

## 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 vets or nurses for more in-depth information.

### HOUSING

- Many psittacines 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 shelter 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 all of 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. In most parrots the problem is sharp nails as opposed to long nails and at the birds health check-up we can burr the nails to blunt them.
- Ultraviolet lighting is important for all parrots, in particular 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/](http://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 however, 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 but yet the toy is zinc free. Household items such as keys, old

paintwork, and lead weights can contain heavy metals and be potential sources of toxicity. If planning to be out of the house for a long time, it is also a good idea to leave a radio program on at a low volume to give the birds some stimulation.

- Free flight is an essential requirement and birds should be given the opportunity for exercise daily. It is however, 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 plucking. 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](http://www.goodbirdinc.com)). Run by Barbara Heidenreich, an avian behaviourist, the website has lots of tips on parrot behaviour and training.

## **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 have a mixture of fruits, vegetables, nuts, seeds, grain and protein all mixed in together and formed into a pellet. This stops 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 fruits, nuts, vegetables and a very small amount of good quality seed used as a treat or training reward. Sprouted seeds can also be fed.
- Please see separate diet hand out for more in depth advice on feeding your parrot.
- 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. For a monthly fee your pet can receive the best treatment at an affordable cost. There is normally an excess to pay for each condition then after that costs are covered up to a set limit. Once you have the policy, please provide us with a copy of your insurance details. There are a lot of different companies and policies available and we suggest you contact a number of them for information- we have a leaflet advising what to look out for. Our advice is to choose a policy which provides cover for chronic illness

for the life of your pet. If this policy is too much for you then the best cover you can afford will provide peace of mind in an accident or emergency.