

PET BIRD CARE

Tips, Tricks and Training



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INTRODUCTION

If you have a pet bird already or you are planning on getting a bird, this manual will definitely help you out. There are many different types of birds, and all can make wonderful pets. The first thing you need to decide is:

1. Whether you want a bird simply to look at and listen to it talk, chatter or whistle or;
2. Whether you want the bird to come out of its cage, be tame and friendly.

The main reason you need to decide on these two points will be the price. In the first example the bird will be raised by the parents and this will be the cheapest option however in the second example the bird is most likely to be hand raised. To explain 'Hand Raised' or 'Hand Rearing' in simple terms is 'To take the baby away from the parents at an early age and feed by hand'. This process takes many hours as the birds have to be fed up to five times a day, every day until the bird is self- supporting. This process can easily be two months. The baby bird needs to be kept in a heated brooder and fed a high protein baby formula which is quite expensive.

HOUSING

If you have a 'parent reared bird' meaning that it will be spending a lot of time in the cage, we recommend that you invest in the largest cage possible within your budget. This will give the bird plenty of space to move around. Remember to choose the bird cage with wire suitable for your type of bird. Make sure that the wire is strong enough especially if you have large birds such as Alexandrines and Conures and if you are getting a small bird make sure the wires are close enough so that your bird won't get its head stuck.

If you have a 'Hand Reared Bird' the cage won't have to be as big because your pet bird will be spending a lot of time out of the cage.

Most bird cages come with two feeders, one for food and one for water. We recommend installing another feeder for extras which are very important to your bird's diet such as a high protein crumble or pellet diet.

TIP-

1. Please clean your bird's cage weekly. At VBC we have biodegradable wood pelletised litter that is safe to use for your bird and removes any odours.
2. A basic seed and water diet is inadequate for your pet bird.

COVERING THE CAGE

It is important that your bird has a daytime/evening ritual. The basic rule is, if it is dark outside your bird should be covered and light outside your bird should be uncovered. The reason for this not only does your bird need relaxation time but birds moult their feathers. This will happen every year according to when the days are longest and the weather is the warmest. If you keep your bird awake until 10pm it will think that it is summer then moult his feathers and regrow new ones. Also if your bird is kept up to 10pm all year round, this can keep him in a constant moult which is bad for your pet bird's health. Cover your cage with a thick cotton sheet or equivalent cover.

TIP-Do not use nylon fibre material as the nylon fibres can tangle around your bird's feet restricting blood flow.

PLAYGROUND

We highly recommend a bird playground area for your pet bird to spend time on out of the cage. Playgrounds give you the opportunity to get your bird out of the security of its cage and bring it into an area where you are 'the boss' making training a lot easier. In order for your pet bird to remain 'super tame' outdoor play time is very important.

CAGE PLACEMENT

Your bird's cage should be kept in a draft free area that is well lit and away from direct sunlight. To make your birds feel more secure and comfortable keep their cage against a wall or in a corner of the room. Place your bird's cage so it is at eye-level or lower for good social interaction. You do not want your bird above your head because for them being higher up means they are dominant.

If your bird is kept inside, it is imperative to add a vitamin D3 calcium supplement to the water. Long term inside birds are not exposed to UV light meaning that their body can't produce vitamin D3 which helps the calcium they eat or drink to be absorbed into their bones.

TIP-UVB is the sunlight that generates vitamin D3 for your bird. UVB does not penetrate glass therefore having your bird next to a window doesn't mean a vitamin D3 supplement is not required.

PERCHES

Most cages come with 2 perches 'both the same diameter' in either wood or plastic. Your bird's feet require exercise meaning that they need different size perches which strengthens and work the muscles. We recommend a calcium or pumice perch which are available in many different diameters. Choose a thickness different to the diameter of the perches in your cage.

TIP-Pumice perches are also great for your pet bird's health as many contain calcium and they help in keeping your bird's nails trim.

BIRD TOYS

Bird toys are extremely important for you bird. Most birds have very high intelligence, some are as smart as a 2 year old child meaning they will get bored very easily. A range of different types of toys are essential for your bird's happy mental state. Toys for birds are designed in many different combinations including woods, leathers, stainless steel, ropes, chains, bells and even acrylics. Toys such as swings and ladders are designed for chewing and climbing, while mirrors are used for viewing and comfort.

TIP-Have multiple toys in different types to reduce bird boredom.

BIRD BATHS

Most birds love a bath! A bath placed in the bottom of the cage or mounted on the side of the cage will allow your bird to bathe. Hand tame birds will even have a shower with their owners.

DIET

This is one of the most important topics as nutrition will ensure your bird lives a happy, healthy life. A basic seed and water diet is totally inadequate for your bird! Around 50% of its diet must be a high protein pellets or crumbles. There are different brands on the market all of which have high protein levels which will ensure your pet bird's health. These days many birds are brought up on these diets so they are familiar however some birds have been brought up on a total seed diet and will take a bit of convincing to change. Perseverance is the key. By removing all the seed from the cage will make the bird look around for other options in food. It can take a few weeks for the transition between a bird brought up on a total seed diet to change to 50/50 pellet and crumble diet.

There are many seed mixes sold at supermarkets which are poor quality and detrimental to your bird's health. We would like to explain this in a bit more detail. Seed mixes contain many types of grains. Some grains are more expensive than others so to keep the prices low and profits high some outlets and brands adjust the grain formula according to what the cheapest grain is on the market at that time of the year. From year to year there may be good or bad crops meaning the prices for certain grains may be very cheap or very expensive. If one of the grains is expensive it is substituted for another grain which is cheaper at the time irrespective of whether it's what the bird likes or requires. For example grains such as plain canary seed and millets which are the basic staple food in many mixtures will be substituted for grains such as wheat, sorghum or crushed maize which is cheap and heavy but the birds simply don't eat it. The point we are trying to make is seed should be made to a formula suitable for the birds health not according to price. Another trick used is quality grey stripe sunflower seed which the birds love is substituted with poorer quality black sunflower seed.

If you have a lorikeet make sure you feed them on a nectar diet as seed is not suitable.

TIP- For the benefit of you bird buy your bird seed from a reputable store that sells on formula and quality not on price.

WATER

Give your bird fresh water each day.

TIP-Remember to add Vitamin D3 supplement to the water for birds kept inside the house.

TOXIC TO YOUR BIRDS

Be careful with what you feed your birds. Certain foods and plants can be poisonous so if you are not sure, best to not offer it! Some examples of poisons are avocado, chocolate, alcohol, caffeine and many types of indoor and outdoor plants. Also we don't recommend feeding lettuce (birds do love it) because it doesn't have much nutritional value and birds tend to overeat which can cause loose droppings and diarrhoea.

Suitable fruit and vegies are celery, silver beet, endive, apples, corn, strawberries, carrots and cucumbers.

MINERALS

Minerals are also important to a bird's health. As well as a calcium vitamin D3 supplement we recommend shell grit which not only adds calcium to a birds diet, it also goes into the bird's crop and helps in digestion. Cuttlebone is also a great source of calcium.

HEALTH CARE

Mites - Just like dogs can have fleas, birds can get mites. Mites are a parasite and tend to live on your bird at night-time sucking their blood then live in the environment during the day. It is recommended by most veterinarians that birds should be sprayed for mites monthly.

Worming - It is important that you worm your bird regularly. If your pet bird is kept inside the house, once or twice per year should be adequate however outside birds must be wormed more often. Bird Wormer prevents your bird from weight loss, poor appetite and diarrhoea.

TRAINING, TAMING AND TRICKS

Potty Training- This can take a month or two for your parrot to learn. The first thing you need to do is determine generally how long your bird takes in between poops. Some birds go every 10 minutes and other can be 20-30 minutes. All birds are different. You start by putting your bird onto its playground and waiting for it to poop. Once this happens pick the bird up, put it on your shoulder and spend some quality time with your pet. After the usual approximate poop time span put your bird back onto the playground. Wait there with your bird and as soon as it poops, pick it up again and spend some quality time. Repeat again and again. This may take a week or a month. Good Luck!

Teaching Tricks- Before you teach your bird to do tricks you need to first work out what your pet birds favourite treat might be. Maybe it's an almond, apple or piece of corn. Once you find this out, use this as the reward for your bird following instructions or learning a new trick.

Stepping onto your hand- Its best to start with your bird stepping onto a perch. Simply move the perch into the birds 'belly' area and gently push. The bird will naturally grab the perch with its beak to get balance then step onto the perch. Gradually move your hand closer up the perch each time you try to the stage where you can just use your hand. Remember to not pull your hand away when the bird uses its beak to climb on.

TIP – Put your bird's favourite treat in your hand and have your bird step onto or over your other hand to get the treat.

Talking-Most parrots have the potential to talk. The best way is to begin with one word probably 'Hello'. The key is repetition. Over and over again. Do not try to teach a full sentence as it will be likely that they will never learn. Once they have mastered one word, try another. We also recommend that females or children teach your bird how to talk because the bird will speak clearer. If it is taught by a male, the bird's voice will tend to be deeper, not as clear and hard to understand.

Clicker Training- Clickers which make a noise similar to a pen can be used for training in conjunction with treats. This is a bit more complicated topic so we recommend searching 'clicker training' on the internet.