

Parrots — Husbandry Manual

Environment

When selecting an enclosure for your bird, it is important to create an environment that is safe and secure, spacious, easy to keep clean and allows for your bird to exhibit normal behaviours. Cages need to at least be large enough for your bird to fully outstretch his/her wings and move between perches. It is important for the spacing of bars to be appropriate for your bird – not too wide to allow escape, but not too narrow that getting caught is a risk.

You should assume that whatever is placed in your bird's enclosure, they will ingest, so all substrates and items included should be confirmed non-toxic prior to use. A common toxicity encountered by birds is zinc toxicity due to ingestion of residue on galvanised wire cages or aviaries. For more common toxicities, see our "Toxic Household Hazards for Birds" fact sheet.

It is important to carefully consider the "furniture" that is included in your bird's cage. In particular, it is imperative to ensure that your bird has a variety of perches. Providing perches of different diameters, textures and substrates for your bird to stand promotes healthy skin and mimics natural perching behaviours. Plain wooden dowels are not ideal. We recommend including small branches from your garden (replaced regularly for hygiene purposes) and rope perches.

All birds require a diurnal cycle (i.e. adequate hours of light and dark) to perform normal bodily functions. It is important that you endeavour to simulate this at home, even if your bird's cage is kept inside. This may mean putting your bird "to bed" (placing the cage in a dark room away from light and television noise) so that they can get a good night's rest. If a diurnal cycle is not able to be replicated, your bird can easily become exhausted, which can lead to a multitude of health problems.

Food and water dishes that can be easily cleaned are also important. Training your bird to drink from a water bottle is a great way to minimise contamination of your bird's drinking water. An additional water source or mister can be provided for bathing purposes.

Cleaning

Your bird's environment should be cleaned at least daily with non-harmful cleaning products. A cage which has a removable tray is helpful to remove droppings regularly, preventing build-up of harmful pathogens. Keep in mind that if you are using wooden perches or hideaways, these are impossible to sterilise, so it is best to replace these regularly.

Balancing lifestyle

It is important to remember that in the wild your bird would spend most of its time foraging for food and exercising. We should try to provide as much opportunity as we can for our birds to replicate these behaviours in our care. This may mean not providing your bird's food in an easily accessible dish, but perhaps in small pieces in a pine cone or toy.

Wild birds' lives are also highly social, so spending a lot of time with your bird is important to ensure they don't get bored. Birds can be trained to fly with a harness, or to fly and return on command. This is a great way to ensure your bird gets a good amount of exercise and also allows for natural behaviours. If possible it is great to set up an area where your bird can engage in safe, supervised play daily.

Adding a variety of toys to your bird's enclosure (and changing them frequently) can also keep your bird engaged and entertained for hours. When you can't be at home with your bird, consider playing some music, a personal voice recording or bird song.

If your bird has too much time sitting alone bored in its enclosure, the development of stereotypic and boredom behaviours becomes more likely (e.g. feather plucking or pacing). Additionally, stressed birds are more susceptible to disease, so keeping your bird entertained and busy is a great way to keep them healthy!

Nutrition and diet

There is a common misconception that a large proportion of a bird's diet should be seed. Seed based diets are high in carbohydrates and fat, lacking in vital vitamins and minerals and can lead to serious health conditions such as fatty liver disease. Bird vets like to compare an all-seed diet to an all-pizza diet in humans. It is important to provide your bird with a commercial avian pellet, specifically formulated for parrot species. This should be supplemented with a variety of fresh vegetables and a small amount of fruit. If seed is provided, it should be a small treat on occasion only. For more information please see our "Avian Nutrition" fact sheet.

Wing trimming

If you wish to have your bird's wings clipped, it is important that the procedure is performed by a veterinary professional. Badly clipped wings (e.g. clipping the wrong feathers or only clipping one wing) can result in serious injury to your bird. Please remember that wing clips are not intended to prevent flight altogether, but rather prevent your bird from being able to gain height and fly great distances.

Worming

We recommend worming your bird 3-4 times a year for the prevention of gastrointestinal worms and associated disease. This is even more important if your enclosure is located outside and in potential contact with wild birds. Best practice is to bring your bird to the vet (at least annually) to obtain an accurate weight and an accurate dosage of the anti-worm product. We can also help to administer the treatment directly to your bird (rather than in their drinking water or feed) to ensure that they get the full dose. If your bird is at a low risk of infection with worms, we can test your bird's faeces regularly in our laboratory to see if any worming is required.

Come and see us!

Here at Global Veterinary Services we welcome the "weird and wonderful" so would be delighted to see you and your parrot for a general checkup or just to say "hi"! If you would like any more information, please don't hesitate to contact our clinic and our friendly staff will put you in contact with one of our avian vets.