



A Guide to Keeping BIRDS

PET & COMPANION BIRDS

There are many types of birds that make wonderful pets, including Canaries, Budgies, Cockatiels, Lorikeets and Lovebirds. Different species have specific needs and requirements, but all pet birds require the best housing, environment, food and health care you can provide.

HOUSING YOUR BIRD

Your bird's house will be his world, most, if not all of the time. Buy the biggest cage you can afford! It's unfortunate that there are many cages available that are simply not appropriate. Consider the following points:

CAGE TYPE & SIZE

When choosing a cage, consider that birds are built to fly. They need plenty of space to spread and exercise their wings. They naturally move horizontally. Any cage should ideally be wider than it is high. You'll find that birds in tall cages tend to keep to the top half of the cage. A wide cage allows birds to express their natural



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behaviours more readily.

FLOORING

The best substrate to go into the bottom of the cage is newspaper. Although commonly sold, grit flooring is not beneficial. In-fact, grit floors can cause sore feet. Birds naturally hop along the ground eating seeds, grasses and insects. Newspaper is cheap, easily disposed of, and soft on your bird's delicate feet.

PERCHES

Considering caged birds will perch more than 99.9% of the time, the type and quality of perches is vital to the health and wellbeing of your bird. When you get your new cage, throw away the perches that it comes with! Smooth perches with the same diameter are problematic. Bird's feet require exercise to keep them healthy. Natural branches, and some commercial ones, offer varied diameters that exercise and change the pressure points on the bottom of the feet. This helps to prevent pressure sores that can develop into serious problems.



Natural branches do more than just provide something to sit on. With bark intact, birds often like to chew them and

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clean their beak on them.

Be careful with rope perches. Although colourful and easy on the feet, birds can get their nails caught in them. If you use a rope perch, monitor your bird carefully and change the perch as soon as it begins to get frayed.

In addition to natural perches some of the quality perches available include pumice and mineral perches. These can be chewed as a supplement, and help keep the beak clean.

Grit perch covers are also readily available. *Please don't use them!* They do very little to keep trim, and more often than not cause problems with the feet, akin to you wearing sandpaper in the sole of your shoe!

Whatever type of bird you have, a good variety of perches in the cage are important. A selection of natural branches and a mineral perch, for example, will do wonders for your pet.

CAGE ENRICHMENT

Birds are naturally very active and inquisitive. As their cage is their home, they require plenty of stimulation to keep them happy and healthy. You will be your bird's greatest enrichment.

But for those times you can't be paying attention to your bird, there are numerous toys available.

Look for colourful toys that provide plenty of interaction.



Beware of poor quality toys.

Avoid anything with metal that rusts (akin to poison to a bird), or catches nails or beaks. Toys don't need to be expensive. Some birds love to play with toilet rolls for example!

The most important thing is that whatever you provide, change the selection regularly to keep your bird from becoming bored.

A HEALTHY BIRD

With the right housing, high quality food, activity and stimulation, most birds will remain healthy throughout their life. There are a number of other considerations that are important to the health and wellbeing of your pet:

- Birds need to maintain a normal wake-sleep cycle. Cover birds at night if they are in a brightly lit and noisy room.
- Make sure your bird is placed away from smoke, fires, kitchen fumes and insecticide sprays.
- Natural sunlight is important – but make sure your bird has somewhere to get shade at all times.
- Clean the cage every week, and the food and water dishes every day.

HEALTH PROBLEMS

Take any signs of unwellness seriously. Seek advice as soon as you notice any change in your bird.

Common things to look out for:

- “Sick Bird Look”: fluffed up, sleeping a lot, sometimes unable to perch. This indicates a very sick bird!
- Respiration: any noise means there's a problem. Causes may include bacterial, viral or fungal infections, worms, or tumours.
- Skin problems: any scaly skin or unusual growths need treatment. Causes can include mites, infections or trauma.

Birds have a “preservation reflex”.
They will hide sickness or injury
unless until they cannot.

- Bleeding: can be life-threatening. Try and stem the bleeding and get your bird to a vet.

Uncontrolled bleeding is an emergency!

FEEDING YOUR BIRD

It's very important to understand the type of food your bird should be eating. Most pet birds eat seeds, but Lorikeets, for example, do not, and require a very specific nectar and pollen diet. If your bird is a seed-eater it is important to know what type of seeds are appropriate, to feed high quality seeds (not all seeds are created equal), and to realise that no bird should live on seeds alone. Please talk to us if you are unsure what is best for your pet.

In the wild, birds also feed on grasses, fruits, weeds and even insects. We have to help our caged birds get a varied diet. Seasonally available weeds such as Chickweed, Sow Thistle/Puha/Rariki, Milk Thistle are favourites with birds and are very nutritious. Silverbeet, spinach, bok choy, and broccoli are also fantastic bird foods.

Some birds, especially budgies, can be very suspicious of new food. Persevere. Continue to offer these foods regularly!

Other fruits and vegetables should be offered also. Apples, grapes, banana...give it all a try. But beware, some foods are highly poisonous – never feed avocado to your bird.

SUPPLEMENTS:

If you feed a quality, fortified seed mix, and provide a variety of fruits, veges and greens, a supplement should not be necessary. However, cuttlefish, mineral bells and treats go a long way to providing variety and interest for your bird. Remember to replace these items if they look spoiled or any wire holders are rusting.

