WALNUT CREEK SUPPLY

THE COMPLETE CARE GUIDE

# Companion Bird

*Pellets, perches, quiet sleep and a home with clean air*

Family-owned in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

**10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters nationwide**

13 sections · walnutcreeksupply.com

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> ***New owner?*** *Go straight to Section 1. It is written so you can set up a safe, correct home and get through the first 48 hours without reading anything else first.*

*A companion bird is one of the most rewarding animals you can share a home with, and one of the most misunderstood. These are the **psittacines** (SIT-uh-seens, the scientific word for the parrot family): budgies, cockatiels, lovebirds, conures, and their larger cousins. They are bright, social, and clever enough to learn your routine, your voice, and which cupboard the treats live in. They are also flock animals who need hours of company every day, they can be loud, they are messy, and the smallest ones can live a decade or more while the larger ones can outlive their owners. And one thing in your own kitchen can kill a bird in minutes without you ever seeing or smelling a thing. This guide is written honestly because the birds that end up in rescues are almost always the ones whose families didn't know what they were signing up for. You're reading this, so you will. Start with the Quick Start, take the air-quality rules as seriously as anything in the whole guide, and then settle in. A well-kept bird on a natural-first diet, with a real routine, a quiet night's sleep, and a family that talks back, is a joy.*

SECTION 1

# Quick Start: Your First 48 Hours

1. **Remove every PTFE product from your home before the bird arrives.** PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene, best known by the brand name Teflon) is the slick coating on non-stick cookware, and when it overheats it gives off fumes that can kill a bird within minutes. Check every pan, baking sheet, air fryer, waffle iron, slow cooker liner, ironing board cover, hair dryer, space heater and heat lamp bulb in the house. If the label says non-stick, treat it as PTFE. "PFOA-free" does not mean PTFE-free. Replace with stainless steel, cast iron, glass or enameled cookware, and skip your oven's self-clean cycle for good. This step comes first for a reason, and the Light, Temperature & Sleep section explains the rest of the air-quality rules.
2. **Choose the room.** Put the cage in the part of the house where the family actually spends its evenings: a living room, den or family room. **Never the kitchen**, and not the bathroom or a drafty entryway either. Birds want to be part of the flock, and the kitchen is where the worst fumes happen. Set the cage at about chest height with a wall behind at least one side so the bird feels secure.
3. **Set up the complete cage before the bird comes home.** Wash a new cage with mild soap and warm water, rinse well and dry it. Check for chipped finish, rust, sharp wire ends and loose latches. Install perches of different diameters, food and water dishes, a few safe toys, and a plain paper floor liner. The Cage Setup & Layout section gives a position-by-position plan.
4. **Find an avian vet and book a new-bird exam this week.** An **avian vet** is a veterinarian with specific training and experience in birds. A dog-and-cat clinic is not the same thing, and many clinics that see "exotics" still don't see parrots. Call before you need them. Ask whether they see parrots, whether they do annual wellness exams, and where you should go after hours. Write the clinic number and the nearest emergency number on the fridge. Buy a small, secure travel carrier now.
5. **Set the three numbers.** Room temperature **65-80°F**, **10-12 hours of daylight-bright light** with a full-spectrum source, and **10-12 hours of dark, quiet sleep**. Put a thermometer near the cage, plug the light into a timer, and decide on a regular bedtime and wake-up before the bird arrives.
6. **Stock the pantry.** Ask the breeder, shop or rescue exactly what the bird has been eating and buy the same thing for the first week, even if you plan to change it. Then add what a healthy diet needs: a **formulated pellet** (a complete, balanced nugget made for parrots), fresh vegetables, a small portion of seed, a cuttlebone or mineral block, and fresh water. Change the diet gradually, never overnight.
7. **Do a whole-room safety sweep.** Stop ceiling fans, screen or close windows, cover or mark large mirrors and glass doors, put away aerosols, scented candles and plug-in air fresheners, confirm other pets are out of the room, and remove toxic plants. The full list is in Perches, Liners & Cage Safety.

8. **Bring your bird home in a covered carrier and let it settle for 48 to 72 hours.** Open the carrier inside the cage, close the cage door, sit nearby and talk softly. Check food and water, keep movement slow, and don't try to handle the bird yet. Cover the cage at bedtime on the first night and keep the schedule steady from day one.
9. **Keep a new bird separate from any other birds for 30 to 45 days.** This quarantine protects your existing birds from infections such as **psittacosis** (a bacterial infection, also called parrot fever or chlamydiosis, that can pass between birds and to people). Use a separate room if you can and care for the new bird last.
10. **Start a simple daily log.** Note appetite, droppings, energy, posture and how many hours the bird slept. A written baseline lets you and your vet see a trend instead of a guess. Wash your hands after handling the bird or cage, and keep the bird off food-prep surfaces.

## First-Time Starter Bundle

What needs to be in the house on day one, and what to look for in each category.

### Essentials

- **A properly sized cage with the right bar spacing for your species** - wide rather than tall, with horizontal bars on at least two sides for climbing, a non-toxic finish, and secure latches that a clever beak can't undo. Stainless steel or a good powder-coated finish are the safest choices.
- **A travel carrier** - small, secure, well ventilated and easy to cover, for vet trips and emergencies.
- **Perches in several diameters and natural materials** - safe hardwood branches and a few textured options, so the feet get a different grip and a different angle all day.
- **Heavy, tip-proof food and water dishes** - at least three: pellets, fresh food, water. Stainless steel or ceramic is easiest to keep clean.
- **A formulated pellet made for your bird's size** - the foundation of the diet, with a small supply of the food the bird was eating before it came home.
- **A fresh-food prep kit** - a cutting board and knife used only for bird food, plus a container for chopped vegetables.
- **A cuttlebone or mineral block** - a safe source of calcium and a beak-conditioning surface.
- **Plain paper floor liners** - unprinted or soy-ink paper that you can change daily.
- **A full-spectrum light source on a timer** - made for birds, placed according to its manufacturer's instructions.
- **A room thermometer and a gram scale** - one to check the air, one to track your bird's weight every week.
- **A cage cover or a separate sleeping area** - breathable fabric that blocks light and drafts for a full night's rest.
- **A small first-aid kit** - styptic powder for a bleeding nail or feather, clean gauze, saline, and your avian vet's phone number.

> ***Ready to set up?*** *Browse the essentials in our collections: Bird Cages, Enclosures & Accessories.*

### Enrichment

- **Foraging toys** - **foraging** means working to find and open food, the way wild birds spend most of their day. Start with simple options like paper cups, wrapped treats, and shreddable puzzle boxes.
- **Chewable toys in soft wood, paper and palm leaf** - chewing is a need, not a bad habit. Choose pieces that can be destroyed safely, and plan to replace them.
- **Hanging toys on stainless steel hardware** - a few small ones to start. Avoid anything with long loose strings or open hooks.
- **A rope or boing swing or ladder** - gives your bird a place to climb and move that isn't a perch.

- **A shallow bath dish or a gentle misting bottle** - for the bathing routine described in the grooming section.
- **A play stand or tabletop gym** - a second spot outside the cage, for supervised time with the family.
- **A rotation box** - a bin where toys wait their turn so the cage always feels new.

> ***Enrichment, one click away.*** *Shop Bird Accessories – Chews & Perches.*

SECTION 2

# Meet Your Bird

Companion parrots come from warm, open country on three continents: budgies (also called parakeets) from the dry grasslands of Australia, cockatiels from the Australian outback, lovebirds from the savannas and woodlands of Africa, and conures from the forests and edges of Central and South America. Almost all of them live in flocks. In the wild a bird is rarely alone, rarely quiet, and rarely still. Your home has to answer all three of those needs: company, a voice, and something to do. Four species cover most of the companion bird world, and the table below is the quick way to compare them.

| Species | Adult size | Typical lifespan | Noise level | Talking ability | Temperament | Mess and dust | Best for |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Budgie (parakeet) | About 7-8 in, about 1 oz | **5-10 years** (well cared for, often the upper end) | Low to moderate; chattering and soft warbling | Good; males often best | Gentle, curious, social; best in a pair or with lots of company | Small seed hulls; light dust | First-time owners who want a lively, small companion |
| Cockatiel | About 12-13 in, 3-4 oz | **15-25 years** | Moderate; whistles and contact calls, loudest at dawn and dusk | Whistles and a few words; males more | Sweet, cuddly, sensitive; prone to night frights | **Powder down**; heavy dust | Owners who want a gentle, affectionate bird and can manage dust |
| Lovebird | About 5-7 in, 1.5-2.5 oz | **10-15 years** | Moderate to high; shrill, sharp calls | Rarely talks | Bold, playful, can be nippy; strongly bonds | Moderate mess; very chewy | Experienced small-bird keepers who can give daily attention |
| Conure | About 10-12 in, 2-4.5 oz | **20-30 years** | **High**; loud screams and contact calls | Some words and sounds | Clownish, cuddly, demanding; can bite when overstimulated | Messy; throws food, loves to chew | Owners with a daily routine, tolerant neighbors, and a long-term plan |
| Larger parrots (Amazons, African grays, macaws, cockatoos) | 12-36 in, 10 oz to 3+ lb | **40-80+ years** | **Very high** (some are among the loudest pets) | Excellent; often the best talkers | Intelligent, intense, emotionally complex | Very messy; cockatoos and African grays produce heavy dust | Advanced keepers with a lifetime plan and a will naming the bird's next home |

## How long they live, and what that really means

The lifespan column is a commitment, not a trivia fact. A budgie bought for a seven-year-old may still be there when that child leaves for college. A cockatiel can see a person through high school, a career change and a move. A conure brought home when you are 25 can still be with you at 55. Birds in the large-parrot group can live 40 to 80 years or longer, and a lot of them outlive their owners. That is why a will, an emergency caretaker and a written care sheet matter for long-lived birds in a way they don't

for a hamster. The ranges here are what a well-kept bird with regular vet visits can reasonably expect; birds on seed-only diets or in smoky homes often live far shorter lives.

## Social and intelligent: what that means in your house

Parrots are flock animals with the intelligence and emotional range of a young child. They notice schedules, remember people, solve problems, get bored, and get lonely. A bird kept alone needs **significant human time every day**, a couple of hours of real interaction at minimum, not simply a bird in the room. A bird in a cage in a quiet back bedroom is not a pet in any meaningful sense, and it's the setup most likely to end with screaming, feather destruction, or a surrender to a rescue.

A pair can keep each other company, which is why budgies and lovebirds are often sold in pairs. But two birds don't replace you, and a pair doubles the cage space, food and vet bills. What isn't fine is buying a bird expecting it to entertain itself.

## Noise and mess: plan for both

Every parrot is noisy. Contact calls at dawn and dusk are natural flock behavior, and no training erases them. Budgies are the quietest, cockatiels moderate, lovebirds piercing, and conures loud enough to carry through apartment walls. If you rent or share a wall, **plan for the neighbors** before the bird arrives.

Mess is just as real. Birds fling food and shed feather dust, and a cage can throw debris two to three feet in every direction. Plan a washable floor under the cage, a small hand vacuum and about 15 minutes of cleaning a day. **Powder-down species**, which include cockatiels and cockatoos, shed a fine chalky dust that can bother anyone with allergies or asthma.

## Where your bird comes from

Choose a **captive-bred, hand-fed** bird from a reputable breeder or a rescue, never a wild-caught one. Ask about hatch date, diet and vet records. A healthy bird has bright, clear eyes, clean nostrils and vent, smooth feathers and a steady grip on both feet. Many adult parrots in rescues make wonderful companions.

## What surprises new owners

Four things catch most first-time bird owners off guard. The first is **how much of the day is yours**: the bird's schedule becomes your schedule, from the covered cage at bedtime to the morning greeting. The second is **the importance of air**: a bird's respiratory system is far more efficient and far more fragile than ours, and household fumes that don't bother you can harm a bird. The third is **how well birds hide illness**: a bird that looks fine at breakfast can be critically ill by dinner, because in the wild a sick bird is a target. The fourth is **how strongly personality shows**. A well-socialized bird has moods, favorites, opinions about your friends, and a vocabulary of sounds that means something specific. It is not a decoration.

If you're ready for a long commitment to a social, intelligent animal that needs fresh food, daily attention, a quiet night's sleep and clean air, you're on the right path.

SECTION 3

# Cage Setup & Layout

The cage is the bird's bedroom, kitchen and safe space, and for many hours of the day it's the only home the bird has. **Width matters more than height.** Birds fly horizontally, and a short, wide cage serves them better than a tall, narrow one. As a rule of thumb, the cage should be wide enough for your bird to open both wings fully and still have room to hop and flap, ideally **1.5 to 2 times the bird's wingspan across**. The sizes in the table are minimums for a single bird. Bigger is always better, and these numbers can be debated; when in doubt, go larger.

| Species | Bar spacing | Minimum cage (width × depth × height) | Better choice |
|---|---|---|---|
| Budgie | About 1/2 in | 24 × 16 × 24 in | 30 × 18 × 24 in or a flight cage, especially for a pair |
| Cockatiel | About 5/8 in | 30 × 20 × 28 in | 36 × 24 × 30 in; leave room for the tail |
| Lovebird | About 5/8 in | 24 × 18 × 24 in | 30 × 20 × 24 in for a pair |
| Conure | **3/4 in or wider** (up to 1 in for larger conures) | 30 × 24 × 30 in | 36 × 24 × 36 in |
| Larger parrots | Species-specific, 1 in or more | 36 × 28 × 48 in and up | A large custom cage or an aviary-style room |

Bar spacing matters for safety. If the bars are too wide, a small bird can push its head through and get trapped. If they are too narrow for a larger bird, a toe or beak can get caught. Match the spacing to your species and ask the seller if you're not sure.

## Choosing the cage itself

Choose a **rectangular cage** with horizontal bars on at least two sides so the bird can climb the walls. Avoid round or dome-top cages. The finish must be **non-toxic** and intact. Avoid **galvanized wire** and anything with zinc, and avoid old painted cages, which may contain lead. Use a grate over the tray so the bird can't walk in droppings. Test the latches: conures and larger parrots are escape artists, so add a small clip as a backup.

## Cage layout, position by position

Imagine the cage as a front view, with the bird looking out at you. The labels below are written so you could sketch them on a drawing, from the top down.

| Label | Position | What goes here | Why |
|---|---|---|---|
| A | Top front corner, highest point | The main perch: a thick natural branch | Birds feel safest high up, and this is the "lookout" |
| B | Upper left side wall | A chewable hanging toy, soft wood or paper | Keeps the toy out of the way of food and droppings |
| C | Upper right side wall | A second perch at a different diameter and angle | Gives the feet variety and gives the bird somewhere to move |
| D | Middle center, open space | **Empty space for flapping and hopping** | Birds need a clear flight lane; don't fill it with toys |
| E | Middle left, side wall | The food station: pellet and fresh food dishes | Placed below A so droppings from the top perch don't fall in the dishes |

| Label | Position | What goes here | Why |
|---|---|---|---|
| F | Middle right, side wall | The water dish | Offset from the food, and from any perch above it |
| G | Back wall, mid height | A rope swing or ladder | A place to climb and rest; keep it away from the dishes |
| H | Lower front, near the door | A foraging station or a puzzle toy | Birds enjoy foraging, and this is where you can reach it |
| I | Bottom grate | **Open space; no perches or dishes** | Keeps the bird off droppings and dirty food |
| J | Tray under the grate | Plain paper liner, changed daily | Easy to see droppings for the daily health check |
| K | Outside the cage, top | A play stand or perch for out-of-cage time | The cage door opens onto a safe landing spot |
| L | Cover | A breathable cover hung over the cage at bedtime | Signals night, blocks light and drafts |

Keep dishes away from directly under perches so droppings don't land in food and water. Put the highest perch somewhat below the cage top so the bird's head doesn't hit the roof. Never put perches so close together that long tail feathers rub on the bars; cockatiels in particular can snap their tail feathers in a cramped cage. Keep a clear flight lane along the middle of the cage, and rearrange the toys every week so the bird isn't bored by the same view.

## Where the cage lives in the room

Place the cage in a **social, well-lit room**, **away from the kitchen**, drafts, vents, bathroom steam and windows with hot afternoon sun. Put it against a wall or in a corner, at roughly chest height, so the bird feels protected.

SECTION 4

# Perches, Liners & Cage Safety

A bird spends most of its day on its feet, and its feet are surprisingly delicate. Perches that are all the same size, too smooth, too rough, or too narrow lead to pressure sores, swollen joints and a painful condition called bumblefoot (an infection that starts as a pressure sore on the sole). The cure is **variety**: different diameters, different textures, and natural materials that give the toes a different grip all day long. A single dowel perch of one size is the most common perch mistake in the hobby. Choose perches the bird can grip comfortably with its toes not quite meeting around the wood, and mix in a size up and a size down so the muscles in the feet get a workout.

## Perch materials compared

| Material | Best for | Pros | Cautions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Manzanita | All species; excellent for most | Hard, natural variation in diameter, long lasting | Can be heavy; buy bird-safe, bark-free pieces |
| Java wood | Small to medium birds | Smooth, naturally varied shape, gentle on feet | Can be pricey; confirm it is untreated |
| Dogwood | All species | Safe, natural, chewable | Make sure it's untreated, pesticide-free wood |
| Fresh-cut safe branches (apple, willow, maple, elm) | Chewing and enrichment | Free, natural, fun to shred | Must be pesticide-free; scrub and let dry; replace when soiled |
| Rope perches | Soft resting spot | Gentle on feet, flexible | Fraying threads can wrap toes; trim and replace often |
| Cement or concrete perches | One only, near the food | Light nail wear | Too abrasive as the only perch; can cause sores |
| Plain smooth plastic or dowel | A single backup perch | Cheap, easy to wipe | **Never the only size or material** |
| Sandpaper perch covers | **Do not use** | None worth the risk | Cause abrasions, sores and infections |

Mix at least four different perch types in the cage, with at least two sizes. Put the thickest, most comfortable perch near the food and water and the softest perch near the bird's favorite sleeping spot.

## Cage floor liners compared

| Liner | Best for | Pros | Cautions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Plain unprinted paper | Daily use | Cheap, absorbent, makes droppings easy to read | Change daily |
| Paper towels | Sick birds and quarantine | Droppings are easy to inspect | Not very absorbent; change often |
| Newsprint with soy-based ink | Daily use | Easily available, inexpensive | Use only black-and-white pages; skip glossy inserts |
| Butcher paper or brown paper | Daily use | Safe, plain, absorbent | Roll size can be awkward to cut |

| Liner | Best for | Pros | Cautions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Washable cloth liners | Sometimes used for large cages | Reusable | Loose threads can wrap toes or cause crop impaction; most avian vets prefer paper |
| Corn cob, walnut shell, wood chips, cat litter | **Do not use** | None | Mold, dust, crop and gut blockage, respiratory irritation |
| Cedar or pine shavings | **Do not use** | None | Aromatic oils irritate the respiratory tract |

## Avoid outright

- **Sandpaper perch covers and sanded "calcium" perches** - they wear the soles of the feet raw.
- **Galvanized wire, galvanized hardware and zinc-plated items** - zinc is toxic when chewed or swallowed.
- **Lead-weighted toys, lead-based paint, stained glass, curtain weights, fishing sinkers and old painted furniture** - even small amounts of lead are dangerous.
- **Cedar, treated lumber or pressure-treated wood** - chemicals and aromatic oils.
- **Toys with loose string loops, frayed cord, open S-hooks, split rings, or bells with removable clappers** - toes and necks can be trapped; clappers can be swallowed.
- **Mirrors as the only companion** - a bird can become obsessed with its reflection and show hormonal or aggressive behavior.
- **Chipped, peeling or rusting cage finish** - replace the cage, or recoat with a bird-safe product.
- **Scented products near the cage** - plug-in air fresheners, scented candles, wax melts and aerosol sprays.

## The whole-room safety sweep

Before your bird has its first out-of-cage hour, walk through the room with a bird's-eye view. Do this again every time you rearrange the room.

| Hazard | Why it's dangerous | What to do |
|---|---|---|
| Ceiling fans | A flying bird can fly into the blades | Turn off before any out-of-cage time; wait until the blades stop completely |
| Open windows and doors | Escape is the leading cause of lost birds | Keep birds in a closed room; set a "door rule" for the household; screen windows |
| Other pets | Even a gentle cat or dog can kill a bird, and a scratch or bite is an emergency | Separate completely; never leave a bird and a cat or dog alone together |
| Hot stoves, toasters, candles, hot drinks | Burns and fatal fumes | Keep birds out of the kitchen |
| Toxic plants | Many common houseplants are toxic when chewed | Remove philodendron, pothos, dieffenbachia, lilies, ivy, azalea, oleander, poinsettia and holly; ask your avian vet for a full list |
| Mirrors and large windows | Birds can fly into them | Add decals, curtains or a sheer cover |
| Open water | Birds can drown in toilets, sinks, pots and even deep dishes | Close toilet lids, empty sinks, never leave deep water unattended |
| Lead and zinc | Cause chronic poisoning | Check for old paint, curtain weights, galvanized wire and hardware |

SECTION 5

# Light, Temperature & Sleep — The 3 Numbers

Three numbers do more for a bird's long-term health than almost anything else you buy: a comfortable **65-80°F** temperature, **10-12 hours of bright, full-spectrum light** each day, and **10-12 hours of dark, quiet sleep** each night. Get these right and you prevent a surprising number of the problems described later, from feather plucking to hormonal behavior to dull feathers. Get them wrong and you may spend months chasing symptoms. Humidity is a quiet fourth number: roughly 40-60%.

| Parameter | Target | How to check | What goes wrong when it's off |
|---|---|---|---|
| Room temperature | **65-80°F**, steady, away from drafts and direct heat vents | A digital thermometer placed near the cage at bird height | Below 65°F: fluffed feathers, shivering, low energy, higher risk of respiratory illness. Above 85°F: panting, wings held away from body, heat stress |
| Light (daytime) | **10-12 hours** of bright, full-spectrum light or safe natural sun | A timer on the lamp; check the bulb's age and manufacturer instructions | Too little: poor vitamin D, weak bones and feathers, mood and hormonal changes. Too much: hormonal behavior, egg laying, overstimulation |
| Sleep | **10-12 hours** of dark, quiet rest | Cover the cage or move the bird to a separate sleeping area at a regular time; log hours slept | Too little: screaming, aggression, plucking, hormonal behavior, higher disease risk, night frights |
| Humidity | Roughly **40-60%** | A digital hygrometer in the room | Below 40%: dry skin, dull feathers, respiratory irritation. Above 70%: mold and bacterial growth |

## Temperature

Most companion parrots are comfortable at ordinary room temperature, roughly **65-80°F**. Their native homes are warm, so they tolerate warmth better than cold, but they do not tolerate sudden swings, drafts or direct heat blowing across the cage. Place the cage away from air conditioner and heater vents, exterior doors, and windows that get cold at night or hot in the sun. Don't use a heat lamp or a space heater to warm a healthy bird's room. If your vet tells you to warm a sick bird, use only a bird-safe heat source that is **free of PTFE coatings**, and follow the vet's directions.

## Light and full-spectrum lighting

Birds see colors we can't, including ultraviolet (UV) light, and they use sunlight to make vitamin D, which helps them absorb calcium. Ordinary indoor bulbs don't supply UV, and **glass blocks the UVB** that natural sunlight would give. That is why a window ledge isn't a substitute for the sun. You have two good options: a **full-spectrum bird lamp** placed at the manufacturer's recommended distance and replaced on schedule, or **supervised time outside** in a secure carrier or harness, in partial shade, never in a closed car or direct heat. Run the lamp on a timer for 10-12 hours each day. If the bulb or the fixture has any non-stick coating, don't use it near birds.

## Sleep: the 10-12 hour rule

Wild birds sleep as soon as it gets dark, and they sleep deeply. In our homes, TVs, lamps and kitchen noise keep many pet birds awake until 10 or 11 p.m., and the result is a chronically tired, cranky bird. Pick a bedtime and wake-up time and keep them as steady as you can. Cover the cage with a breathable, tightly woven fabric, or better, move the bird to a quiet sleep cage in a dark room. Avoid covers with loops of loose thread that toes can catch. Cockatiels prone to night frights (sudden panicked thrashing in the dark) may do better with a dim night-light.

## Air-quality rules

**Air quality is life or death.** A bird's respiratory system includes air sacs that pull air all the way through the lungs, which makes them wonderfully efficient at flight and dangerously efficient at absorbing toxins. Birds were once carried into coal mines as an early warning for bad air.

| Source | Why it's dangerous | What to do |
|---|---|---|
| **PTFE/Teflon in non-stick cookware, bakeware, air fryers, waffle makers, popcorn poppers** | Overheated PTFE releases fumes that can **kill a bird within minutes**, sometimes from a pan on the stove in another room | Remove every non-stick item from the home |
| **Self-cleaning ovens** | The extreme heat gives off fumes that can be fatal | Never use the self-clean cycle; clean by hand |
| **Heat lamps, space heaters, hair dryers, irons, ironing board covers with PTFE coatings** | The same fume hazard when heated | Check labels; replace with PTFE-free versions |
| Aerosol sprays, air fresheners, scented candles, wax melts, incense | Fine particles and chemicals irritate and poison the airways | Don't use in the house |
| Cigarette smoke, vape, wood smoke | Toxic and irritating, and nicotine residue sticks to feathers | Keep all smoke and vapor out of the house |
| Cleaning sprays, bleach, ammonia, strong disinfectants | Fumes burn the airways | Use mild, unscented cleaners and ventilate well; keep the bird away |
| New carpet, fresh paint, varnish, glue, new furniture | Off-gassing chemicals linger for days | Choose low-fume products, ventilate for days, and keep the bird in another part of the house |
| The kitchen itself | Fumes, smoke and steam | The kitchen is the worst place for a cage |

If you ever suspect fume exposure, **move the bird immediately to fresh air in another part of the house, or outdoors if conditions allow, open windows, and call an emergency vet at once**, even if the bird seems fine. Signs can appear within minutes and can include open-beak breathing, wobbling, collapse and sudden death.

SECTION 6

# Diet & Nutrition

*Formulated pellets as the base, with fresh vegetables, a little fruit, and seeds as a foraging treat rather than the whole diet.*

A seed-only diet is the single most common cause of preventable illness in pet birds. Seeds are rich in fat and low in vitamin A, calcium and many amino acids, and a bird living on them can look healthy for years while developing **malnutrition and fatty liver disease** underneath. At the same time, wild parrots don't eat a bowl of dry seeds; they eat a rotating mix of seeds, buds, leaves, flowers, fruits and shoots, and they work for every bite. Our approach is natural-first: **formulated pellets as the base, fresh vegetables every day, a small portion of fruit, and seeds and nuts as treats and foraging rewards.** No mystery ingredients, no dyed junk, and no sugary "treat sticks" as meals. Clean Fuel, No Junk.

## The target diet, by species

Ratios differ with species and with your vet's advice. These are safe ranges, not rigid rules. Budgies and cockatiels often do better on a mix that includes some seed rather than a sudden, strict pellet-only plan, so the numbers below allow for it.

| Species | Pellets | Fresh vegetables | Seeds and nuts | Fruit |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Budgie | About 50-60% | About 30-35% | About 10% (small seeds, millet) | A small bite, 0-5% |
| Cockatiel | About 55-65% | About 25-30% | About 10% | A small bite, up to 5% |

| Species | Pellets | Fresh vegetables | Seeds and nuts | Fruit |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lovebird | About 60-70% | About 20-25% | About 5-10% | Up to 5% |
| Conure | About 60-70% | About 20-25% | About 5-10% (nuts used for training) | 5-10% |
| Larger parrots | About 60-70% | About 20-30% | A few nuts as treats | Small portion |

## Switching a seed-eater to pellets

Many birds arrive on an all-seed diet, and some will refuse unfamiliar food. **Never remove the old food suddenly.** Over several weeks, offer pellets in one dish and the old seed mix in another, then gradually shrink the seed dish. Mix crushed pellets into the seed, serve pellets moist, offer them as a first-thing-in-the-morning breakfast, and eat them where the bird can see you. Weigh your bird on a gram scale every few days during the change, and **call your avian vet if the bird loses more than a few percent of its weight** or stops eating or producing droppings.

## Safe foods

| Food | Category | How often | Notes |
|---|---|---|---|
| Broccoli, kale, collards, dandelion greens, romaine | **Leafy greens and brassicas** | Daily | Wash well, serve chopped or whole for shredding |
| Carrot, sweet potato (cooked), bell pepper, squash | **Orange and red vegetables** | Daily | Excellent vitamin A; serve raw, steamed or shredded |
| Peas, green beans, zucchini, cucumber | **Everyday vegetables** | Several times per week | Mild, hydrating, easily accepted |
| Cooked beans, quinoa, brown rice | **Cooked grains and legumes** | A few times per week | Cook beans thoroughly; never serve raw |
| Apple (no seeds), berries, melon, mango, banana | **Fruit** | A small bite, a few times per week | Sugar adds up; keep within the fruit portion |
| Millet spray, canary seed, flax | **Seed treats** | A few times per week | Great for training and foraging; not a meal |
| Almonds, walnuts, pecans, unsalted | **Nuts** | A few small pieces per week | Fatty; good as a foraging reward |
| Cooked egg, small bit of plain cooked chicken | **Protein treats** | Occasionally | Very small amounts only |
| Sprouted seeds and grains | **Sprouts** | Several times a week | Wash well, serve fresh and discard what is not eaten within a few hours |

## Never feed

| Food | Why | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **Avocado** | Toxic to birds; can cause heart failure and sudden death | Never offer any part of it |
| **Chocolate and caffeine** | Toxic to the heart and nervous system | Includes coffee, tea, energy drinks and cola |

| Food | Why | Notes |
|---|---|---|
| **Alcohol** | Toxic even in small amounts | Never |
| **Onions, garlic and chives** | Can damage red blood cells | Includes cooked and powdered forms |
| **Apple, pear, cherry, peach and plum seeds and pits** | Contain compounds that release cyanide | Remove all seeds and pits before serving the fruit |
| **Salt and salty snacks** | Dehydration and kidney strain | Includes chips, crackers and pretzels |
| **Raw dry beans** | Contain a toxin that cooking neutralizes | Cook thoroughly or skip |
| **Some mushrooms** | Several wild and store varieties may be toxic | Skip them entirely |
| **Xylitol and sugar-free sweeteners** | Dangerous in gum, candy and baked goods | Check labels |
| **Dairy in excess** | Birds can't digest lactose well | A tiny taste won't hurt; a bowl will |
| **Fried, greasy and heavily processed food** | Fat, salt and additives | Fast food, chips, sweets |
| **Rhubarb leaves, tomato leaves and stems** | Toxic plant parts | Ripe tomato fruit is fine |

## Foraging: make them work for it

In the wild, birds spend much of the day searching, chewing and cracking. A bowl that fills with no effort is boredom on a plate. Start simple: crumple food into a paper cup, wrap a nut in paper, or weave a leafy green through the bars. Then move to shreddable boxes and puzzle feeders, and scatter part of the daily pellets in a foraging toy. Foraging burns energy and reduces screaming and plucking.

## Supplements, water and grit

A well-fed bird eating a pellet-based diet usually doesn't need extra vitamins; adding vitamin drops to the water can grow bacteria and make dosing unpredictable. Always ask your avian vet before adding any supplement. Do keep a **cuttlebone or mineral block** in the cage for calcium and beak wear. Offer **fresh water daily**, and change it more often if the bird dunks food in it. Wash dishes daily. Most avian vets don't recommend grit for parrots, because they hull their seeds and an excess of grit can cause problems.

## A daily feeding schedule

| Time | What to do |
|---|---|
| Morning, when the cover comes off | Fresh water; fresh pellets; a chopped vegetable mix served first, when the bird is hungriest |
| Mid-morning (2-4 hours later) | Remove any fresh food that hasn't been eaten, since it spoils quickly |
| Afternoon | A foraging treat or a small portion of fruit or nuts, used for training |
| Early evening | A second, lighter vegetable meal and a check that pellets are available |
| Before bed | Remove fresh food and any spoiled items; keep water available; cover the cage |

Weigh your bird weekly at the same time of day. Weight is often the first thing to change in a sick bird.

***Shop the food and supplies:*** *Browse Bird Food, Treats & Supplements.*

SECTION 7

# Grooming, Molting & Wing Care

## Bathing and misting

Most pet birds love to bathe, and it keeps feathers clean and skin hydrated. Offer a shallow dish of lukewarm water, a gentle misting from a clean spray bottle set to a fine mist, or a damp leafy green to roll in, two to four times a week. Let the bird decide: never force a bath. Bathe in the morning so feathers dry before bedtime, keep the room warm and draft-free, and use plain water only. **No sprays, "feather conditioners" or perfumed products.**

## Molting

**Molting** is the natural, periodic shedding and regrowth of feathers. Most companion birds molt once or twice a year, and young birds go through their first full molt in the first year. New feathers grow in inside waxy sheaths called pin feathers, which are sensitive and can bleed if bumped. During a molt, expect more feather dust and loose feathers, a bird that is itchy, grumpy or tired, and sometimes a reduced appetite. Help by offering extra bathing, protein-rich foods such as cooked egg or sprouts, a calm routine and extra sleep, and be gentle around pin feathers. **A bird that looks bald in patches, or is losing feathers without new ones coming in, is not molting normally** and should see an avian vet.

## Nail and beak care

Nails grow constantly. Varied perches and a rough-textured perch near the food dish usually keep nails in good shape, but many birds still need a trim every few months. Have your avian vet or a trained groomer show you the first time. Keep **styptic powder** and a clean cloth on hand in case a nail bleeds. A healthy beak is smooth, symmetrical and doesn't flake, peel or overgrow. A cuttlebone and chewable toys help. An overgrown, cracked or crossed beak is a medical issue: see your avian vet, and never trim it at home.

## Wing clipping: a real debate

Wing clipping is the trimming of the flight feathers to limit how well a bird can fly. Owners and experts disagree. Arguments for it: it can reduce the risk of escape through a door or window and makes a new bird easier to handle. Arguments against: flight is natural exercise and important for confidence, clipped birds can still fall and be hurt, and a bird with a poor clip can crash into the floor and injure its keel (breastbone). A poorly done clip can also cause feather damage and fear. Whatever you decide, **make it a vet-guided choice**, never a do-it-yourself job, and **never rely on a clip to keep a bird safe**. A clipped bird can still escape, especially when the feathers grow back in. Keep doors, windows and fans under control either way.

## Powder down and dust

Cockatiels, cockatoos and African grays make a fine powder from special feathers to condition their plumage. It's normal, but it settles on every surface and can bother people with asthma or allergies. Damp-dust daily, bathe the bird often, and use a HEPA air purifier that makes no ozone and has no PTFE-coated parts.

SECTION 8

# Handling, Training & Enrichment

## Trust first

A bird that has just come home is a frightened prey animal. Give it 48-72 hours to settle, then build trust by sitting near the cage, speaking softly, and offering treats through the bars. Never grab a bird or chase it around a room; the more it chooses to come to you, the faster training moves. Short, calm sessions of 5-10 minutes, two or three times a day, work far better than one long one.

## Step-up and target training

**Positive reinforcement** means rewarding the behavior you want, rather than punishing the one you don't. It is the only approach that works well with parrots. Choose a favorite treat, say a bit of millet, a pine nut or a sunflower seed kept only for training, and follow these steps.

| Step | What to do | What success looks like |
|---|---|---|
| Target | Hold a chopstick or small stick near the beak; reward any touch | The bird touches the target on purpose |
| Step-up | Press a finger gently against the lower belly and say "up" | The bird steps onto the finger |
| Recall | Ask the bird to step up and move a short distance | The bird follows the target or steps up in a new location |
| Station | Teach the bird to go to a perch or play stand on cue | The bird stays calm in the spot you pick |
| Return | Ask the bird to step back into the cage with a treat | The bird goes in willingly |

## Reading body language

| Signal | What it means |
|---|---|
| Fluffed feathers, relaxed beak grinding | Content and sleepy |
| Slicked-down feathers, wide eyes | Frightened or alarmed |
| Pinning (rapidly contracting pupils) with fanned tail | Excited or angry; give space |
| Open beak with a lunge | A warning; stop and back away |
| Wings held away from the body, panting | Hot or distressed |

## Out-of-cage time

Birds need **at least a couple of hours a day out of the cage**, always supervised, in a bird-safe room. Close windows and doors, turn off ceiling fans, put other pets in another room, and remove toxic plants and open water. Give a play stand with toys, a foraging station and a perch near family activity. Out-of-cage time is also the best time for training. If children share the home, have them sit on the floor, move slowly, wash hands afterward, and never squeeze or chase the bird; keep cats and dogs out of the room entirely.

## Enrichment and toy rotation

Chewing is natural, and a bird that doesn't get to chew will chew your furniture, your hair or its own feathers. Keep **three to five toys in the cage** and rotate them weekly from a storage box, so the cage always feels new. Mix types: soft wood for shredding, paper for tearing, foraging toys, a swing, and something that makes noise. Replace anything that is badly chewed, and always check that toys have no loose threads, small split rings or exposed metal.

SECTION 9

# Common Challenges & Solutions

Birds are experts at hiding sickness. By the time a symptom is obvious, the problem has usually been developing for days. When in doubt, call your avian vet.

## Respiratory disease and air sac infection

**What you see:** tail bobbing with each breath, open-beak breathing at rest, wheezing, clicking, sneezing, nasal discharge, a voice change, or a bird that stops singing. **Why:** infection from bacteria, fungi or viruses, or irritated airways from fumes, dust, smoke or damp bedding. **What to do:** move the bird to a warm, quiet, fume-free space and call your avian vet right away. **When to call a vet:** immediately. Tail bobbing and open-beak breathing are an emergency.

## Psittacosis (chlamydiosis)

**What you see:** lethargy, fluffed feathers, green or yellow droppings, eye or nasal discharge, breathing trouble, weight loss, though some birds carry the infection with no signs at all. **Why:** a bacterium called *Chlamydia psittaci*, spread through droppings, feather dust and respiratory secretions. It **can pass to humans**, causing flu-like illness or pneumonia. **What to do:** isolate the bird, wash hands carefully, wear a mask when cleaning, and keep the cage damp-cleaned rather than dry-swept. **When to call a vet:** as soon as possible. Tell your own doctor you keep birds if you have a persistent cough or fever.

## Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD) and proventricular dilatation disease (PDD)

**What you see:** PBFD causes abnormal, brittle or missing feathers, a flaky or overgrown beak and slow decline; PDD affects digestion and nerves, causing weight loss, undigested seeds in droppings, regurgitation and weakness. **Why:** PBFD is a virus; PDD is linked to a virus as well. Both spread between birds and are often diagnosed by testing. **What to do:** quarantine new birds, keep a clean environment, and get testing through your avian vet. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign. Early testing matters, and neither disease has a simple cure.

## Egg binding

**What you see:** a female who sits fluffed on the cage floor, strains, has a swollen belly, walks stiffly or has trouble perching, sometimes with no egg produced. **Why:** a retained egg, often linked to calcium deficiency, lack of sleep, constant light, or hormonal triggers, and it can happen without a male present. **What to do:** place her in a warm (about 85°F), quiet, dark space, and phone your avian vet immediately. **When to call a vet: now.** Egg binding can be fatal within hours.

## Fatty liver disease and obesity

**What you see:** a bird that is overweight, sluggish and dull, a bulging belly, overgrown beak or nails, dull or stress-barred feathers, and often a seed-only diet. **Why:** too much fat and too little exercise, usually from seed-heavy diets. **What to do:** switch gradually to pellets and vegetables, increase flight and play time, weigh weekly. **When to call a vet:** book a check for blood work, since fatty liver doesn't always show clear signs.

## Vitamin A deficiency

**What you see:** white spots or plaques in the mouth, sneezing, runny nose, swollen eyes, a flaky beak, poor feather quality. **Why:** a seed-heavy diet lacking orange and dark leafy vegetables. **What to do:** add vitamin A-rich foods (carrots, sweet potato, peppers, leafy greens) and move to pellets. Do not self-supplement. **When to call a vet:** within a few days. Severe cases can cause lasting damage.

## Feather-destructive behavior (plucking)

**What you see:** chewing, barbering or pulling out feathers, bare patches on the chest, legs and sides (the head can't be reached). **Why:** boredom, loneliness, lack of sleep, hormonal changes, poor diet, skin irritation, air quality, parasites or illness. It is rarely just "a habit." **What to do:** review the three numbers, increase sleep, foraging and out-of-cage time, and adjust diet. **When to call a vet:** early. Rule out medical causes before assuming it's behavioral.

## Hormonal behavior and screaming

**What you see:** nesting, regurgitating on you or toys, screaming at dusk or dawn, aggression, cage territoriality, egg laying. **Why:** long days, too little sleep, rich food, or petting the back and under the wings, which a bird reads as mating behavior. **What to do:** 10-12 hours of dark sleep, reduce daylight length, pet only the head and neck, remove nest-like hiding spots, and reduce rich foods. **When to call a vet:** if it leads to egg laying, constant laying, or injury.

## Mites

**What you see:** scaly, crusty or honeycombed patches on the beak, cere (the fleshy area above the beak) or legs; itching; feather loss. **Why:** mites spread by contact with infected birds. **What to do:** don't use over-the-counter treatments without advice. **When to call a vet:** at the first sign, since treatment is simple and effective when started early.

## Toxin exposure

**What you see:** sudden weakness, trouble breathing, wobbling, vomiting, seizures, collapse. **Why:** PTFE fumes, smoke, aerosols, toxic food or plants, lead or zinc. **What to do:** get the bird to fresh air immediately, remove the source, and call an avian or emergency vet on the way. **When to call a vet: immediately.**

## Trauma and injuries

**What you see:** bleeding, a drooping wing, an inability to perch, a bird sitting on the cage floor after a crash. **Why:** collisions with windows or fans, cage accidents, pet attacks, broken blood feathers. **What to do:** for a bleeding blood feather or nail, press styptic powder or cornstarch against it; keep the bird warm and quiet in a covered carrier. **When to call a vet:** any significant bleeding or any bite or scratch from a cat or dog.

## Quick reference

| What you see | Likely cause | What to do | Vet urgency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tail bobbing, open-beak breathing | Respiratory disease, air sac infection, or toxin exposure | Warm, quiet, fresh air; call now | **Emergency, same day** |
| Fluffed bird on the cage floor | Serious illness | Warm carrier; call now | **Emergency, same day** |
| Straining, swollen belly, no egg | Egg binding | Warm, dark, quiet; call now | **Emergency, same day** |
| Weakness or collapse after cooking, spraying or smoke | Toxin exposure | Fresh air; call now | **Emergency, same day** |
| Green or yellow droppings, eye discharge | Psittacosis or other infection | Isolate; call | Same day or next |
| Bare patches, chewing feathers | Plucking | Check the three numbers; add enrichment | Book a visit |
| Overweight, dull, seed-only diet | Obesity, fatty liver | Move to pellets and vegetables | Book a visit |
| White plaques in mouth, runny nose | Vitamin A deficiency | Add orange and green vegetables | Within days |

| What you see | Likely cause | What to do | Vet urgency |
|---|---|---|---|
| Scaly beak or legs | Mites | Do not self-treat | Within days |

SECTION 10

# Routine Care Calendar

| How often | What to do |
|---|---|
| Daily | Remove the cover at a regular time; give fresh water and pellets |
| Daily | Offer chopped fresh vegetables; remove uneaten fresh food after a few hours |
| Daily | Change the floor liner and look at the droppings (color, amount, consistency) |
| Daily | Check the bird for bright eyes, smooth feathers, normal posture and appetite |
| Daily | Run the full-spectrum light on a timer and check the room temperature |
| Daily | At least two hours of interaction, training and out-of-cage time |
| Daily | Cover the cage at the same time every night for 10-12 hours of sleep |
| Weekly | Weigh the bird on a gram scale and write down the number |
| Weekly | Wash dishes with hot, soapy water and rinse well |
| Weekly | Rotate toys and replace anything chewed or damaged |
| Weekly | Wipe down the cage bars, perches and the area around the cage |
| Weekly | Check all toys, perches and cage hardware for wear |
| Monthly | Deep-clean the cage: scrub, rinse and dry the bars, grate and tray |
| Monthly | Replace worn perches; check for sharp edges and frayed rope |
| Monthly | Inspect nails and beak; check feet for sores |
| Monthly | Check the air: no new candles, sprays or non-stick items have crept in |
| Monthly | Take a photo of the bird as a body condition baseline |
| Every 6 months | Replace the full-spectrum bulb as the manufacturer recommends |
| Annually | Avian vet wellness exam, with a weight, a physical and any recommended bloodwork |
| Annually | Review the diet, cage and toys; replace the cage cover and any worn gear |

SECTION 11

# When to See a Vet

Birds hide illness, a survival instinct from the wild where a weak bird is a target. When you notice a symptom, the problem has often been building for days. **When you're uncertain whether to call, call.** A short phone call to an avian vet is always better than a day of watching and waiting. If a bird is fluffed up and sitting low on the cage floor, treat it as an emergency.

**Go today, same day or emergency:**

- Tail bobbing, open-beak breathing, wheezing or clicking when the bird is resting
- A fluffed-up bird sitting low on the cage floor or unable to perch
- Any exposure to PTFE fumes, smoke, aerosol sprays or other toxic fumes, even if the bird looks fine
- A female who is straining or has a swollen belly, with or without an egg
- Active bleeding that doesn't stop within a few minutes, or a broken blood feather that keeps bleeding
- Eating or drinking something toxic (avocado, chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, lead or zinc objects)
- Collapse, seizures, loss of balance or sudden weakness
- A drooping wing, suspected fracture or a bite or scratch from a cat or dog
- No droppings for a day, or blood in the droppings
- A bird that hasn't eaten for a day, particularly a small one

**Book within a few days:**

- Droppings that change color or consistency for more than a day
- Weight loss of more than a few percent in a week
- Sneezing, a runny nose or any discharge from the eyes or nostrils
- Feather loss, plucking or poor feather quality
- A beak or nails that are overgrown, cracked or changing shape
- Scaly patches on the beak, face or legs
- Changes in voice, activity or appetite that last more than a day
- Any new lump or swelling

Find your avian vet **before you need one**, and ask where to go after hours. When you travel, **bring the bird in a covered carrier** that is warm, secure and dark. Bring your daily log, your weight records, a list of foods, and a photo of the cage setup. If you can, bring a sample of fresh droppings in a clean container.

SECTION 12

# FAQ

## What do pet birds eat?

A healthy pet bird eats a base of **formulated pellets**, roughly 60-70% of the diet for many species, along with fresh vegetables every day, a small portion of fruit, and a limited amount of seeds and nuts as treats and foraging rewards. Budgies and cockatiels often do better with a mix that includes some seed, while larger parrots need more pellets. Offer a cuttlebone or mineral block for calcium, fresh water daily, and remove fresh food after a few hours. Never feed avocado, chocolate, caffeine, alcohol, onions, garlic, apple or pear seeds, fruit pits, salt, raw dry beans or fried and processed foods.

## How long do pet birds live?

It depends on the species, and the range is wide. Budgies live about 5 to 10 years, cockatiels 15 to 25, lovebirds 10 to 15, conures 20 to 30, and larger parrots such as Amazons, African grays, macaws and cockatoos 40 to 80 years or more, sometimes outliving their owners. Good diet, clean air, sleep, exercise and annual avian vet visits push a bird toward the upper end of its range; seed-only diets, smoky homes and chronic stress shorten it.

## How big a cage does a parakeet need?

A single budgie (parakeet) needs a cage at least 24 inches wide, 16 inches deep and 24 inches tall, with bar spacing of about 1/2 inch, and a pair does better with 30 inches or more. Width matters more than height, because birds fly horizontally, and the cage should be wide enough for the bird to fully extend its wings and move around, ideally 1.5 to 2 times its wingspan across. Bigger is always better, and a flight cage is a wonderful upgrade.

## Are pet birds loud?

Yes, all of them to some degree, but it varies a lot by species. Budgies are the quietest, with soft chatter and warbling, cockatiels are moderate with whistles and calls, lovebirds are sharp and shrill, conures can be very loud, and larger parrots such as macaws and cockatoos can be heard through walls and across a neighborhood. Dawn and dusk calling is natural flock behavior and cannot be trained away, though enough sleep, daily attention and foraging reduce constant screaming. If you rent or share walls, plan for the neighbors before you bring a bird home.

## Why can't birds be around non-stick cookware?

Non-stick cookware is coated with **PTFE** (polytetrafluoroethylene, often sold as Teflon). When the coating overheats, it releases fumes that can kill a bird within minutes, sometimes before you smell anything or know something is wrong. A bird's respiratory system pulls air all the way through the lungs and into air sacs, which makes it far more sensitive to airborne toxins than ours. The same risk comes from self-cleaning ovens, air fryers, waffle makers, and some heat lamps, hair dryers and space heaters with PTFE coatings. The safest choice is to remove every non-stick item from your home and cook with stainless steel, cast iron, glass or enameled cookware instead.

## How many hours of sleep do birds need?

Most companion birds need **10 to 12 hours of dark, quiet sleep** every night, as wild birds sleep when it gets dark. Put the bird to bed at the same time each night, in a covered cage or a separate quiet room away from the TV and kitchen noise. Chronic sleep loss leads to screaming, aggression, hormonal behavior and feather plucking, and it can weaken the immune system.

## Can parakeets live on a seed-only diet?

No. A seed-only diet causes malnutrition, vitamin A and calcium deficiencies, obesity and fatty liver disease, and a parakeet may look fine for years while the damage builds. Parakeets do best on a mix: roughly half to 60% formulated pellets, a good portion of

fresh vegetables, a small amount of seed and millet as a treat, a cuttlebone for calcium and fresh water daily. If your bird is currently on seeds, switch slowly over several weeks and weigh the bird regularly, since a bird that refuses new food can lose weight fast. Your avian vet can help plan the switch.

## How do I tame a bird?

Taming comes from trust and time, not force. Let the bird settle for two or three days, then sit near the cage each day, talk softly, and offer a favorite treat from your hand. Once the bird takes treats calmly, teach it to touch a target stick and then to step onto your finger, rewarding each small success with a treat and praise. Keep sessions short, calm and daily, never chase or grab the bird, and stop if the bird shows fear through slicked feathers, wide eyes or an open beak. A hand-fed young bird may tame in days, while a rescue or nervous bird can take weeks or months.

## How do I know if my bird is sick?

Birds hide illness, so watch for small changes: fluffed feathers, sitting low or on the cage floor, tail bobbing, open-beak breathing, a drop in appetite, a change in droppings, a weight drop on your scale, dull eyes, discharge from the nostrils or eyes, sleeping more than usual, or a bird that stops singing or talking. Keep a daily log and weigh the bird weekly so you can spot a trend. A fluffed bird sitting on the cage floor, or any labored breathing, is an emergency, so call your avian vet right away and bring the bird in a covered, warm carrier.

## Are pet birds good for beginners?

Some are, with the right preparation. Budgies and cockatiels are the usual starting points: they are smaller, gentler and more forgiving than the larger parrots, and with proper housing, diet and attention, they make wonderful first birds. Birds are still social, intelligent animals with real needs: daily interaction, fresh food, enrichment, clean air, a quiet night's sleep and an avian vet. Lovebirds and conures are more of a stretch, and larger parrots are advanced commitments because they are long-lived, very loud and very demanding.

> ***Ready to shop?*** *Start with Birds. 10% of every purchase supports no-kill animal shelters.*

SECTION 13

# Every Purchase Gives Back

Before we earn a dime, **10% of every purchase at Walnut Creek Supply goes to no-kill animal shelters across the country.** Not at checkout. Not as an option. Off the top of every order, every day, because we believe responsible pet ownership and community care are the same commitment made in two different directions.

That means something specific for bird families. Parrots are among the most frequently surrendered pets in the country, often because the family didn't know about the noise, the mess, the lifespan or the daily time a bird needs. If you've read this guide, you understand the real picture. You've cleared the non-stick pans out of the kitchen, found your avian vet, set the three numbers, and made a plan. That makes you exactly the kind of family these birds deserve. And if you're ready to give a home to a bird that's already here, avian rescues across the country have beautiful, healthy birds waiting for a family just like yours.

We're a family business in Christiana, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania. We grow our own food, keep our own animals, and stock the clean-label, USA-made goods we'd put in front of our own pets: **no mystery ingredients**, **Clean Fuel, No Junk**, and no care guide leaves our shop without an honest picture of what living with a bird really means. If you have a question about your bird's diet, cage setup or how to start training, call us at **(717) 983-8069**. We'd rather talk it through with you.

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