



BRINGING
**BIRDIE
HOME**

*A guide for new potential
pet bird parents*



Pet birds are great companions!



Pet Birds are impressive, beautiful and colorful. They make wonderful companions who can bond closely with their care takers. You will truly appreciate the intelligent, endearing and sometimes comical qualities of a pet bird.

INDEX

BEFORE YOU BRING BIRDIE HOME

Is a Pet Bird Right for You? **2-4**

- Do Your Research
- Preparing for a Pet Bird
- Week One with a Companion Bird

Habitat and Care Requirements **5**

- Nutritional/Dietary Needs

BRINGING BIRDIE HOME

Training & Behavior **6-7**

- Enrichment
- Parrots & Mess

Medical / Health Information **8**

Household Dangers **9**

About the Authors **10**





Is a Pet Bird Right for You?

Before purchasing a companion bird, you should be well informed to ensure you make the best possible choice for you, your family and your (potential) pet bird.

- Does anyone in the home have allergies to dander?
- Is there a smoker in the home?
- Are you away more than you are home?
- Do you have enough time to commit to a pet bird?
- Do you have a budget to care for a pet bird?
- Are other members of the household okay with a pet bird in the home?

Pet birds enjoy interaction. In as little as 30 minutes a day, you can enrich your bird's life!

The relationship you share with your companion bird can be extremely rewarding. It will be a lifetime of joy since birds can live 10 to 60 years. For a mutually rewarding relationship prepare to invest a considerable amount of time with your bird. Pet birds are social flock animals and thrive on attention. Your bird will consider you part of its flock. The time and expense of caring for your pet bird (including food, treats, toys and veterinary visits) and its habitat should also be considered.

With the right start sharing your life with a pet bird can be a wonderful relationship to be cherished. We're here to help with this comprehensive guide!

Helpful Tip:

All pet birds make noise, its part of their social nature. Birds are most vocal at dusk and dawn. A healthy bird is vocal and some, like the African Grey, have great talking ability. Training your pet bird to talk is part of the fun of owning a companion bird!



Is a Pet Bird Right for You?

Do Your Research!

Choose a species that fits well with your lifestyle and environment. Get to know the physical and behavioral trends of different species. Learn a little about their natural history, lifespan, weight range, wild habitat, conservation, etc., and what makes the species you are considering special. Knowing about your bird's natural history will aid you in providing a suitable environment to ensure health and happiness. It is also important to do some research on where you will acquire your pet bird: breeder, pet store or rescue?

Popular Parrot Pets:

- African Grey Parrot
- Amazon Parrot
- Caique
- Cockatiel
- Cockatoo
- Conure
- Eclectus Parrot
- Lovebird
- Lorikeets and Lories
- Macaw
- Parakeet (Budgerigar)
- Quaker Parrot (aka Monk parakeet)

Resources to Research Pet Birds:

- Kaytee® website: www.kaytee.com
- Online Search Engines & Discussion Groups
- Books: try the non-fiction section of your local library
- Local Bird Clubs & Bird Shows
- Book section of pet stores

Research Checklist:

- Noise level of the species you choose
- Space requirements
- Personality of the bird to fit your lifestyle
- Expected life span
- Time constraints
- Cost of feeding - does it fit your budget?
- Cost commitments - short and long-term
- Cost of caging and enrichment items
- Cost of veterinary care - Is there an Avian Veterinarian in your community?

Preparing for Your Pet Bird

Be sure the bird you choose is healthy. Learn what a healthy bird should look like, what it should weigh and how it should act.

In some parrot species it's difficult, if not impossible, to identify the sex just by looking at it. DNA testing can be done to determine the sex. It can be important to know the gender of your bird so you can better understand its behavior and knowing the sex can be life saving information to your veterinarian in case of illness.

Learn the appropriate way to handle a parrot and how most parrots prefer to be touched so that it is fun for both owner and pet.

Work out a plan to introduce a new bird to existing pets or plan to keep them separate. Parrot proof your house, especially for birds with untrimmed wings (flighted). This means making sure items you don't want chewed are hidden. For flighted birds, it means windows and mirrors are covered with stickers or are made temporarily opaque with bar soap and ceiling fans are not moving prior to their release into the home. Your house can slowly return back to normal as your bird learns its designated perches.

Acquire a transport container (smaller portable habitat, crate, etc).



Is a Pet Bird Right for You?

Week 1 with a companion bird. Keys to success!

The first week your new bird is home is an important time for both you and your bird. During this time you need to encourage good habits and behaviors in your bird, as well as keep him safe and healthy. Below are simple tips to help you start out right.

Before Bringing Birdie Home:

- Have the habitat set-up where he will stay, preferably in a well trafficked area out of direct sunlight.
- Have everything ready in your bird's habitat (food, toys and perches) before your bird arrives home. Rearranging things after he has arrived could be stressful for your bird.
- Be sure the habitat and surrounding area is free from danger: cords he could pull in, toxins, plants, sharp items, etc.

Day 1 & 2 Tasks

- Allow your bird to become familiar with his new home and surroundings. Avoid handling him for the first day or two, wait until he's ready.
- Move slowly around your bird, so as to not accidentally frighten him.
- Weigh him, this way you'll have a starting point in case any health concerns may arise.
- Call your Avian Veterinarian and schedule a New Bird Exam, for no more than 3-5 days from bringing your bird home.

Week 1 & Beyond, Daily Tasks

- Observe to be sure he looks comfortable in the habitat and with the placement of the habitat.
- Talk to him while in the room and even when you are out of the room, to let him know you are still there.
- Be sure you are feeding him the diet he's always been on; changing his diet can be very stressful.
- Watch his droppings to be sure they look normal (normal amount and color of urine, urates and feces).
- Be a treat dispenser for your bird! Offering treats is a great way to become friends.
- Never attempt to pick up your bird if he seems frightened.
- Avoid doing things that create an aggressive response, such as lunging or biting.
- Wait for your bird to show interest in interacting with you, never force him!
- Avoid overwhelming your bird with too many new people or activities at once. Introduce these items slowly and calmly.
- Watch your language! Never say words in front of your bird that you don't want repeated.
- Keep all interactions with your bird fun and non-threatening. This will build trust.
- If he is squawking or screaming do not go to him, this will reinforce the screaming behavior (keep this rule for his entire life).
- If your bird is doing something you enjoy, such as talking or whistling- reward him with a treat or something else he desires, such as a head scratch.
- Be sure the amount of time you invest into your bird in the beginning is the same amount of time you're able to invest throughout his lifetime. More attention in the beginning will leave him always wanting that amount of attention long term.



Habitat & Care Requirements

You will need to research the cage size and style that best suits your parrot species and find a space for it within your home. An ideal location for your bird's habitat will be a well trafficked, sunny spot (avoid direct, constant sunlight), away from drafts. Birds usually like to be “where the action is” in the home.

Basic Habitat and Care Needs:

- Habitat
- Food
- Treats
- Water (via bowl or water bottle)
- Care Guide / Book / DVD
- Emergency Care Kit - First Aid Kit
- Air quality, UV light and how your bird might safely have access to fresh air and sunshine
- Choose the type of cage litter substrate you will use

Note: Avoid using old habitats that may contain questionable metals which may be dangerous to your pet bird.

Necessary Habitat Accessories & Enrichment Items:

- Perches
- Swings
- Toys
- Ropes
- Foraging items

Note: Make sure perches include a variety of textures and are sized appropriately for your bird. Your bird's feet should not be flat (a sign that the perch is too large) nor should his toes wrap around the perch so far that they touch or overlap (a sign that the perch is too small).

Nutritional/Dietary Needs:

Identify and provide the appropriate diet for your parrot species. KAYTEE® exact® is a great diet to consider, it's the most researched diet on the market and offers complete nutrition in every bite.

Dietary Options Include:

- Extruded Complete Diets (often referred to as pellets)
- Fortified Seed Diets
- Combination Diets
- Fresh foods - nuts, fruits and vegetables

Note: Some birds may need supplements.

Fresh Water:

Birds should have access to water in a bowl (preferred method), and it should be washed and changed daily. You may train your bird to drink from a water bottle, but be sure to still provide fresh water daily to avoid bacterial growth which may result in illness. Some birds like to soak their food in water, creating a bad soup - in these cases water may need to be changed more frequently to avoid bacterial growth.

Helpful Tip:

Think of ways to include your bird in family activities. Why can't "Polly" be part of movie night?



Training & Behavior

Once you have made your selection and you are ready to bring your new companion home – it's time to learn all you can about training and behavior in order to have the best possible relationship with your bird and to keep your bird happy and healthy.

Begin training right away. Training is important; it will ensure you start your relationship out on the right foot and help avoid potential behavior problems. Your bird's behavior will be shaped by what you do. Your bird can be super fun or a big problem depending on your choices.

Training Information to Gather:

- How to target train
- How to train step up, step down, step onto new people
- How to train your bird to go back in its cage
- How to train your pet bird to go into a travel cage

- How to introduce new enrichment items and encouraging your bird to play with toys
- How to teach a bird to enjoy new environments and people

Note: www.GoodBirdInc.com is a great place to start gathering training information.

You may have come across some common behaviors in the species you chose. Be aware of these behaviors and how to avoid creating them. It is a good idea to learn what to do if your bird develops a behavior problem or comes to you with one already.

Information to Learn About Behavior:

- How screaming for attention is prevented
- How to teach independent play
- How to avoid biting problems
- How to prevent a bird from bonding to only one person
- How to make going back into the cage fun

Prepare for Your Bird's Medical Care by Training Him to:

- Enjoy a towel (for restraint)
- Enjoy a transport container (by making regular short trips)
- Step onto a scale
- Present toes for nail trims
- Taking fluid from a syringe

Information to Learn About Flighted Bird Training:

- How to train a recall
- How to train the bird to fly to a perch on cue
- How to teach your bird to fly angles, around corners and distance
- What skills represent good fliers
- Why some birds are not easily trained for flight (who have been clipped during fledging, etc.)
- What to do if your bird escapes

Note: If your bird is flighted, create house rules that include no open doors or windows when the bird is out, etc.

Helpful Tip:

If your new bird is young, plan on devoting some time to initial training. This will be beneficial throughout the bird's lifetime. Training a bird at a young age is easiest.

Training & Behavior

Enrichment

Enriching your pet birds life is vital, this brings them both mental and physical stimulation. These beautiful and intelligent creatures need to be kept busy and challenged, that's exactly what enrichment does!

- Get familiar with types of enrichment the species you choose might respond to. Stock up on enrichment items in advance.
- Determine what type of a "Toy Player" your pet bird is. Does he like foot toys, destructible toys or soft toys to preen?
- Be prepared to rotate items frequently as well as purchase new enrichment toys on a regular basis to keep them exciting and engaging.
- Be aware of safety issues associated with enrichment items, such as loose threads, lengthy chains, pinch points or tangling possibilities, etc.
- Establish other perches or play stands around the house for your bird. Make them very desirable perches by reinforcing (rewarding) your bird for being there with toys, treats and attention.
- Consider ways your bird will be able to exercise and be active.
 - Through flight?
 - Through time in and out of his enclosure?
 - Climbing and playing?
 - Through time interacting with you?

Companion Birds & Mess

Pet birds have the potential to be a little messy at times. It is important to remember that the mess can be contained and easily managed.

Dust & Debris

There is a keratin sheath that surrounds a new feather as it grows in. This is what your bird preens off creating dust particles. Some birds, especially Cockatoos and African Greys, have special dust producing feathers. These feathers help to clean and condition the other feathers, like a portable dust bath! Parrots are also constantly molting at a low level, which means they are always replacing some feathers, and they have a heavy molt twice a year.

How to Control Dust/Debris

- Air Purifier / Filter
- Quick daily clean with a vacuum or sweeper

Poop Happens!

Birds poop frequently during the day. It can be controlled to some extent. You can train your bird to "go" while on a specific perch of choice. You can also potty train your bird to poop on command - be sure to make pet sitters and veterinarians aware of this behavior.

Note: Strategically place washable throw rugs, paper towels or office mats to catch the mess.

Property Damage

Birds' beaks were designed to shred things, it's a natural behavior. Not all species are as inclined to display this behavior. Supply your parrot with plenty of chewables and shreddables that are okay for him to destroy and train your parrot to know where the right place is to perch and chew!

Food Control

In the wild, part of a parrot's job is to spread seeds to grow new plants, and being a messy eater is conducive to this task.

Options to Help Control This:

- Feeding a pellet or extruded diet
- Feeding only what your parrot will eat in one day
- Offer their diet for 30-60 minutes in the morning and 30-60 minutes in the evening, this allows them time to eat and less time for spreading their seeds!
- Place food bowls lower in the cage - watch that fecal material is not landing in their food bowl
- Use a cage skirt

Helpful Tip:

A 10-15 minute daily clean is the best way to keep your home and your bird's home neat and tidy!



Medical & Health Information

Identify your local Avian Veterinarian and establish a relationship to determine their comfort level with treating avian patients BEFORE your bird becomes ill or is injured. Ask local bird people, bird clubs or pet stores for a recommendation, or go to AAV.org (The Association of Avian Veterinarians) to find an avian veterinarian in your area. Take your new bird to your chosen Avian Veterinarian within 3-5 days of purchase for a check up.

- Weighing your pet bird at the least 2 times a month is a good habit to get into.
- Have an emergency first aid kit and instructions on how to use it.
- Bathing is very important for your bird's well being. Learn about the different ways of bathing or showering your bird that will work in your household, how to train your bird if he does not like to bathe and how often your bird should bathe.
- Pet birds can carry diseases that can infect other birds in the household and possibly humans as well, especially a person with a compromised immune system. Annual check-ups are recommended to maintain good health.
- Keep identity records, such as leg band information, pictures, microchip and other important information in a safe place in case your bird is lost or stolen.

Bathing Options:

- Bowl
- Spray bottle
- Shower
- Mister in an aviary
- Shallow pan
- Wet lettuce leaves





Household Dangers

Learn about common household dangers to birds such as self cleaning ovens, non-stick pans, lead wicked candles, cleaning chemicals, metal if ingested, plug-in fragrances, certain plants, etc. There are many dangers in the home for flighted birds. They can escape through open doors, fly into windows, be injured by ceiling fans or drown in swimming pools or pots on the stove. Below are some common everyday dangers:

Cat Scratches or Animal Bites. Even mild scratches or bites are life threatening!

Non-Stick Cookware. Poisonous fumes can be released from non-stick cookware if temperatures are excessive, causing respiratory distress, lack of coordination, seizure and death.

Food. Certain foods (avocado, chocolate, alcohol, fatty foods) people commonly eat may be dangerous.

Poisonous Plants. Some of the most common toxic plants may include Azalea, Diffenbachia, Jerusalem Cherry, Philodendron, Poinsettia and Mistletoe.

Windows. Striking a window can easily break your pet's neck, cause concussions or damage its beak.

Lead Poisoning. Lead can be ingested from certain weighted bird toys, window curtain weights, solder, stained glass and other sources. Signs include depression, convulsions, other nervous symptoms and red or black stool.

Insect Spray/Other Inhaled Toxins. Pesticides, ammonia or bleach fumes, hairsprays, cleaning sprays, aerosol sprays, cigarette smoke and high levels of carbon monoxide can be toxic to your bird.

Open Water. Birds can fly into sinks, toilets or bathtubs and may be unable to get out.

Hot Stoves/Appliances. May be a source of severe burns.

Ceiling Fans. For free-flying birds, fans can be a source of severe injury.

Overheating. If your bird is placed near a window and it cannot escape from incoming sunlight, it could suffer from heat exhaustion.

Sharing your life with a companion parrot or other pet bird can be very rewarding. Especially when you are well informed and prepared for what to expect. We hope this brochure helps you and your bird enjoy a wonderful life together. Visit kaytee.com to learn more about caring for your new feathered friend.



About the Authors

KAYTEE® has a group of highly experienced pet bird veterinarians, trainers and behaviorists that have contributed to the making of this brochure.



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Michael Clark has spent over 17 years in the professional pet arena, his experience and knowledge has taken him across the globe to conduct product and pet care education seminars for retailers, clubs and youth organizations. His industry knowledge also extends into retail merchandising, product development and marketing for Kaytee® products. A lifelong animal enthusiast, he has directed his passion for pets toward enhancing the companion animal experience; making it easier and more enjoyable to share your life with animals. For more information visit: www.kaytee.com