



# Avian Environment

## PROPER CAGE FOR YOUR BIRD

Accidental injuries are one of the most common reasons for birds to require veterinary care. Broken nails, feathers, or even bones can occur as a result of unsafe cages, lack of supervision, or from panic attacks. For this reason, it is in the bird's interest to keep them caged when no one can supervise.

Safe cages have sturdy construction of non-toxic materials and are generally very basic in shape. Ornamental curls and other areas where bars converge are sites where toes can become trapped, leading to injury. The cage door should have a mechanism that is easy for the

owner to open, but impossible for the bird to open. A removable tray should be present at the bottom of the cage to allow easy cleanup. There should be a grate to prevent birds from eating contaminated food that has been dropped to the bottom. The grate should be removable to allow easy cleaning.

Cages should be as large as possible to allow activity. Several perches of various

sizes, shapes, and textures should be available to allow for foot comfort. Only a few toys should be present as well. These can be changed regularly to keep up interest.



It is strongly recommended that birds have a second, smaller cage that is used only for sleeping. This cage is very simplistic. It does not need toys or even a food dish. A water bowl and a comfortable perch are all that is necessary. This cage should be in a dark, quiet room so the bird can get plenty of uninterrupted sleep.

## CLEANING THE CAGE

Bacterial and fungal infections are common in pet birds. Many of these diseases are the result of poor sanitation, contaminated food or water, and an immune system weakened by stress, poor nutrition, or other



diseases. Proper hygiene should be practiced to avoid these diseases. Cage trays should be lined with paper which is changed daily. Food and water dishes should be washed at least daily. Fresh foods should be left in the dish for only a few hours.

Perches should be placed such that droppings will not hit objects below, and should be cleaned at least weekly. Cage grates should be washed weekly.



## Environment Tips

- Clean, safe cage
- Sleep cage
- Various perches
- Toy choices



- Secure (not isolated) location
- Stable comfortable climate
- Clean, smoke-free air
- Moderate humidity

- Regular bathing
- Avoid toxin exposure

## CAGE LOCATION

As social creatures, parrots should be placed where they can interact as a member of the family. A living room or family room is usually a good location for the primary daytime cage.

Ideally, the cage should sit in a corner where the bird can view the activity in the room without feeling exposed. Parrots are prey species and are always on the lookout for danger. Having a wall behind can give a bit of security. While the ability to

look out of windows and into other rooms is beneficial, a parrot should be able to retreat from the watchful glare of the world.

Locating the cage where people may appear from nowhere can lead to constant startling as well. Cages should be placed facing doors and stairways rather than next to them so



that they can see approaching people from a distance first.

It is best if there is a low level of sound in the area of a cage. In the jungles of the world, the only time it is quiet is when someone is stalking. A low level of sound will decrease sensitivity to everyday sounds like the heat or air conditioning kicking on. Leaving a radio on is a simple means of providing this "white noise".

## ENVIRONMENTAL STRESSES

Birds have an undeserved reputation for being delicate animals. Many times an illness is thought to have come on suddenly and as a result of a draft or chill. In reality, these birds have been sick for weeks to months but have not shown symptoms until stressed.

Although the word stress often conjures up pictures of overworked executives, stress can come in many forms. Stress is a physiological response to adverse physical or

psychological stimuli. Certain hormones are produced to prepare the body to deal with the situation. However, these responses are at the expense of immune function.

Physical conditions that lead to stress in birds include rapid temperature changes, low humidity, poor nutrition, overcrowding, inadequate sleep, molting, reproduction, or disease. Stressful psychological conditions include isolation, fear, and sexual frustration.

### *Measures to Help Reduce Environmental Stress:*

- *House Birds Singly*
- *Socialize Birds*
- *Feed Balanced Diet*
- *Avoid Rapid Temperature Changes*
- *Keep Adequate Humidity*
  - *Keep a Schedule*
- *Provide Environmental Enrichment*

## PERCHES

Birds spend 24/7 on their feet! Having one surface to stand on can lead to abnormal wear on the bottom of their feet. Perches should be provided in a variety of diameters, shapes, textures, and sizes. All should be reasonable for the bird, but the greater the variety the better. Rather than having excessive numbers of perches



in the cage, rotate perches weekly.

Wooden dowels are not the only choice. Natural branches with bark, rope perches, textured plastic perches, or even concrete perches can be used. Concrete and sandpaper perch covers should be used carefully.



In addition to wearing down nails and beaks, they can wear down the skin on the sole of the feet. They should only be used in conjunction with other perches.



## TOYS



There are four basic types of toys.

- Chewing toys
- Foot toys
- Climbing toys
- Puzzle toys



Some toys can fit into more than one category.

Birds should have at least one of each type of toy available.

Toys should be changed on a

regular basis to keep up interest. Some birds do not know how to play with toys. These birds need to be taught to play. Rather than introducing toys into the cage for these birds, play with the bird outside of the cage using the toy. Once they show interest in the toy, it can be introduced to the cage.



Some websites for custom bird toys:



[www.mysafebirdstore.com](http://www.mysafebirdstore.com)  
[www.thingsforwings.ca](http://www.thingsforwings.ca)  
[www.oliversgarden.com](http://www.oliversgarden.com)

## BIRD SKIN CARE

Many birds have poor feather quality. This is often due to poor nutrition. Unbalanced diets are a contributing factor in many of the diseases we see. The skin provides a window to the overall health of the bird. If the feathers appear dull, frayed, or flaky, the bird may also have other internal problems.

In addition to a healthy diet, most birds require periodic bathing. This cleans the feathers and encourages normal preening. Baths can be given in a variety of ways. Some birds bathe in a dish. Some like to be misted or



share a shower with the owner. Only use water for bathing.

Mite protectors or sprays are not necessary and could be harmful. Any other product for the skin should be checked by your veterinarian before using. Many over-the-counter products do more harm than good.

## TOXICOSIS

*Toxicosis* is defined as disease caused by exposure to poisonous agents. The types of diseases produced by toxins are as numerous as the types of poisons. There are, however, some generalizations that may help avoid this problem or save a bird with this problem.



**PREVENTION:** Always keep birds confined to a cage when not supervised. Use only professionally made cages or those made of nontoxic materials. A veterinarian or reputable pet store will be able to help you with this.

Check for toxic materials or plants near the bird's cage and remove them. Keep cage away from sources of toxic fumes (paint, cooking fumes, and natural gas). Make sure ovens and other non-stick surfaces are not coated with Teflon. Do

not overheat any Teflon cookware.

Do not feed low quality grains (such as wild bird seed) to birds as they may have mold toxins. Wash all fresh foods thoroughly before feeding to remove any pesticides or disinfectants.

Lastly, sick birds should be treated only by veterinarians experienced in treating birds. Over the counter remedies are not only ineffective, but may also be toxic.

**RECOGNITION:** Toxicosis should be suspected in any bird that is suddenly seriously ill. This is especially true if the bird had not been confined in a safe environment. Chronic poisoning can also occur over a long period of time and show up suddenly. Immediate veterinary attention should be sought.

Attempt to find the source of the toxin. Lead and other heavy metals, which account for a large percentage of poisonings, may cause seizures, green watery urine, or in Amazons, red urine. While these signs may be seen in other conditions, they all need immediate veterinary care. Sudden death may occur in birds exposed to toxic fumes, such as gas or overheated Teflon.

**TREATMENT:** If you know the source, STOP the exposure. Birds exposed to toxic fumes can be saved when they are removed from a home. CALL your veterinarian immediately. It is dangerous to delay veterinary attention. DO NOT attempt to treat at home. If you can identify the source, this will help your veterinarian provide immediate care.



## SMOKING: BAD FOR YOU, WORSE FOR YOUR BIRD

Cigarette smoke is a serious toxin. The effects on the health of smokers are well documented. Even second hand smoke is very harmful.

Birds have extremely efficient respiratory systems. Birds take in more air from the room and extract oxygen very effectively.

Unfortunately, it also extracts toxins from the air. A bird will take in about *20 times* the amount of toxin from the air as an equivalent sized mammal.

Birds that are exposed to second hand smoke often have red irritated eyes and throats, respiratory wheezes, and black

speckled lungs. They are at a higher risk for developing significant respiratory disease.

If you must smoke, do it away from your bird. Also, wash your hands after smoking. The nicotine from your hands can be transferred to the bird.