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A non-profit 501c(3) club, established for over 20 years dedicated to the education of companion parrot owners.

“The Recommended Care of Pet Birds”

This handout is about owning a companion parrot and providing the best basic care. The Alaska Bird Club encourages you to stay current with avian care as it changes rapidly with new information all the time. This is a general guideline current as of 2008. It was compiled and written by former bird club member Candy Carlson, in loving memory of Harry, and edited by Lin Westgard and Leanna Rein. As always, we urge you to do your own research and expand your knowledge on the type of species that you own. This handout is not a complete guideline and should be used as a reference only. Have fun with your bird(s) and enjoy them! They are lifetime commitments and constant companions.

“Many have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You remain responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

-Antoine de Saint Exupery

Nutrition

Improper feeding is the primary cause of disease and behavioral problems in pet birds, problems such as feather plucking, mental health issues and even death in pet birds. It is your responsibility as a bird owner to provide proper nutrition to help guarantee a long and healthy life for your bird. Birds should never go without food or clean, clean water! If your Avian Vet has instructed you to "fast" your bird then follow the instructions to the letter.

Diet

The well known "seed only" diets have been the mainstay for many cage birds for over 100 years. Unfortunately "seed only" diets are deficient in most vitamins and are extremely deficient in vitamin A and D3. A seed only diet that is not supplemented is guaranteed to shorten the birds' life span, cause health problems and or death due to severe vitamin deficiencies. Great advances have been made in the field of avian nutrition. Foods such as pelletized foods, Birdie Cornbread and enhanced seed foods will increase a bird's level of nutrition. These foods should be the "main food" for birds and seed mixes should be given only as a "treat" after the main food has been eaten. Note: Most of the information on feeding your pet bird in this handout is focused on hooked bills (small to large parrots.) Soft-billed birds and Nectar eating birds have a different set of nutritional requirements. Please ask your Avian Vet about any feeding concerns.

Vitamins

When using a vitamin supplement always consult with your Avian Vet first, overdoing vitamins can be toxic or even kill your bird. Please don't add anything to your birds water.

Minerals

Minerals are an essential part of the daily diet. A Cuttlebone can be added to the cage for extra Calcium. Birds that go through a period of stress use up a lot of minerals stored in their bodies. One way to help out when your bird is under stress is to add mineral water to your bird's cage in a separate water dish in the ratio 1:1. The mineral water must be sugar free and must not be carbonated. Always ask your Avian Vet when adding anything to the food or water. We do not recommend adding anything to your bird's water unless directed by a vet. You don't want to spook them of drinking for any reason.

Side Dishes (additions to the main course)

One method of adding variety and interest to a bird's diet is to include table foods. This also increases the nutrients the bird will get on a constant basis. When introducing new foods and when feeding "side dishes" keep quantities small so food is consumed and not left to spoil. Some birds are leery of new things. You may have to experiment a little with the size and shape of food. Try cutting it up in different shapes and sizes to make it more appealing to your bird. Remember: Don't let your bird fill up on side dishes before it has eaten most of the main food. Always thoroughly wash all fruits and vegetables. Ingested pesticides and fertilizers can kill your bird! Very poisonous foods include chocolate, avocado, caffeine and alcohol. Watch for seeds and pits, some are toxic. You will need to become knowledgeable about which ones are toxic and which aren't.

You can also cook for bird! Soak beans and lentils overnight and then cook them the next day. Then add rice or pasta or other fun ingredients, such as broccoli, grapes, carrots, etc., for a healthy warm food mixture. Birds love variety. Crazy Corn[®] makes food packets you can easily cook up; it has all the fun stuff already mixed together. Don't get discouraged if your bird doesn't eat new food right away. Food with birds should be continued to given, even if they appear not to like them. Some types of foods can go un-eaten for months and months and then one day, it appeals to the bird and they eat it. You can even mix pellets to the mix to add moisture and change the consistency of the pellet. Small amounts of boneless chicken and non-fatty portions of meat can be added. Another thing to try with your parrots is baked salmon. There are great books out there on cooking for your birds. Another fun food to cook is birdie bread, which is usually a corn bread base and then you add all kinds of fun stuff. Some parrots will surprise you with what they will eat!

Vegetables

Asparagus	Chicory greens	Jalapeño Peppers	Squash
Beans (all types)	Chili peppers	Kale	Sweet potato (cooked)
Beet greens	Cilantro	Mustard greens	Swiss chard
Beets	Collards	Okra	Turnips
Broccoli	Corn	Peas	Turnip greens
Brussel sprouts	Cucumbers	Potatoes (cooked)	Watercress

Cabbage (minimal)	Dandelion greens	Pumpkin	Yams (cooked)
Carrots	Endive	Radishes	Zucchini
Cauliflower	Green beans	Spinach (minimal)	
Celery	Green/Red pepper	Sprouts (all types)	

Fruits

Apples (no seeds)	Grapefruit (minimal)	Mangoes	Pineapple (minimal)
Apricots (no pit)	Grapes (no seeds)	Oranges (minimal)	Plums
Bananas	Guava	Papayas (no seed)	Pomegranates
Berries	Honeydew	Peaches (no pit)	Raisins
Cantaloupe (seeds ok)	Kiwi	Pears (no pit)	Tangerines
Figs	Kumquats	Persimmons	Watermelon

Remember: when using fresh fruit it is advisable to change the food into clean dishes every 4-8 hours in warm weather. Spoilage can cause an overgrowth of bacteria, which in turn will make your bird sick. Also take the seeds and pits out of fruits as some seeds and pits can be toxic. See the Safe and Harmful plant list for more information.

Other side dishes

Cereal (low in sugar)
 Cheese (cheddar only!)
 Chicken (cooked)
 Hard boiled Eggs
 Meats (small amts)
 Pasta
 Scrambled eggs
 Whole grain toast

No Milk (lactose Intolerant)

No Chocolate (poisonous)

No Avocado (poisonous)

Use your imagination. Meats can be given but must be well cooked and use small amounts. Milk & dairy can be given in very low quantities. Birds do not have the enzyme necessary to digest dairy foods properly therefore it may cause diarrhea. A great way to store and serve hard boiled eggs is to boil them, let them cool, and chop them up, shell and all for your bird.

Or you can blend them shell and all, then freeze in ice cube trays. Once frozen, place the mixture in an airtight bag or container in the freezer. Only thaw what will be used for that day. You can do this with any foods you cook so they can have something fun every day.

Treats

The treats listed should be given as "snacks." Once you find a treat that your bird can't seem to live without, use that treat for training purposes only (See the section on training for more info). When using seeds, or nuts of any kind, (and remember, Anchorage only get bulk nuts in the shell usually during the holidays, so stock up). Because of the fat content in some nuts and seeds there is a higher chance of rancidity; Sunflower seeds and Peanuts are the highest in fat. Always store nuts and seeds in an airtight container in a dark, cool place or refrigerate. Always buy salt free. Feed peanuts sparingly! If buying in-shell bulk nuts, store in well ventilated packaging to prevent spoilage. Below is a list of commonly used seeds and nuts:

Seeds and Nuts

Almonds

Hazel nuts (crack for smaller birds)

Brazil Nuts (crack for smaller birds)

Sunflower seeds (un-salted)

Millet (for the little guys)

Pumpkin seed (with or without shell)

Pine nuts (or Pinon nuts)

Pistachios (un-salted)

Sesame seeds

Pecans

Walnuts

The nuts with hard shells (i.e., Walnuts, Almonds, Pecans, etc.) should be shelled or cracked open for smaller birds. Letting your bird "dig out" nuts from the shell is a great way to keep your bird entertained. Seed cracking is proving to be a very psychological advantage for birds. Let them have seeds sparingly, but daily. Sprouted seeds are also a great source of vitamins and minerals, for your bird. Be sure and rinse sprouts daily and discard if unused or eaten right away. Don't let grow to long as the most nutritious part is right when they sprout.

Most health food stores carry seeds for sprouting (Alfalfa and Clover to name a few.) Remember: Always make sure the seed is organic and free of pesticides and fertilizers. Peanuts are controversial. They are known to carry a fungus that some bird owners worry about. Do your research and decide for yourselves.

Liquids

Fresh water is just as important as food, as birds can quickly become dehydrated. **Always** have fresh clean water available for your bird. This might mean changing it a few times a day. Other liquids can be given in small amounts (i.e., Orange juice, diluted Apple juice, etc.) Remember: NEVER give your bird carbonated or caffeinated drinks of any kind. If you are on well water, you should have your water quality checked every year.

Helpful hints on changing food

Don't try to starve your bird into eating new foods. A small bird will die in 48 hours if it doesn't eat. It is a good idea when changing food to weigh your bird daily on a gram scale to watch for any drastic weight loss. When weighing your bird always weigh it around the same time every day, before your bird has eaten is best. Weighing your bird after it has eaten will make the weights vary from day to day. You should also check for normal 'poops' as well.

1. Introduce only small amounts of new food.
2. Try feeding warm foods. Always test the temperature.
3. Hand or spoon feed.
4. Try feeding outside of the cage.
5. Mix new foods with regular food or use two different feeding containers. When mixing foods together, start out with a small amount of new food (1/4 new food to 3/4 old food.) Do this for 1 day. The next day make a 50/50 mix. Watch closely to see if your bird has started eating the new food yet. On the 3rd day make a 3/4 new food to 1/4 old food mix. If your bird is eating the new food well enough by the 4th day then feed only the new food. Your bird may surprise you and start eating the new food by the first or second day. If not, have patience but keep at it. It can take some birds months or years to accept new foods.
6. Use two dishes to feed. Place a small amount of the regular food in one dish and fill up

the second dish with the new food. Check the dishes in 3-4 hours, if your bird has eaten all of the regular food and not eaten any of the new food, place a small amount of regular food back in the container. Repeat this for 3 days until your bird is eating the new food. Always use a small amount of the old (regular) food, just enough to keep the bird a bit hungry.

Cage


The number one rule is the size of the cage should match the size of the bird. Make sure the bar spacing of the cage is right for your size bird. The bird should not be able to stick its head through the bars. Also do not use galvanized wire on cages. This can cause zinc poisoning if your bird were to ingest some of the zinc coating. Additionally, your bird should be able to open its wings to turn around and not touch the cage on either side. The ultimate cage should be more horizontal than it is vertical. In other words birds don't hover when they fly, so a vertical cage (one that is taller than it is wide) is not in the best use of space in allowing maximum movement for the bird. A cage that is more horizontal (longer than it is tall) gives the bird a chance to fly in its cage, especially if the water container is placed at one end and the food container at the other. Most manufacturers make cages to fit the needs of the owner, not the bird. With larger birds, making a horizontal cage fit into an apartment setting is not going to work well. This is when it becomes the owner's responsibility to exercise the bird out of the cage. Remember: birds were meant to fly, not sit on a perch all day.

Cage Location

Room temperature should range from 60-70 degrees. Birds are normally happiest when placed in a location of activity. The family room, living room or even the kitchen are good locations. Remember: When placing a bird in the kitchen (or any room), be aware of hidden dangers (i.e. Teflon fumes, cleaners, etc.) Make sure the bird is not in an extremely drafty area or going to get over-heated from direct sun exposure. With smaller cages, or cages on rollers, moving the cage outside on a warm sunny day is a good idea. The bird must be supervised for various things, including heat exhaustion and neighborhood dogs and cats. The signs of heat exhaustion range from: panting, holding wings away from the body or laying the feathers down close to the body. Direct sunlight provides Vitamin D3; sunlight through a window does not, unless the window is open. A healthy bird can tolerate a change in temperature of 10 to 15 degrees. 70 to 75 degrees is comfortable for most birds. Sick birds

need warmer temperatures. Parrots are prey animals; some are uncomfortable right next to a window. Give them something to hide behind in their cage if they appear scared when the cage is placed near a window. Ravens and Eagles are scary to birds of prey!

Lighting

Full spectrum light is essential to the health of caged birds. A full spectrum bulb can be used on your bird for approximately 4-5 hours a day, longer in the winter. Full spectrum bulbs can be purchased at most pet stores or your local hardware store. Make sure the package reads "Full Spectrum." You can mount them to the wall behind your cages, or you can get OTT  lighting systems that are on stands and can be put safely next to the cages at your local office supply store. Make sure your parrot cannot get to these light fixtures or wiring. You can purchase flexible PCV tubing, slice it in half and then put this around the cords. It won't prevent the larger parrots from getting through it, but it can sure slow them down in time for you to "catch them" in the act.

Humidity

An ideal humidity for a bird seems to be in the range of 30% to 40%. In the winter months and sometimes in the summer a humidifier may need to be used to increase the humidity. Always keep humidifiers **clean** and do not use additives in the water. Do not use vaporizers that have had medicines added to the water around your bird.

Perches

Perch sizes and textures are very important. Caged birds are going to spend more time on their feet than in the air. Since this is the case, it's the owner's responsibility to supply the bird with the best possible perches. The perches should be many different sizes and types. Your bird's feet will benefit most by getting exercise and having different textures to choose to stand on. Mix it up. Make it fun. You must protect their feet.

Cutting your own perch from Willow or Birch is inexpensive and better for the feet than the more expensive Manzanita perches. Manzanita is smooth and a very hard wood and because of this your bird gets no real benefit from it. Can you imagine never being able to sit down and having to walk barefoot every day? Another important type of perch is made of rough cement. You also have to think about nail and beak conditioning when choosing

perches. The rough cement perches help in conditioning both nails and the beak but should not be the only type of perch in the cage. Rope perches are nice, but keep it trimmed up if the bird is shredding it. Remember: birds are always on their feet. Care needs to be giving in this area to prevent foot irritation or an infection called Bumblefoot. Always make sure to keep the perches clean. All perches, including the cement type should be cleaned regularly as part of the cage cleaning routine.

Toys

We can't say enough about toys. Toys must be continuously available for the birds and rotated to keep the birds minds stimulated. Different size birds need different size toys. When selecting toys, make sure that they are bird safe. Remember: even though toys may say "bird safe" at the store, always check them thoroughly to make sure they are right for your type of bird. Some birds chew more than others and the danger of swallowing toy parts could mean the loss of your bird. Toys with bells on them need to have the clapper of the bell checked. Some birds can twist the clapper off and swallow it. Also, toys with ropes attached must be watched for fraying. Loose strings can get wrapped around toes or worse, hang your bird. When arranging toys do not over clutter the cage. Hang toys more towards the outside walls of the cage (birds need to stretch their wings!). Change toys out frequently to keep the bird entertained. Toys also need to be kept clean. Provide toys that encourage foraging (ones that you can hide treats in). You can be creative and make your own toys! Just be safe!

Food and water containers

There are many different types of containers out on the market. Most cages that you buy come with containers. If you need to buy more, buy the type that hang on the side of the cage. This helps keep droppings out of the food or water. Remember: Wash food and water containers daily.

Cage covers

Cage covers have two purposes: One, to darken the cage in order for the bird to rest and to control the amount of light the bird receives. Make sure the cover is large enough and dark enough to completely darken the cage. If you can see your hand in the cage when the cover is on, then the cover is not dark enough. Make sure air can circulate in the cage when it is covered. Secondly, cage covers help in keeping the cage warm at night when the temperature drops. Check the cover frequently for frays so that toes don't get caught.

Cage cleaning

Newspaper or cage paper should be used in the bottom of cages and should be changed daily. It is preferred that the cage has a grate in the bottom of the cage to keep the bird away from droppings and discarded food. The products on the market called "litter type or cob" cage liners should never be used. Birds have eaten this litter and suffered from crop impactions and other life threatening problems. You must also monitor droppings daily, so newspaper is the best and easiest to change. Always wipe down cage bars with warm water solution every other day. When deep cleaning, use a bleach/water solution. The correct dilution is ½ cup household bleach to 1 gallon of water. New solutions need to be made every 3 days as bleach dissipates rapidly. Cages must be clean first, then wipe with the solution, wait 15 minutes and then wipe off with warm wet rag. If you miss a spot when wiping it down, the bleach/water solution will dry to a type of sodium (salt) and is generally non-toxic to the bird. Never use any type of chemical cleaning solution on cages other than a solution specifically made for bird cages. Clean cages are essential to your birds health. Please, keep them clean.

Cleaning Products

There are many different types of cleaning products on the market for cleaning birdcages, perches, toys and dishes. It is important that the product be bird safe. ½ cup of household bleach to 1 gallon water. Discard the mixed bleach solution after your cleaning is completed. This mixture loses its anti-bacterial effects when stored and when subjected to light. Remember: Rinse well after cleaning. Don't use over the counter cleaners. You can also put many items right in the dishwasher for cleaning. (perches, bowls, acrylic toys, etc).

Bird Care

Birds are social animals and require a rich environment to do well. Birds learn to relate to people. When living in a cage situation and not in an aviary with other birds, your bird relies on you for socialization. Talk to your bird, whistle or sing. When you are away from home during the day leave a radio or T.V. on at low volumes. A lot of birds find T.V. fascinating. Be careful with the station you choose. Public TV is a perfect station for birds learning to talk. Most of the programs during the day are focused at children and have bright colors and they speak slowly. When choosing other channels on T.V. or radio your bird may pick up language you might not approve of or end up singing commercial jingles all day!

Playing

Play is very important to your bird. It also helps in setting guidelines for your bird to follow. Out of cage play needs to be monitored. Set up rules for your bird to follow and keep reinforcing them. Let your bird know that certain areas of the house are off limits. If the bird is flighted, do this by returning the bird to its cage when it goes somewhere it should not. There are a few good bird-training books on the market to help with behavior. One book is called "Guide to a Well Behaved Parrot" by Mattie Sue Athan. Remember: the knowledge we possess, or can learn, makes the difference in our birds. There are also many ways to potty train your birds. Trick training can be great ways to interact with your birds so they are not bored.

Exercise

Exercise is almost as important as food. If your bird is free flighted (its wings are not clipped) let the bird fly at least 20 minutes or more a day. Having a flighted bird is a scary thing and you must be very attentive to making safe flying areas. Watch open doors and windows. An environment where children and adults are constantly coming in and out of the home is not a safe environment for a flighted bird! A free flighted bird is easier to exercise than a clipped bird that sits around all day, but you can work around that. If your bird's wings are clipped then the best form of exercise is mock flying. You can do this by having the bird step up, hold onto the feet with your thumb, and raise and lower the bird at a speed that will make the bird flap its wings. Do this for short periods (30 seconds to a minute) a few times a day. You may have to start out slow at first. Make sure not to stress the bird. Another way is to secure a Boing® to the ceiling with a swivel hook and teach the bird to "fly" the Boing®. It will go in circles and they have great fun spinning it around with the momentum of them flapping their wings and "flying".

To Clip or Not To Clip

There are many Pro's and Con's to think about when it comes to clipping a bird's wings. Clipping the flight feathers on the wings is not a guarantee that your bird will not be able to fly. Some birds can still fly very well after being clipped. In fact a drastic wing clip (clipping all the flight feathers) should never be done. Clipping too many feathers can cause your bird to be injured if it falls from a high place. A bird can not glide to the floor without some intact flight feathers. On occasion a bird's feathers may need to be clipped for training (or behavioral) reasons. This should be discussed with your Avian Vet. Remember: Do not take

your bird out of the house without it being in a cage or on a harness, even if it has had feathers clipped. Outside variables you can't control can spook your bird. A loose dog or bird of prey can come at you before you even see it and can get your bird. Avoid repeatedly clipping and then free flying your bird. Pick one or the other and stick to it. It can be very confusing to a bird otherwise.

Training and Handling

When training your bird, now is the time to use the special treat mentioned earlier. One excellent trick to train your bird is to teach him to come to you when called. This is done by using a "food leash." Start out by having the bird come to you with a command word or whistle, or use both. If the bird only walks one-step at first reward him with 1 treat. Only give the treat if the bird has performed as asked. Keep working with the food reward until the bird is coming to you longer and longer distances. Always give only **1** treat and never give this special treat for any other reason than for training. There are great books on trick training your bird on the market. You will be surprised at how many things you can teach your bird. Always remember, make it fun! Occasionally your bird may have to be handled for exams either at home or in a Vet's office. It's a good idea to learn how to properly towel your bird for the bird's safety and others. Ask your Avian Vet to show you how to capture and hold your bird safely in a towel.

Bird Baths

Birds require daily baths to keep the feathers and skin healthy. How the bird gets a bath is up to the bird. Some birds like to be misted, some like a dish of water, while others will only take a bath in their water dish. Some like being taken right into the shower with you, or onto specially made stands for the shower. You may have to experiment a bit to see what your bird prefers. Birds should be drenched, all the way to the skin, not just lightly misted. Bird's need more frequent bathing in the winter in Alaska than in the summer due to the lack of humidity. Have patience. Remember: Make sure to supervise your bird when bathing. Drowning can occur. Don't use shampoo. Only use a hair dryer lightly on them if you need to. Most birds just drip dry. Remember to always keep toilet lids closed in bathrooms.

Beak Care

Beaks grow continuously. Birds in the wild have to forage for their food and in doing so the beak is trimmed or "worn" naturally. Caged birds don't have to forage for their food, it is

supplied to them. Try hiding some food in a bowl under some rocks or something that stimulates them to look around. However, the owner has to make sure their birds have enough toys, foods, etc. to chew on to wear down the beak. Sometimes a beak trim is required and this is best left to an Avian Vet.

Nail Care

A bird's nails grow continuously and in the wild are worn down naturally. The use of proper perches helps dramatically in keeping the nail length in check. Toys will also help with conditioning the nails and beak. Sometimes this isn't enough and the nails will need to be trimmed. Your Avian Vet can show you how to trim your birds nail or if preferred, can trim them for you. If bleeding occurs while cutting your birds nail please see the Emergency Treatment section on "Bleeding." Have some type of clotting agent ready when trimming.

Feet Care

If proper perches are used you should have no problems with your bird's feet. Feet should be checked on a routine basis to make sure there are no sores forming. This is also a good time to make sure there are no strings around toes or ankles or any feces build up. If sores are seen you should see your Avian Vet, do not try to fix any sores at home. Different sizes and textures of perches will stimulate the feet. The main perch should be proportioned for their feet and they should have a good grip.

Leg Care

Bird legs require no special care. Leg bands are required to travel out of the country and into some states. Leg bands are good identifiers but also can cause a problem if caught between cage bars or around toys. If any noticeable changes are seen on or with your birds legs (i.e. swelling, redness, thickening, sores, discoloration) your bird should be seen by your Avian Vet.

Skin Care

Since feathers protect the skin, no special care should be needed. Daily baths, adequate humidity and proper nutrition help to keep the birds skin in good condition.

Eyes, Ears and Nose Care

A discharge from any of these areas indicates trouble. Do not try to treat this at home. Your bird should be seen for any of conditions related to eyes, ears or nose.

Preening

Birds have anywhere from two to three thousand feathers. "Preening" is the action the bird goes through to keep the feathers clean, lubricated, and untangled and flight ready. Birds rely on other birds or humans to preen their heads and areas they can't reach. Your hands should be clean when petting birds in order to keep them from "over preening" to remove whatever you might have on your hands. Smokers should wash their hands every single time after smoking a cigarette and should never be around a bird while smoking (smoke outside!) Limit preening to only 10-15 minutes a day so as not to over stimulate the bird.

Feather Care

Feathers are shed or "molted" once a year, normally in the spring. Some birds have different molting cycles and may molt more than once. Molting can be stressful for some birds and the growth of new feathers requires a considerable amount of energy. This is another reason that proper nutrition is very important. Within 2 weeks of losing a feather, a new feather should be evident. Some birds drop a lot of feathers during a molt. Bald spots or "chewed" spots are not normal. If any feather picking or excessive feather chewing, not preening, is noticed a visit to your Avian Vet is a must. Feathers that have become oiled or dirty must be washed. Call your Avian Vet to find out the right procedure to follow for cleaning your oiled or excessively dirty bird, as this may be the sign of a sick bird.

Droppings (feces)

Bird's droppings are one of the best indicators of your bird's health. Some foods, like berries, pomegranates, etc., can change the color and consistency of your bird's droppings. The number of droppings should be monitored daily along with any changes in color or consistency. Monitoring droppings is important to catch an illness the bird has not yet shown physical signs of. Bird droppings contain three components: fecal matter, urates (the white stuff) and urine (usually clear). Birds that continue to have yellowish, bright green or off color droppings should be taken to a vet for evaluation. Birds that have un-digested seed or food seen in bird droppings should also indicate a trip to a vet is needed.

Weight

Once your bird has gotten to its adult weight, the weight should be checked every 10 -14 days. If your bird is sickly and being treated, it is a good idea to check it daily or every other day. Most birds can be weighed on food scales or gram scales. Digital scales are the most

accurate. If a scale is not available then ask your Avian Vet to show you how to feel the birds keel bone to check for weight loss. A bird should never lose more than 5% its body weight in a three day weighing. Rapid (10%) loss can result in death.

Sexing your bird

Visual sexing of birds is almost impossible. The best way to test the sex of your bird is through DNA testing. DNA testing is done by cutting a toenail short enough to collect a small amount of blood. The blood is sent off to a lab and results are received within 1 – 2 weeks. Your vet can include this with their annual blood CBC testing.

Breeding Cycles

All birds go through breeding cycles (or hormone increases) when they are of mature age. Different size birds mature at different ages, and have different breeding cycles. Most birds breeding cycles are in the spring when light level increase. You may notice an "attitude" change when this is happening. Some birds turn into Dr. Jeckel or Mr. Hyde when the hormone level increases. Normally this will last for approximately 3-4 weeks. If the attitude change is noticed with signs of illness please see your Avian Vet.

Health and Sickness

Birds hide illnesses very effectively. Because of the difficulty in detecting illness, learning the daily routine and normal behaviors of your bird is essential. Below is a list of sign's to look for in an ill bird:

1. Change in activity: Less active, sleeping more, less vocalization (or singing), eating or drinking less.
2. Change in appearance: Ruffled feathers, not perching (staying on cage floor), weakness, wobbling/swaying on perch.
3. Breathing problems: Wheezing, open mouth breathing, panting or shortness of breath, tail bobbing (pronounced up-and-down motion of the tail), nasal discharge, loss of voice, excessive yawning.
4. Digestive problems: Diarrhea, vomiting, straining to eliminate, changes in color of droppings or the number of droppings.
5. Eye problems: Discharge, eyes squinted or pasted closed, swelling of the eyelid,

cloudiness of the eye, excessive rubbing or scratching at the eye.

6. Feather problems: Picking or chewing at feathers, bleeding of blood feathers, deformed feathers, prolonged molt.

Remember: If any of these signs or combination of these signs occurs please see your Avian Vet as soon as possible. For a list of avian vets near you, see our website.

Emergency Treatment

There may be a time that the bird owner has to give supportive care to an injured or sick pet bird before seeing your Avian Vet. Always consult with your Vet first. In the case of an emergency, here is a list of care to give your bird until you can get your bird to an Avian Vet. Remember: Your bird should see an Avian Vet if it becomes sick or injured. This list of emergency treatment in no way should substitute a visit to your Vet.

1. Handling: Sick birds must be handled as little as possible. Even the tamest bird may bite when sick or injured. Your bird should be put in a dark and quiet room.
2. Bleeding. Any bleeding should be checked by the vet. Learn how to treat broken blood feathers or they can bleed to death before you get to a vet. You will need hemostats, small needle nose pliers, a clotting agent such as flour, cornstarch or quik-stop and a towel to wrap them.
3. Keeping warm: When your bird is injured or sick it is important to keep the temperature in the cage between 80 - 85 degrees. To do this place a heating pad under 1/2 of the cage. Wrap a towel "around" the cage (leave the top unwrapped) place your cage cover or a thick towel over the cage for quick peaks in. If a heating pad is not available a heat lamp or 60 watt light bulb can be used. Make sure that the light is directed in such a way that the bird can get away from the heat if needed. Watch closely for your bird to overheat. Signs to look for are: rapid breathing or panting, holding the wings out from its body or the feathers lying down close to the body.
4. Food: Do not withhold food or water. In fact, place food and water closer to where the bird is perching. If the bird is on the cage floor place the food dishes on the cage floor also.

Remember: The sooner you can get your bird to you're an Avian Vet when it is ill the better chance the bird will have to survive.

Toxins

There are many toxins in our households that can be deadly to birds. One of the “hidden toxins” is PTFE (Polytetrafluoroethylene.) PTFE is a synthetic polymer used as a non-stick surface on pots, pans, cookie sheets, waffle irons, drip pans for stoves, irons, ironing board covers, hair dryers, curling irons and bread machines (just to name a few.) The more popular name for PTFE is Teflon®, Silverstone® and T-Fal®. When PTFE is over heated it emits vapors that can kill a bird within minutes. Whenever using anything with a non-stick surface make sure you use lots of ventilation and do not over heat the item being used. Ventilation is not a guarantee that PTFE vapors will not affect your bird. The safest thing to do is **NOT** to use anything with a non-stick coating. You should never use the Glade plug-ins around birds! And you shouldn't burn a lot of scented candles. There are many other potentially harmful substances in the household that owners need to be aware of. Below is a list of common toxins. Remember: When in doubt, don't!

The following lists are not complete. Read as much as you can to get familiar with all toxins and poisonous plants. Make notes below on other toxic items you read about.

Common Household Toxins:

Acetone	Herbicides	Shoe polish
Alcohol	Hexachlorophene (in some soaps)	Silver Polish
Ammonia	Indelible markers	Snail bait
Antifreeze	Insecticides	Spot remover
Ant Syrup or paste	Iodine	Spray starch
Arsenic	Kerosene	Strychnine
Bathroom bowl cleaner	Lighter fluid	Sulfuric acid
Bleach	Linoleum (contains lead salts)	Suntan lotion
Boric Acid	Lye	Super glue
Camphophenique	Lysol	Toilet bowl cleaner
Carbon Tetrachloride	Matches	Wax (floor or furniture)
Charcoal (for grills)	Model glue	Weed killers
Clinitest Tablets	Mothballs	Window cleaners
Copper and Brass cleaners	Muriatic Acid	Wood preservative
Corn and Wart remover	Mushrooms	
Crayons	Nail polish	
Deodorants	Nail polish remover	
Detergents	Nicotine	
Dishwasher detergent	Over cleaner	
Disinfectants	Paint	
Drain cleaners	Paint remover	
Epoxy glue	Paint thinner	
Fabric softeners	Perfume	
Felt pens	Permanent wave solution	
Floor polish	Pesticides	
Furniture polish	Photographic solutions	
Garbage toxins	Pine oil	
Garden sprays (houseplant sprays)	Plants - some	
Gasoline	Prescription and non-prescription drugs	
Gun cleaner	Red squill	
Gunpowder and Lead	Rodenticides	
Hair dyes	Rubbing alcohol	
	Shaving lotion	

Harmful Plants and Foods:

Plant Name:	Parts known to be poisonous:
Alcohol	Drinking types
Amaryllis	Bulbs (All)
American Yew	Needles, seeds
Avocados	All parts
Azalea	Leaves
Balsam pear	Seeds, outer rind of fruit
Baneberry	Berries, roots
Bird of Paradise	Seeds
Black Locust	Bark, sprouts, foliage
Blue-green algae	Some forms are toxic
Boxwood	Leaves and stems
Buckthorn	Fruit, bark
Buttercup	Sap, bulbs
Caffeine	All
Calla Lily	Leaves
Caladium	Leaves
Carbonated drinks	All (Birds can't burp!!)
Caster bean (castor oil plant)	Beans, leaves
Chalice vine	All parts
Cherry tree	Bark, twigs, leaves, pits
Chocolate	All
Christmas candle	Sap
Clematis	All parts
Coral plant	Seeds
Cowslip	All parts
Daffodil	Bulbs
Daphne	Berries
Datura	Berries
Deadly amanita	All parts
Death camas	All parts
Dieffenbachia	Leaves
Eggplant	All parts but fruit
Plant Name:	Parts known to be poisonous:

Elephant ear (Taro)	Leaves, stem
English Ivy	Berries, leaves
English yew	Needles, seeds
False henbane	All parts
Fly agaric mushroom (deadly amanita)	All parts
Foxglove	Leaves, seeds
Fruit	Some seeds and pits. (When in doubt, throw it out!)
Golden chain (laburnum)	All parts, especially roots & seeds
Hemlock, poison	All parts
Hemlock water	All parts
Henbane	Seeds
Holly	Berries
Horse chestnut	Nuts, twigs
Hyacinth	Bulbs
Hydrangea	Flower buds
Indian turnip (jack-in-the-pulpit)	All parts
Iris (blue flag)	Bulbs
Jack-in-the-pulpit	All parts
Japanese yew	Needles, seeds
Java bean (lima bean)	Uncooked beans
Jerusalem cherry	Berries
Jimsonweed	Leaves, seeds
Juniper	Needles, stems, berries
Lantana	Immature berries
Larkspur	All parts
Laurel	All parts
Lily-of-the-valley	All parts, including the water they been in
Lobelia	All parts
Locoweed	All parts
Lords and Ladies (cuckoopint)	All parts
Marijuana	Leaves
Mayapple	All parts, except fruit
Mescal bean	Seeds
Plant Name:	Parts known to be poisonous:

Mistletoe	Berries
Mock orange	Fruit
Monkshood	Leaves, roots
Morning glory	All parts
Narcissus	Bulbs
Nightshades (all types)	Berries, leaves
Oleander	Leaves, branches, nectar of blossoms
Philodendron	Leaves, stems
Poison Ivy	Sap
Poison Oak	Sap
Poinsettia	Leaves, flowers
Pokeweed (inkberry)	Leaves, roots, immature berries
Potato	Eyes and new shoots
Privet	All parts, including berries
Rhododendron	All parts
Rhubarb	Leaves
Rosary pea (Indian Licorice)	Seeds (seed illegally imported to make jewelry)
Skunk cabbage	All parts
Snowdrop	All parts, especially buds
Snow-on-the-mountain (ghostweed)	All parts
Sweet pea	Seeds and fruit
Tobacco	Leaves
Virginia creeper	Sap
Western yew	Needles, seeds
Wisteria	All parts
Yam bean	Roots, immature pods

Safe Houseplants:

Acacia
African violet
Aloe
Baby's tears
Bamboo
Begonia
Bougainvillea
Chickweed
Christmas cactus
Cissus (Kangaroo vine)
Dracaena varieties
Ferns: Asparagus, Birds nest, Maidenhair,
Boston
Figs: Creeping, Rubber, Fiddle leaf, Laurel
leaf, Weeping
Monkey plant
Mother-in-law's tongue
Nasturtium
Natal plum
Norfolk pine
Palms: Areca, Date, Fan, Lady, Parlour,
Howeia, Kentia, Phoenix, Sago
Peperomia
Petunia
Pittosporum
Pothos
Prayer plant
Purple passion
Raspberry
Schefflera (umbrella)
Sensitive plant
Spider plant

Swedish Ivy
Thistle
Wandering Jew
White clover
Zebra plant

SAFE TREES (NO PESTICIDES):

Alder
Apple
Ash
Aspen
Beech
Birch
Citrus (any)
Cottonwood
Crabapple
Dogwood
Elm
Eucalyptus (leaves and all)
Fir
Guava
Madrona
Magnolia
Manzanita
Norfolk Island Pine
Nuts (except chestnut and oak)
Palms (areca, date, fan, lady, parlour)
Palms (howeia, kentia, phoenix, sago)
Pear
Pine
Poplar
Sequoia (Redwood)
Willow

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