

Tips to Better Bird Health

We have provided a little information for you, to help maintain and enrich your feathered friend's life.

Preventative Medicine

It is important that when you purchase a new bird, you visit an avian veterinarian for a "new bird" consultation. This will enable us to detect and treat any problems early.

The most common disease we see in newly acquired birds is Chlamydiosis (Psittacosis). This is of significance because it can be transmitted to humans.

Quarantining new aviary birds is essential. We suggest isolating new aviary birds for a minimum of 4 weeks to ensure your new bird is not harboring any contagious disease.

An annual examination is recommended for ongoing health assessment. Your pet is thoroughly examined and checked for parasites and worms. Tips on training and behavioral problems are often discussed at this time.

The most effective method of worming is by crop dosing. This method ensures accurate dosing.

Remember most parrots don't drink a lot of water, so in water medications can be unreliable. External parasites such as mites and lice can be treated effectively using a pyrethrin spray weekly for 3 consecutive weeks.

Diet and Nutrition

Many bird owners are amazed when they first learn of the potential life span of their bird. Budgerigars and Cockatiels can live 15-25 years, Galahs and Cockatoos can live 80-100 years. Unfortunately, only a small percentage will reach "old age". What causes the situation? For the majority of birds that perish early in life, the main culprit is poor nutrition. **The importance of a balanced diet for pet birds is critical.**

Seed eaters (Cockatiels, Budgerigars, Cockatoos and other Parrots)

The danger of standard seed mixtures is that they are incomplete, unbalanced and generally unhealthy. Seed is generally high in fat and carbohydrates and low in vitamins and minerals and is generally considered junk food. Seed should only be fed as a treat for training or as part of a foraging strategy

The results of feeding birds a seed-only diet is malnutrition, a shorter life span and often fatty liver disease. Have you noticed how pet birds fossick through their seed mix and may only eat one or two of their seeds? The result is severe amino acid, vitamin and mineral deficiencies.

The Solution!

The ideal solution is pelleted bird food. These diets come as crumbles or pellets and are nutritionally complete. Gradual conversion is generally best. Ask us how to best convert your bird to pellets.

Soft Foods

This group includes fresh fruit and vegetables, native nuts, berries and flowers. Different species of birds have different requirements for fruits and vegetables. Essentially all fruits and vegetables can be fed with the exception of avocado, onion and garlic.

Examples:

Apple, pear, banana, orange, mandarin, plum, apricot, cherry, strawberry, blueberry, raspberry, lychee, passion fruit, guava, mango, pawpaw, rock melon, honeydew, watermelon, pomegranate.

Celery, broccoli, cauliflower, rocket, spinach, silver beet, asian greens, pumpkin, sweet potato, carrots, capsicum, chilli, beetroot, corn, peas and beans.

Alfalfa, mung beans, legumes and other sprouts.

Bottlebrush, grevillea, gum, lilly-pilly, paper bark, banksia, wattle and other "wild foods".

Table foods should be kept to a minimum, e.g. bread, pasta, rice, potato, meat.

Nectar eaters (lorikeets)

Lorikeets do not eat seed. They have different nutritional requirements and we can best replicate this by offering a nectar mix (wet mix) and a dry mix. Both of these products are commercially available and easy to use. Remember to use a quality product. Wet mix should be mixed fresh daily and remember in hot, humid weather this spoils easily. Soft food as above should also be fed daily to lorikeets.

Housing

The cage that you choose for your bird should be large enough to allow the bird to stretch its wings fully. **NO CAGE IS TOO BIG!** If using a galvanized wire cage, you must first rub it down with neat vinegar and scrubbing brush, and then rinse it with water. This will help to eliminate the risk of heavy metal poisoning.

Replace the dowel or plastic perches with natural tree branches. These should be wide enough to prevent the toes from wrapping around the perch. These should be replaced regularly as they become damaged, soiled or chewed. It is a good idea to place different sized branches to encourage foot exercise. Whenever possible, your bird should be given the opportunity to explore outside the cage, however this is only possible if they are trained.

Environmental Enrichment and Foraging

Birds need activity. Keeping them busy is important! When in the wild, birds spend 6-7 hours using the beak to forage for food. We should be trying to replicate this in captivity. Developing foraging behaviour for your bird is essential to its mental well being. Ask any of our staff for some ideas.

Exercise is also extremely important for pet birds, whether inside the cage or outside. Sufficient exercise can be achieved (without flight) through climbing, acrobatics and swinging. It is also important to provide sufficient areas for bathing. A large fairly flat dish is great for bathing.

Hygiene

It is important to keep your bird's living environment clean. We suggest cleaning the cage at least twice a week. Water containers, nectar containers (for lorikeets) and soft food dishes should be washed in warm soapy water daily. Remember to also wash or replace the perches if they become soiled.

Signs of Sickness

- Loss or change in appetite
- Change in the birds character, vocalisation / talking
- Change in appearance of droppings (colour, firmness)
- Change in number of droppings
- Change in activity level (bird becoming lethargic)
- Change in attitude (suddenly becomes friendly or grouchy)
- Fluffed up in appearance (ruffled feathers)
- Breathing becomes noticeable, loud or laboured
- Sneezing, coughing or stained nostrils
- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Sitting on floor of the cage, reluctance to move
- Unusual lumps of bruising
- Any discolouration of the face, feet, beak, or legs

It is very important to keep an eye on your bird's behaviour and general appearance to detect problems early. Any of the above signs can indicate illness and veterinary advice should be sought immediately.

Final word

Enjoy your pet bird! They are wonderful companions and with a little attention to detail they will be your friend for many happy years.