

## **Pet Bird Care- General Recommendations**

### **Environment**

Cages should have the appropriate bar-widths for the size of bird. For many pet birds cages with more width than height provide more comfort and less stress. Cage bottoms are best covered with paper, such as newsprint or paper towels. Bagged cage litters can become hazardous to your bird due to fungal spores and toxins.

Many bird owners will keep a main cage in the family area. Some birds are more secure if located in the corner of a room. Some birds are unduly stressed by being near a window. Some birds will be stressed being located next to another bird species. Different bird species don't "hang out together" in the wild even if from same region.

Removing the bottom grill of the cage will allow your bird to forage on the bottom of the cage. Feed dishes are best located so that the bird can stand on a perch and lean into dish, rather than "standing on his head." Proper dish positioning can lessen the opportunity for your bird to defecate over the dish.

Feed dishes, particularly water and wet food dishes should be regularly washed with soap followed by a chlorine bleach soak and rinse (1/4 cup per quart water) to prevent harmful bacterial growth.

Perches are best almost over-sized and oval for daytime use, particularly for larger or overweight birds. Night perches should be smaller in diameter for better grip while asleep. Perches are best made of wood and replaced at regular intervals. Rope type perches are useful but should be laundered (delicate washer cycle) weekly. Avoid plastic, metal or sand-paper covered perches. Colored concrete perches are sold to keep nails in trim. These products are not harmful, but only work well in a small number of very active parrots.

Concern about "drafts" can result in birds being subjected to substandard air quality due to poor ventilation. The minimum room temperature in modern homes with central air, should be 65 degrees F. Covering cages is not recommended but rather the bird should be "put to bed" in a dark, quiet room. A smaller "night" cage with the smaller perches will do well for this. Birds need plenty of sleep and "call it a day" at sundown.

### **Diet**

Much confusion and misinformation surrounds the proper feeding of pet birds. In many cases we don't know exactly what these birds eat in the wild but over the year they do eat a balanced diet of continuously changing foodstuffs throughout the seasons.

All seed mixes offered for various birds are based only on folklore and tradition rather than sound nutritional science. These products are equivalent to lard and potatoes and result in multiple nutritional deficiencies. Many complete post-mortem studies find that at least part of the cause of death was malnutrition. Common nutritional problems include excessive fat, excessive calories, inadequate essential proteins, mineral deficiencies, and vitamin deficiencies. Bird malnutrition can result in:

Skin, Respiratory, Digestive disorders

Fungal and Bacterial infections

Increased egg-laying and serious female disorders

Liver disorders      Immune deficiencies

Bone, feather, and beak disorders

Low blood calcium    and .....much shorter life of pet bird!

### **Diet (continued)**

“Fresh food” or a “large variety” of foods usually is not a solution for seed malnutrition. Bird veterinarians often find that most of these foodstuffs also result in malnutrition. For example, North American fruits provide little or no nutritional benefit to pet birds and can actually worsen mineral imbalances. Often we hear that you should feed lots of bread, pasta, rice, and crackers. These favorite foods are simply empty starches or “seed without the fat,” and should be fed only in very limited amounts, if at all.

For over twenty years, formulated diets or “pellets” have been on the market for pet birds. Unlike dog and cat food, these products are hard to find in supermarkets, superstores, many feed stores, and some pet stores. Pet stores and veterinarians particularly interested in birds tend to carry or know where to recommend such products. Examples include Harrison’s Bird Diets, Zupreem, Exact, Roudybush, Pretty Bird. These diets should comprise 80-95% of your pet bird’s total calories. See “Converting your Bird to a Formulated Diet” handout. Within a few months your bird will look and feel better.

### **Behavior and Socialization**

Many pet bird species are highly intelligent and social creatures. They are wired quite differently from their owners and other house pets. When a new young parrot comes to live in your home, it is natural for them to take a “leadership” position, with an attitude towards making orders and expecting exacting service from their “owners.” Unfortunately, if the owner doesn’t take more of a flock leadership position, some birds will develop serious behavioral disorders including aggression, screaming, separation anxiety, inappropriate egg-laying, feather-picking (some causes) or self-mutilation.

Prevention is the best policy. All parrots, tame or wild benefit from regular “flock interactive behavior” or a “Good Citizen Program.” Examples are ten-minute “birdie burrito” sessions; step-up, step-down and stay exercises; heavy on the positive reinforcement (praise, pet or foot treat). We want the parrot accustomed to responding to your requests. The book *Birds for Dummies* has additional simple exercises to follow.

Cuddling is not a normal bird behavior, EXCEPT when copulating. Cuddling should be minimized with your pet bird. Instead train your parrot to sit on a nearby training perch so that they can still “hang out” with you.

### **Safety**

Much has been written about the dangers of avocado, chocolate and non-stick cookware to birds. While we don’t recommend avocado or chocolate their dangers are probably over-rated and unproven. And non-stick cookware, when used safely and with ventilation, should not be a hazard.

More importantly, other household tragedies occur quite often. Examples are trauma, toxicities, and fly-aways. For the safety and protection of your bird, please keep it caged anytime supervision isn’t possible. Wing-clipping will prevent many problems and is highly recommended. Don’t allow you bird to wander. Outcomes can include property damage, damage to bird, or behavior problems. Don’t make the mistake to assume that your dog or cat is “buddies” with your bird.

### **Prevention**

Cherish Your Bird; Protect Your Bird From Harm; Train Your Bird for Proper Socialization. Schedule regular veterinary examinations.