

PARROT CARE

Looking after a pet parrot properly is complex and time-consuming, but this sheet aims to provide you with some tips for the long-term health of your bird. Please see additional hand-outs on diet, UV light and health care, or ask any of our exotic vets or nurses for more in-depth information.

HOUSING

- Many parrots naturally live in large flocks so will be happiest in a spacious aviary set up. This should be an outdoor enclosure made of strong wire mesh (which should be zinc free), with an easily cleanable floor and plenty of room for the birds to fly around. In addition to the flying area, a sheltered sleeping area should be provided to protect from the worst of the British weather. There should also be the facility to provide supplementary heating in the winter. The enclosure should also provide shade on sunny days. Perches can be placed at varying heights around the enclosure with branches of different diameters providing the most natural set up. It is also particularly important to ensure that the enclosure is secure, both to stop the birds getting out (double security doors are the best way to prevent an escape) and to stop predators getting in.
- Alternatively, if an aviary is not an option or if you wish to tame the birds, then they may be housed indoors in a cage set up. Ideally the cage should only be used for housing the bird at night or when unsupervised. A cage set up should also be as large as possible and must allow the bird to stretch its wings in all directions as an absolute minimum. The cage should be made of non-toxic material and be zinc free. It should be placed out of direct sunlight and draughts and situated away from any item that may give off toxic fumes. Certain household products such as tobacco smoke, Teflon from non-stick frying pans, air freshener plug ins and deodorants can lead to irritation of the bird's respiratory tract and in some cases can be fatal.
- We recommend changing the perches that are supplied with most cages (usually wooden dowel or plastic) to natural tree branches. Fruit trees are preferred, and these should be washed thoroughly with an appropriate disinfectant before use. Natural tree branches prevent the common foot injuries that we see and prevent nail overgrowth. Sanded perch covers should not be used as they simply abrade the feet and do not keep the nails short. Rope perches can help exercise the feet as the bird has to alter its grip to balance.
- Ultraviolet lighting is important for all parrots, and is essential for Grey parrots. This is required both for natural behaviour and calcium metabolism. Specific bird lamps are available and have recognised health benefits. A good review of bird lighting can be found on the Arcadia website www.arcadia-bird.com/uv-lighting/. A bird lamp should be fitted above the cage to reflect light downwards as a bright light hitting the side of the bird can cause eye irritation.
- Different toys should be added and changed regularly to entertain birds. It is important to bear in mind that many pet shop toys can be easily demolished, so only sturdy toys should be used. When purchasing toys or cages always make sure that they are "zinc-free" as zinc poisoning is increasingly seen in captive birds. Be careful as some fixings can contain zinc and only the toy itself is zinc free. Household items such as keys, old

paintwork, and lead weights can contain heavy metals and be potential sources of toxicity. Even grit picked up from the floor can be contaminated. If planning to be out of the house for a long time, it is a good idea to leave a radio program on at a low volume to give the bird some stimulation.

- Free flight is an essential requirement and birds should be given the opportunity for exercise daily. It is important to ensure that the room they are allowed to fly around is totally secure with all windows, doors and chimneys blocked off, heaters and fans turned off and any potentially poisonous house plants removed. If started young, birds can be easily trained to perch on a finger and returned to the cage.
- Wing clipping is not advised as it commonly leads to self-trauma to the wing feathers and can lead to feather destructive behaviour. Birds can also injure themselves when trying to escape, leading to wounds on their keel (chest). A wing clipped bird is also likely to be more fearful. Wing clipping is not a service we provide.
- The cage or aviary should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease and a suitable disinfectant used (such as F10 disinfectant).
- For further advice on behaviour and enrichment we recommend the website Good Bird Inc (www.goodbirdinc.com). Run by Barbara Heidenreich, an avian behaviourist, the website has lots of tips on parrot behaviour and training. Please also see our separate handout on enrichment.

COMPANIONS

- In general, most birds are social animals and ideally should be paired up with another bird of the same species for lifetime companionship.

WHAT TO FEED

- Keeping your parrot on an appropriate diet is key to ensuring good long-term health. The diet with which your bird is supplied from a breeder or pet shop may not always be the most appropriate diet.
- The bulk of a pet parrot's diet (80%) should be a commercial pelleted food such as Harrison's, Kaytee or Nutriberries. These diets are well balanced and stop the birds selecting out their favourite bits and only eating the ingredient they like.
- In addition to this you should be offering a large selection of vegetables, sprouted seed or chop, with a very small amount of good quality seed used as a treat or training reward.
- Please see our separate diet hand out for more detailed advice on feeding your parrot and on conversion to a pelleted diet.
- Water should always be available both for drinking, and in a shallow saucer for bathing. This should be changed daily.

ANNUAL HEALTH CHECKS

We recommend annual health checks every year for pet bird as medical problems are more easily treated if detected at an early stage – **you can register for automatic reminders**

INSURANCE

We highly recommend that you take out a pet insurance policy. There are a lot of different companies and policies available, and we suggest you contact a number of them for information.