

Guidelines for New Bird Owners



Pet birds belong to two main classifications: Psittacine birds (cockatiels, lovebirds, parrots, macaws, etc.) and Passerine birds (doves, finches, canaries).

When selecting a pet bird, make your decision after careful research on the species you are considering. Factors to consider are whether you want a bird that can sing, whistle, or talk, and the overall noise level of that particular species. If talking is important in your bird, choosing birds known for that ability does not guarantee that your bird will be a good talker.

Cage selection is very important, since the cage is where your bird will spend the majority of its time. Purchase the biggest cage that you can afford for your bird - it is an investment that should last for years. The minimal acceptable cage size for Psittacine birds is a cage where the bird can spread its wings fully and not touch the sides of the cage with the wing tips. Passerines such as finches and canaries require an even wider cage that will allow flight from perch to perch. Horizontal (side-to-side) space is far more important than vertical (top-to-bottom) space. Horizontally oriented cage bars make exercise and climbing easier for your bird. Remember that for the smaller pet birds it is not uncommon to spend more money on the proper cage than you spent for the bird itself!

Nutritional requirements vary depending on which species of bird you select. All seed diets are NOT nutritionally balanced for birds, and no bird should exist on 100% seeds (seed mixes, treat sticks, and millet sprays are all inadequate nutritionally). Pelleted diets provide more complete and balanced nutrition. Conversion from a seed diet to a pelleted diet can be very stressful to your bird, and you should contact your avian veterinarian before radically changing your bird's diet. In addition, dark green leafy vegetables (broccoli, greens, etc) and yellow-orange vegetables (carrots, sweet potatoes) should be given to your bird daily. Clean fresh water should always be available to your bird.

Basic care needs include daily cage cleaning by removing soiled newspaper from the tray and replacing with fresh newspaper. Do not use corncob litter, wood shavings, cat litter, or walnut shells - these items prevent you from monitoring your bird's droppings and can be harmful if ingested by the bird.

Weekly the cage grate in the bottom of the cage should be scrubbed and the rest of the cage cleaned as necessary (scraping droppings off perches, wiping down the cage bars). Birds are extremely messy creatures and should not be purchased by people who want their home to be immaculately clean!

Grooming of your bird is important. Wings should be trimmed in ALL Psittacine birds - Passerines should NOT have their wings trimmed. A flighted bird is in danger of flying into a glass door, window, or mirror; can drown in an open toilet or pot of water; may escape out an opened door or window; has free access to potential toxins in the house (lead and zinc); and can be killed by ceiling fans or other pets. Let your avian

veterinarian show you the proper way to clip wings - the first 5 to 7 flight feathers should be cut on BOTH wings to prevent significant lift from occurring. It is not cruel to trim a bird's wings and will make the bird easier to tame.

Most birds will not need to have their beak trimmed unless they have health problems. Liver disease and scaly-face mites are the two most common reasons for an overgrown beak. Do not purchase mite-protectors as these items are toxic to birds and do not work against scaly-face mites.

Most birds will need regular toenail trimming - do NOT use sandpaper perch covers to attempt to keep a bird's nails short. Sandpaper perch covers are painful to stand on and can lead to foot injury. Have your avian veterinarian show you the proper way to trim your bird's toenails.

Birds need to be bathed regularly - some birds will use a shallow pan of water as a birdbath, while the larger birds often enjoy being misted with warm water from a spray bottle.

Grit is NOT needed by Psittacine birds - Passerine birds only require 1-2 pieces of grit per month. Allowing your bird free access to grit can result in a life-threatening impaction.

Avoid feeding your bird avocado, chocolate, alcoholic beverages, and salty snack foods. All of these items are potentially fatal to your bird.

Birds hide illness as a natural protective mechanism - at the first indication your bird may not be healthy, get it to a qualified avian veterinarian immediately. When you are able to tell your bird is sick, it has most likely been ill for several days, and a further delay in treatment can make the difference between life and death. Since birds are so good at masking their illnesses, veterinarians often must perform a battery of tests to determine what is wrong and how to best treat your bird. Blood work, x-rays, and cultures often are required to make a diagnosis. Yearly preventative health exams are very important for all pet birds for early illness detection.

A good beginner bird is a cockatiel. These birds usually are very affectionate and easy to tame. While usually not outstanding talkers, male cockatiels are good whistlers. Cockatiels are very entertaining to watch at play and enjoy human companionship if handled from an early age. - Susan L. Leck, DVM, Diplomate ABVP

Loving Hands Animal Clinic

13775 Highway 9

Milton, Georgia 30004

(770) 667-9022

www.lovinghands.com