

Bird care basics

Birds are intelligent active animals that require environmental enrichment. This can be done by placing their cage near an active area at home making them part of the routine, especially at mealtimes. Supervised exercise away from the cage including flight time and foraging will also help your bird stay healthy and happy.

Housing

No cage is ever too big! So, give them the largest cage that can be accommodated. The cage must be strong enough to prevent damaging or dismantling by the bird, be designed to be cleaned easily and most importantly, made of non-toxic material. In most cases, a cage should be wider rather than taller so the bird can stretch its wings, but may also be taller for long tailed birds. The cage should be lined with newspaper or paper towels as it is hygienic and allows for better monitoring of fecal droppings or any other abnormalities such as a blood.

Feeling secure: Many birds like to have an area for privacy. This can be provided by placing the cage next to a wall, furniture or natural plants. Paper bags, or towels can also give birds a place to retreat within the cage.

Perches: Natural wood branches that are clean and pesticide free are ideal. Use different width perches for foot exercise. Perches should be positioned to prevent the tail from rubbing on the side or bottom of the cage and away from the food and water bowl to prevent fecal contamination. Replace perches as soon as they show signs of wear or damage.

Food and water bowls: Sturdy, wider rather than deep bowls make the food more visible and attractive, which may even encourage birds to eat new foods. For a healthy bird, foraging is a great addition/alternative to food bowls, your veterinarian can give you more detailed information.

Hygiene: The cage floor and bowls should be cleaned daily to prevent food spoilage and a weekly thorough clean of the cage is recommended using warm soapy water.

Environment

Temperature: A healthy bird will be able to tolerate temperatures that are comfortable to its owner. Sudden changes in temperatures should be avoided.

Humidity: Similarly, birds can adapt to a variety of humidity levels. Birds native to subtropical or tropical climates will benefit from spending time in the bathroom with running shower or misting of the feathers with water.

Outdoors time: It is beneficial for your bird's physical and mental health to spend some time in fresh air and direct sunlight (not filtered through glass/plastic)

Nutrition: A good diet is key to the overall health and longevity of every bird species. Commercially formulated bird diets in the form of pellets or crumble are recommended. A pellet-based diet will fulfill all dietary requirements, as well as preventing excessive calorie intake (see bird nutrition handout). Seeds and nuts should not be the overall diet of your bird and reserved for treats and encouraging foraging behaviours.

Grooming: Nails may need to be trimmed if they become sharp or uncomfortable for the owner. Most birds enjoy daily bathing in a shallow, wide dish. Some prefer to shower or bathe under a tap. Tropical/subtropical birds will also enjoy misting daily with tap water which will encourage normal grooming behaviour.

Wing clips: Wing trims should be carefully considered. Flight allows for exercise and better weight maintenance but clipping also prevents escape and injury in the home. If the bird is allowed to fly, make sure they are well away from ceiling fans, large windows, or hot pans or boiling water on the stove.

Veterinary visits: New birds should visit their veterinarian soon after purchase. This will enable a full health exam, a check for disease and parasites, and an appraisal of good preventative health, nutrition and husbandry.

***See your veterinarian if you notice your bird: at the bottom of the cage, fluffed up, having difficulty breathing, vomiting, exhibiting blocked or dirty nostrils, or has a change in appetite, fecal droppings appearance, vocalization, activity level, or color of face, feet or legs.**