



All About
**Bird Care &
Feeding**

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Bird Care & Feeding

Birds make wonderful pets, but their owners must be well-informed and ready to take on the responsibilities of bird ownership. In general, the larger the bird, the greater care it will require. Larger birds, for instance, will require larger cages, or possibly even an aviary.

Before deciding on a pet bird, do plenty of homework. There are literally hundreds of information sources about pet birds in your local library or bookstore and on the Internet. You can also talk to bird owners. Find out if there are bird clubs in your local area and attend some meetings or events. Talk to breeders. Visit bird shows. In short, do all you can to inform and prepare yourself before getting a pet bird.

Think carefully about which breed is right for you. Among other things, consider how much time you spend away from home on an average day, whether there are small children in your home, and how easy or difficult it will be to spend a few hours with the bird each day. Some birds are extremely noisy, others may not be loud but “chatter” for hours on end, so also consider the noise factor when selecting a bird. Some birds can live as long as 40 to 60 years. You may literally have to consider including provisions for your bird in your will.

Housing Your Bird

Bird cages provide safe homes for pet birds. Anyone with a bird for a pet needs to have a place for it to safely roost. In most cases, this will be a bird cage, although larger birds may require an aviary. There are almost as many types of cages as there are varieties of birds. Most cages are made of metal, such as wire, zinc, chrome, brass or stainless steel.

A bird cage may be made of wire (this is generally the least expensive) or other metals. The bird cage may be assembled or may come welded together. Generally, cages that are welded are much stronger than assembled cages, making them more appropriate for larger birds.

The highest quality bird cage is one made from stainless steel. This is also the safest material for cage construction, since it does not rust or chip. Stainless steel is very strong and can withstand even the strongest beaks.

You should always invest as much as you can in a bird cage, both in terms of financial expense and space allotted. Ensuring that your bird cage is of the right size for your feathered friend can help alleviate many behavioral problems.

How much time your pet bird spends in his cage may vary depending on the species and the environment. Your bird may reside in his cage most of the time or only use his cage at different times throughout the day, using a perch the rest of the time.

Depending on the type of materials, species of bird, and climate, a bird cage can be used indoors or outdoors. Generally, birds should not be kept in the kitchen (due to danger of exposure to fumes and flame), directly in front of windows, or in drafty areas.



[Bird cage, Chiquita Playtop Sapphire Blue](#)

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Housing Your Bird (continued)

Size is also a very important issue to consider when looking at bird cages. The cage must be large enough to accommodate the size and activity level of your bird. At the very least, the bird should be able to extend both wings inside the bird cage. The bars must be able to withstand biting. The spacing between the bars is also an important safety issue. The bird should not be able to fit its head between the bars to prevent it from getting trapped. In addition to selecting a bird cage of the proper size, and bar spacing, be sure the bar size is appropriate. Bars with larger diameters are stronger. Always make sure the bars are stronger than the bird.

Some bird cages are easier to clean than others. Removable grids and litter trays are convenient features for easy cleaning.

Feathered Fitness: Exercise for Your Bird

As with any pet, proper exercise is an important part of your pet bird's health and well-being. How much exercise your bird needs will depend on its breed. Many smaller birds get most of the exercise they need while in their cages. Larger species need to spend time outside their cages to get their needed exercise each day.

Many birds, especially parrots, like to climb as a form of exercise. Cages with horizontal bars are ideal for them, as are swings and perches. For smaller species, bird toys can keep your bird entertained while also providing exercise. For larger species, wooden or rawhide chews are often a good choice. Keep a variety of toys on hand and rotate them frequently. Be sure the size of the toy is appropriate for the size and age of the bird. Check the toys often for signs of wear and tear, and discard those that could lose pieces and be swallowed by the bird. Be sure all painted toys use non-toxic paint.

Bird Grooming

Much of a bird's grooming will be done by the bird itself, either alone or with the help of a cage-mate, if it has one. Birds preen their feathers daily, often spending a good deal of time on this important activity. Preening may be done with its beak or feet, and helps remove old feathers, waterproof feathers, and generally keep them in good shape.

Most birds should be bathed a few times a week. Regular bathing not only reduces the amount of dander on your bird, it also encourages self-preening. Many birds enjoy baths and look forward to being sprayed with a water bottle or even a shower nozzle, especially those birds introduced to bathing at a young age. But if your bird is unaccustomed to being bathed, you can start the bathing process by lightly wetting the bird with a mist or spray bottle. Shampoos should not normally be used on your bird, since these can strip the feathers of important natural oils. Be sure to use lukewarm water and keep your bird protected from drafts until it is completely dry. Some birds like to be dried with an electric hair dryer on a low or cool setting; others prefer to dry naturally.



EXPERT TIP

Choosing a Bird Gym

A hanging bird gym is a great way to get your bird out of his cage for a little while. It will keep him occupied and (hopefully) out of trouble, and give him some exercise as well.

If possible, you should try to select a hanging gym that allows you to change and rearrange placement of toys and treats. This will keep your bird engaged and entertained.

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Bird Grooming (Continued)

In the wild, birds are exposed to rocks, rough perches, and other factors that keep their beaks worn properly through natural abrasion. In captivity, some birds will need to have their beaks trimmed periodically. But beak trimming is not something most bird owners should attempt on their own; it is best left to experienced veterinary professionals. To help your bird maintain good beak health, provide it with mineral blocks, cuttlebones, wooden toys, and other natural ways to wear down its beak appropriately.

Most birds in captivity also need to have their nails trimmed regularly. While trimming once a month is sufficient for many birds, some will require bi-weekly trimming. Trimming a bird's nails requires two people with whom the bird is very familiar with: one to hold the bird carefully and securely and the other to perform the trimming. Depending on the size of the bird, human nail clippers may be the best tool. For larger species, dog nail clippers often work well. Some vets use electric rotary nail trimmers; some birds may be fine with this but others may be frightened by the noise. When trimming your bird's nails, always take off a small amount at a time; more can be trimmed later if needed. Have a styptic pencil or styptic powder at hand to stop the bleeding if you accidentally cut too far.

Bird Health

A healthy pet bird should see an avian veterinarian annually for a "well bird" checkup. Your vet will check the bird for any physical problems by looking at its feathers, listening to its breathing, and checking the overall physical condition. The vet will ask plenty of questions about the bird's behavior, eating habits, and general health. Depending on the health of your bird or any concerns you or your vet may have, the doctor may need to run blood tests or collect mouth, vent, or fecal samples for testing.

Along with an annual exam, your bird should also see the vet any time it has any health concern. Early detection and treatment of illnesses is very important to maintain the health of your bird. Signs of illness can include (but are not limited to) lethargy, increased amounts of sleep, loss of appetite or weight loss, dull appearance, loss of interest in preening, or breathing troubles.

Feeding Your Bird

Choosing the right bird food is one of the most important aspects of responsible bird ownership. You can directly control what goes into your bird, and only you can make sure its nutritional needs are being met. The proper type of food depends on the breed of your bird.

Many birds eat a diet primarily consisting of seeds. In general, seeds are high in fat and this may not only increase your bird's weight but may also hinder its ability to absorb calcium. Seeds are appropriate for some breeds, but not for others. For example, budgies and cockatiels eat a diet consisting largely of seeds. For parrots and most other psittacine birds, a seed diet can be detrimental. For parrots, palletized foods, formulated specifically for parrots, are a much better choice.



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Feeding Your Bird (continued)

Beyond specialized pellets, many birds enjoy and benefit from some of the same foods we eat. Vegetables and fruits can be very beneficial to birds, but with a few warnings. Some types of avocados are toxic to birds, so all types should be avoided. Some fruit seeds contain dangerous chemicals or compounds, so fruit seeds should be removed before the fruit is fed to the birds. One example of this is apple seeds, which contain cyanide. The pits of peaches, plums, apricots and cherries may be dangerous as well, and should be removed before these fruits are fed to pet birds.

Never feed a bird chocolate; this is toxic to most birds. In general, birds shouldn't eat the fatty, salty, fried foods that we humans shouldn't eat either.

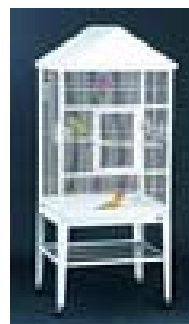
Birds tend to be naturally cautious about trying new foods. In the wild, birds usually will not eat something they do not see another bird eating. Take this into consideration when introducing new foods, whether pellets or fruits and vegetables. Be patient and allow the bird to watch you eating a particular food before you feed it to him; seeing you eat may actually help him decide to try it.

If your bird is still hesitant to try new foods, you may want to mix the new food in with its current seeds. Your bird might inadvertently taste it while looking for seed. Another option is to tie a piece of new fruit or vegetable to its perch. If the bird doesn't want to try it, the bird may throw it to the cage floor. But in the process of removing it from the perch, the bird may eat a small piece and decide to actually like it.

Determining the proper diet for your bird is one of the most important things you can do for your pet. If you find you have been feeding your bird with the wrong diet, make the changes slowly and gradually; your pet is more likely to accept the change this way.



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