

AVIAN HEALTH AND CARING FOR YOUR PET BIRD

Owning a pet bird can be a wonderful experience, but birds may not be the best pet for everyone. Depending on the species, some birds may live from 8 to 80 years. Making bird ownership a lifetime commitment.

Birds are highly intelligent and entertaining, but when deprived of attention or stimulation the often times become destructive of their surroundings, or worse, themselves. A healthy bird should be bright, alert and responsive to its surroundings. Feathers should be shiny and smooth, and their breast should be full and round. Stools and urine should also appear normal. A potentially sick bird will appear to one or several of the following :

- Plucked or chewed discolored feathers.
- Discolored stool or urine.
- Thin breast or prominent keel or breast bone.
- Tail bobbing or labored breathing.
- Fluffed appearance.
- Unusually quiet or sleepy.
- Stained feathers around eye or nostril.
- Swollen eyes or deformed eyelid.
- Scales or growths on face/beak/feet.
- Asymmetrical scaly overgrown beak.

Birds are very efficient in covering the signs of illness. Therefore any of the above signs may indicate a very serious problem.

When looking to buy a cage, the size varies from bird to bird. You want to try to get the biggest cage possible with the horizontal width being more important than the height. Minimum width should be twice the birds wingspan when the wings are fully extended. Cages should be easy to clean and service. Frequent cleaning to remove all organic matter is important in preventing disease. Natural perches varying in diameter are best. Try not to use dowels or sandpaper perches as they can lead to foot disease overtime. On the bottom of the cage you should use paper towels, newspaper or paper bags. Do not use shavings , walnut shells, or litter, as these can lead to infrequent cleaning and promotion of mold and fungus growth. Food and water bowls should be placed for easy access and in an area to minimize fecal contamination. Grit and mite protectors are often times unnecessary and can be dangerous.

The cage itself should be positioned in a well lighted room with moderate activity level. Placing it at eye level for people in natural sunlight is best, but access to shade should be available. Placement in the kitchen is NOT recommended. Frequently

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rotating toys helps maintain interest and provides environmental stimulation. Be aware of small parts that are easily removed.

It is critical to the health and longevity of our pet birds to provide a nutritionally complete diet. All birds require an extensive list of essential vitamins, amino acids, and minerals, many of which are lacking in a diet primarily of seed. Sunflower and safflower seeds contain 47-60% fat and are grossly deficient in many of the essential nutrients. Because of the high energy content, if given the choice, captive birds will often times eat these high fat foods to the exclusion of all the other foods. On general appearance these birds appear to be healthy, but in reality are obese and suffering from malnutrition. Diseases typically seen in these birds include hardening of the arteries, fatty liver syndrome, liver failure, and protein malnutrition. Therefore, birds may be able to survive for a period of time on a seed diet, but they will not thrive.

Some of the things that birds can eat are just about any wholesome food a human can eat. Including eggs, meats, pasta, rice, bread, cereals, fruits and vegetables. If seeds are fed, they should compose of no more than 20% of the diet with the remaining 80% being foods selected from all four food groups. It is also important to wash fresh foods to avoid exposure of dangerous molds and bacteria. Moldy peanuts are a source of potent toxins.