

# So You Want a Parrot as a Pet?

*We encourage parrot owners to enjoy the quality of experiences that we know are possible with our avian companions.*

*"Some say they don't believe that Angels can be seen or heard. What a shame such blindness, what a pity such deafness, when the Song of Songs abounds and heaven's flyers are all around, only thinly disguised ... as birds." (author unknown)*

Presented by

**Feathered Companions Aviary**

Austin, Texas —

**Marcy Covault**

www.birdcompanions.com — birdcompanions@juno.com

Member: American Federation of Aviculture  
Pyrrhura Breeders Association  
International Conure Association  
Alamo Exhibition Bird Club



## Do you want a pet parrot?

Did you know that parrots are usually

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| ü Intelligent  | ü Long-lived |
| ü Affectionate | ü Loving     |
| ü Joyful       | ü Active     |
| ü Messy        | ü Hormonal   |
| ü Noisy        | ü Demanding  |
| ü Curious      | ü Playful    |

## How are parrots different from other pets?

Parrots are highly intelligent creatures that enjoy mental stimulation. Because they are prey animals, unlike cats and dogs (and humans), which are predator species, a bird will react differently, e.g., flight preferable to fight in most cases. They stress more easily, and when they can't escape

because they are in a cage and/or have flight feathers trimmed so that they can't fly, defensive behaviors develop, such as biting, extensive vocalizing, and feather picking. *You should not expect a parrot to be a feathered kitten or puppy.*



Household harmony is critical to birds. It is important to protect the trusting nature of your bird by keeping it safe from other animals, or

from being handled by those who would mistreat it, including small children who may not have the motor control necessary to handle birds safely.

## Are there differences in temperament among species?

There are mannerisms common to all species, but there are also variations in temperament among species and individuals. Some are more laid-back, and some are more hyper. Some are louder, and some are quieter. Some are more outgoing, and some are shy. Do your homework to see which fits with your expectations and lifestyle.

## What's my commitment going to be?

Most parrots are fairly long-lived, and therefore a strong commitment on the part of the person buying the bird is required. It's not quite as easy caring for an exotic bird as it is a dog or cat, but your extra effort for these feathered angels will not go unrewarded. You will have many years with a very special companion!

## What housing do they need?

**Cage size and type**—Parrots need as large a cage as your space and budget allows—size and type depends on the species. For example, a cockatoo "houdini" would need much more secure cage door latches than a green cheek conure, although they may need a similar size of cage due to activity levels!

**Location**—Being social "flock" creatures, most parrots want to be where you are, but they also need to feel safe and be able to get adequate rest. Place cages out of drafts and high traffic areas, but where they can see what's going on, "where the action is," and feel part of the family.

**Cage furnishings: Perches and toys**—Perches should be of various sizes and shapes to allow some variety for your bird's feet. Parrots are active and intelligent, and like



inquisitive children, they need stimuli in their environment to channel excess energy into fun, "lively" activities. Sufficient toys (even some that you can switch out from time to time)

will provide amusement and exercise. Educate yourself on which toys are safe and which ones aren't, and check your bird's toys regularly for dangerous loose threads that can trap toes or beaks.

### What do they eat?

**Basic diet**—Offering a varied diet is not only physically healthy, it is also a form of psychological stimulation. Fresh water is a must. Depending on species and what they're fed from the time they are small, most parrots appreciate fruits and vegetables and should have them regularly. A good maintenance pellet, high quality seeds, and if possible, sprouted seeds (sunflower, etc.), should provide a nourishing diet. Cooked rice/bean mixes and "birdie" breads are other good foods. Certain species (such as lorries and toucans) have specialized diets, so you need to become familiar with what a particular species requires for maintenance and best health.

**Table food**—Some table food in moderation is fine, but no caffeine (coffee, chocolate), very salty or sweet foods, or avocados.

**Home Sweet Home**—Because most parrots are active and "mouthy," like a human toddler, they will taste just about anything. Many household plants can be toxic, so you'll need to learn what's safe and what's not—and control their environment. Other common home dangers are electrical cords (shock) and containers of liquid (drowning).



### What about grooming and vet visits?

**Flight feathers**—Some species are exceptionally strong flyers. Depending on their environment, you should consider trimming their flight feathers to prevent accidents or escapes, but have a pro do it or show you how, so that you don't clip too

*Emily Dickinson said: "Hope is the thing with feathers that perches in the soul."*

short (where they "fall like a rock" and can crack their beak or sternum), or too long (so they can get up speed and fly into a plate-glass window or out the door). Even with some flight feathers trimmed, it is not advisable to take birds outside unless in a carrier or cage.

**Nails and beaks**—Nails should be trimmed as necessary. Only in rare instances does a beak need trimming, and that should be done by an avian professional only—the beak has many nerve endings and is very sensitive.

**Vet checks and vaccinations**—Discussing your bird and its health with your avian vet is good preventive action, can set a baseline for health, and gives you a contact in case of emergencies. Find out what you need for an avian emergency kit.

**Illnesses**—Since parrots are prey animals, they instinctively hide illnesses (weaknesses), so being observant as to normal behavior and when there's a deviation from that behavior is important. Learn to recognize signs of illness and how to contact your avian vet quickly.

### Is it better to have one or more parrots?

Birds are naturally "flock" creatures, so if you have a single bird, you should provide a rich environment to prevent boredom and undesirable behavior. Many parrots are in single-bird households and adjust fine.

Parrots are often possessive of their person, and they may maintain a better relationship with you if they are not paired.



If you can't give daily personal attention or are gone for extended periods during the day, providing either a same-room companion animal/bird or music/TV will be welcome company. When you return, expect them to greet you NOISILY and JOYFULLY!

*For detailed information on bird care, we recommend "My Parrot, My Friend," by Bonnie Munroe Doan; "Birds for Dummies" by Dr. Brian Speer and Gina Spadafori; "Good Bird!" by Barbara Heidenreich; and books by Mattie Sue Athan and Julie Rach.*