

Keeping birds as pets—Parrots



This fact sheet details the requirements for keeping a Parrot as a pet, covering areas such as buying a Parrot, cage sizes and diet.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this fact sheet is to provide a complete guide for the new pet parrot owner.

Parrots have been held in high regard ever since 1504 when the first live parrot was imported into the UK, although the Romans kept them as pets long before this. Parrots, given the correct care and attention can be long lived and so will provide your household with not just a new pet, but a life-long companion and a new family member.

CAGES

This is the first major purchase before selecting your new companion. There are numerous designs and styles available, at various prices, from pet shops. Whilst there are no right or wrong cages, a simple design will be easier to clean and maintain. Remember that your parrot will treat it's cage as it's own territory, and will happily spend large parts of the day in it, so the cage should be as spacious as possible, and must allow the bird to at least be able to spread it's wings.

The bottom of the cage needs to be covered with something that can be changed regularly, this can be shredded paper or wood-shavings, but these tend to get blown about and make a mess around the cage. The best floor covering is old newspaper, this is cheap and readily available so that it can be changed daily.

Location of the cage is also very important. Birds are very sensitive to fumes and gases, hence the use of canaries to detect dangerous gases in coal mines. If you notice a smell or fumes move the cage to another room with good ventilation, fumes can arise from cleaning products, aerosol sprays, new paint, cigarette smoke, cooking gas, self cleaning ovens, carbon monoxide from household boilers and car exhausts, etc. Cages should not be positioned in the kitchen as fumes from everyday cooking can prove fatal.

Cages should not be placed in the window or near door ways, because of the risk of draughts, nor should they be placed in direct sunlight when the bird may overheat. One essential addition to the cage is a method of securing the door, the best and fool-proof method is by using a small padlock.

DIET

Your parrot should be fed at least once a day, with tit-bits offered as available. Most pet shops sell "parrot mix" or possibly parrot pellets, but neither of these will form a complete diet. A good selection of fresh fruit and vegetables should also be offered every day. Peanuts if offered should be those sold for human consumption, as the ones sometimes sold in pet stores may be infected with a

fungus which will lead to aflatoxin poisoning. Anything that we eat can be offered in moderation including, cooked meat and bones, also cooked fish, tinned fruit, cheese, plain biscuit, etc. Chocolate however should not be given, also avocado which is poisonous to birds.

KEEPING YOUR PARROT HAPPY

Although your parrot's cage is its castle, it should be let out under supervision at least once a day, never leave your parrot out unattended as this can result in chewed furniture or wall paper.

A wide range of toys are now available from pet shops, the best ones are made from natural products like wood and hemp rope. The purpose of these toys is to give your bird things to chew and destroy, so everyday things which can be found around the house are just as suitable, such as, cardboard boxes and empty toilet rolls. Fresh cut branches from non poisonous trees are also required. Also try placing objects such as large pieces of fruit on top of the cage so that the bird has to climb up to get it, thus exercising your parrot.

Some species, especially African Greys and Cockatoos are prone to feather plucking if bored or frustrated and so need lots of love and attention.

SELECTING YOUR NEW PET

There are numerous decisions to be made about choosing the right bird; either imported (i.e. wild caught), usually less expensive, adult birds and some young birds will never settle to a cage life, there is also a greater risk that the bird may be carrying a disease. Aviary bred (i.e. a bird bred in captivity) will be much more settled to domestic life. If the bird has been hand-reared, it will already be hand tame and possibly talking, consequently hand-reared birds are more expensive but much more desirable. If you are purchasing a young bird it is important to ensure that it is independent from its parents and feeding itself. You could also choose an adult bird that has been someone else's pet, however the disadvantage of this is that the bird may be attached to one person and may utter phrases that are unacceptable in it's new environment !

Always choose a healthy bird - that is one with it's feathers held tight against it's body, bright eyed, and lively. Leave the one with it's feathers ruffled, and spending most of the time asleep with both feet holding the perch. If your pet shows these symptoms, seek veterinary advise, select a vet with avian experience.

All parrots, but especially African Greys and Cockatoos, produce feather dust or "powder-down" which can be bad for people with asthma or anyone suffering from allergies.

Being able to positively identify your bird is very important, should it be lost or stolen and then recovered. There are various ways of permanently marking your bird; closed rings, these are steel bands which are fitted around the birds' leg when they are a small chick. As the birds grow they cannot be removed or fitted to adult birds, these rings often carry the initials of the breeder and the year it hatched. Micro-chips are small electronic chips, about the size of a grain of rice, which are inserted into the parrot. These then stay under the skin for the rest of the birds life and are read using a scanner which will give a individual numerical code.

Transportation of your parrot - how this is done depends on the temperament of each individual bird. If your bird is nervous then it is best if it is moved in a small wooden box, this way the bird will feel safer in a darkened environment and it cannot harm itself by dashing against the bars of a large cage. If your bird is very steady then it may be moved in it's cage, indeed many parrots enjoy going for a drive when they are used to it.

If you already own other pets such as cats or dogs, many breeders offer birds that have been reared in the company of other animals so they are used to them. Young birds however will usually accept other animals with no problems. Likewise with children, most birds will readily accept youngsters running around, but remember, large parrots have large beaks which can deliver a painful bite if provoked, so it may be as well to choose a smaller species to start with.

Neighbours- remember that some larger parrots can be extremely noisy, so it would be good manners to ask your immediate neighbours if they would have any objections, if they do choose a quieter species such as a Senegal or Meyers Parrot.

Remember that parrots can be long lived - some as long as humans - so you may need to make provision for their care in your will. Some species that are regularly bred and offered for sale in the pet trade are extremely endangered in the wild, to protect these birds they are included on CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). All captive birds on the CITES List have to be identifiable (either rung or chipped) and have to have the correct paperwork issued by DETR Department of the Environment, International Trade in Endangered Species Branch, Tollgate House, Houlton Street, Bristol, BS2 9DJ).

The following are regularly offered and are on CITES, but this is not a complete list; Cuban, Tucuman and Green-cheeked Amazons, Hyacinth, Scarlet, Buffon's and Illigers Macaws, Goffin's, and Moluccan Cockatoos, and

Blue-throated Conures. For a complete list contact DETR at the above address.

Take your time when selecting your new pet as they can live for a considerable time. Choose which species you may be interested in then speak to the breeder or dealer to try and gain as much information as possible about the bird being offered, such as diet, where it has been kept, has it seen other animals or children, etc. Do not choose a bird just because it is large and impressive or worst still, because it matches your decor.

Species	African Grey	Senegal / Meyers Parrots
Hand-Reared Price Guide	£450-750	£150-275
Talking Ability	√ √ √	√ √
Noise		
Suitable for Children	x	√ √ √
Notes	Can be demanding	Small African Parrot suitable for the smaller home

Species	Amazons (Blue Fronted / Orange Winged)	Pionus / Caiques
Hand-Reared Price Guide	£400-650	£180-350
Talking Ability	√ √ √	√ √
Noise	x x	
Suitable for Children	x	√ √ √
Notes	Can be demanding and if not given attention become very noisy	Caiques (pronounced cakes) are very colourful, playful and gentle

Species	Large Macaws (Blue & Gold / Scarlet)	Dwarf Macaws
Hand-Reared Price Guide	£500-1500	£150-300
Talking Ability	√ √	√
Noise	x x x	x
Suitable for Children	x x x	√ √
Notes	Blue and Golds can make good pets, Scarlets can become aggressive and spiteful	Hahns and Noble Macaws regularly offered for sale

Species	Conures (S.American Parakeets)	Lories and Lorikeets
Hand-Reared Price Guide	£75-150	£50-200
Talking Ability	√	√
Noise	x	
Suitable for Children	√ √ √	√ √
Notes	Sun and Nanday Conures can be especially noisy	Specialised diet of artificial nectar and fruit resulting in liquid dropping which they squirt out with considerable force

Species	Cockatoos	Cockatiels/Budgies, Parakeets and Lovebirds
Hand-Reared Price Guide	£500-1500	£5-50
Talking Ability	√ √	√
Noise	x x	
Suitable for Children	x x x	√ √ √
Notes	Can become dominating over their owner, so be firm with them from the outset	Cockatiels can be noisy. Lovebirds are best kept as a pair and be very entertaining. Australian parakeets are not suited to cage life.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

- Birds do not recognise either clear glass in doors and windows or mirrors. Net curtains will assist in reducing the risk of injury should the bird fly into the glass.
- Net curtains that contain lead weight beads can be very harmful to parrots, especially young birds. They will naturally chew any hard items and are unable to identify the toxic nature of some household materials.
- The kitchen is not the ideal place to position your cage. Appliances operated by gas can emit sufficient fumes to be harmful to birds.
- Teflon finished pans, which are used extensively because of their non-stick properties, can be the cause of sickness for some birds.
- Always check exit points before releasing your parrot from its cage to

exercise; even partly open windows can provide an escape route.

- Cages should not be positioned next to radiators when the heating is on. Humid conditions will induce moulting and winter is not a natural time for this to happen.
- Because of their natural inclination to forage, parrots should be protected from any form of floor contamination. In some homes, susceptible to mice coming in at certain times of the year, pet birds can become very ill as a result of urine deposits left by mice which are not detectable.
- Electric fans and air circulators should be switched off whilst your bird is free flying.
- Parrots can be frightened easily by the sight of someone wearing brightly coloured (orange, red, pink or yellow) household gloves and/or aprons that shine or glint.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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