



Your Pet Parrot

By Maureen Pace

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About the Author, Maureen Pace

Maureen Pace and her husband have owned a variety of birds, but now just have two peach-faces which, she says, provide great company.

She intends to write more books since she retired from her marketing job.

She started with this subject because someone told her to write about something she knew and was enthusiastic about. She also wanted to share what she knew about parrots for people like a close friend that told Maureen that, "My parrot makes more work for me than our children ever did!"

Maureen says, "I love my parrots and I'm very grateful to my husband for giving me the first one two years ago."

"I've seen and heard a lot of great advice and some friends that have shared their experiences which has been really helpful, but the best lessons have come from my parrots!"

"For them and all the other parrots that give so many people companionship and help to make their lives lots more interesting, I have tried to make clear the those parts of keeping a parrot that some people might regard as negatives so that my readers have their eyes open when they decide to get their first parrot.

There's also plenty of information that I believe will help people that already have a parrot and may have found it difficult to get answers to some of their questions.

What do I recommend?

I can't recommend particular foods because results will vary for your parrot because of its physical state, environment and the condition and history of the particular food item that you feed them. The actual food you give them may contain residues of some toxic chemical that the crop had been sprayed with.

Your parrot might be a peach-face like I have, but may have a negative reaction to a particular food that my 'boys' thrive on.

Most foods grown or produced for human consumption are tested but not all foods for our pets are protected to anything like that extent.

Pre-Purchase Check

Parrots can be great pets and there is such a wide variety that you can be confident of finding some that would suit you.

But, if you are a person that is thinking about getting your first parrot, I want to point out some important facts about owning and caring for a parrot that is not evident in those wonderfully colorful pictures of ecstatic owners and beautifully groomed, well-behaved pet birds.



Reaching that level in your relationship with your parrot is achievable but it takes work, time and money.

Like thousands and thousands of other people in this country, I feel that it was all repaid many times over by the companionship and entertainment that my two parrots, like their predecessors (a duck, two parakeets and a canary), gave me so unselfishly.

But, putting this information right up front will help you to make the best possible decisions right from the start and smooth the path for you and your new feathered friend to the point where you can enjoy each other's company for years to come.

So, here we go

Parrots are basically closer to their wild relations than dogs or cats. They can become much-loved companions but they require more adjustment from their human family.

While a dog and, to a lesser extent, most cats try to please their owners, parrots are more independent, intelligent and will require more of your time for their care and supervision even after their initial training seems to be complete.



Even the best-trained bird will scatter some seed, water and its waste without consideration of its effect on your pristine home.

If you don't provide it with sufficient toys to chew and even destroy, then you will find that it might target some of your prized possessions as parrot fodder.

Parrots must chew.

Small children should be kept clear of parrots for their own safety but also to protect the bird.

Dogs and **cats** can also be a danger to your feathered friend and they should only come together, if at all, when you are able to supervise them closely.

If you already have or intend to let **ferrets**, **lizards** or **snakes** share your home, do not even consider having a parrot. The risk of the parrot becoming a meal for, or being injured, even actually scared to death, by your other pets is too high.

Pet fish are not, themselves, a problem but, if the top of the tank does not have a parrot-proof cover, then you risk finding your bird drowned after it is attracted by the brightly colored inhabitants flashing around inside the tank and gets too close when it decides to investigate!

When You Go Away.

You should provide your pet with toys and noise when you leave it to amuse itself, even if you are just visiting a neighbour.

With any parrot, you can expect they might make more noise when you aren't home.

I leave the radio on and that works well except for one time when the selected station put on a program about birds with lots of chirping and even some squawking that got my boys a bit excited!

It's probably worthwhile to try to get your bird used to being alone by leaving it alone for a short period and then following that up with absences that get slightly longer, say, every few days.

Travelling with Bird.

This can be very difficult.

You have three choices; take your bird friend along, board them or have someone “sit” the bird.

If you travel by car, you should confine your bird to a hard-sided container that is very securely fixed with its own seat belt. You should spend time before the trip acclimatizing your bird to the container.

If you travel by plane or ship, you must check the rules with that company well in advance. Some companies have low limits on the number of pet containers that can be carried on a single flight or sailing.

The experience could be traumatic for the bird as well as you.

Check what facilities, if any, are available at the hotel or other venue you are going to.

If you travel overseas, your bird will probably be subject to quarantine or just banned from entering the country.

Only Use Experienced Pet Sitters

Anyone that looks after your bird while you go away should be experienced at tending birds and like them.

Staff at your Vet may do this in their own time for extra cash. Otherwise, the vet may have a list of experienced pet-sitters that you could get.

You need to have full confidence in the abilities of the person that looks after your pet. Paying an experienced, enthusiastic person is cheap insurance that gives you a better chance of your pet surviving the separation.

Leave a list with all information and, of course, contact number for your vet.

Arrange beforehand with the Vet that, should something unexpected happen, the sitter can get attention for your bird and that you will settle the bill within a reasonable, stated time after you return.

Boarding your Bird.

All boarding places are not equal – some are not even adequate.

Check the premises, equipment and staff thoroughly before signing anything.

Your feathered friend could develop bad habits, even trauma, from being close to other birds of various species.

Most parrots will need significant human contact every day while you are away.

There is also a small, but ever-present risk of your bird contracting a disease.

Cleaning of the boarding area needs to be thorough and frequent.

The advice of your vet could be a life-saver if you choose this option.

Why do you Want a Parrot?

Parrots make great companions if they are treated well and their owners willingly give the time, attention and care that they need. All this can be a significant investment on your part.

There are two reasons that some people have for getting a parrot or other pet which are likely to cause distress and other problems down the track.

Fashionable Friend

If an important consideration in someone's decision to get a particular type of pet is because of the breed's current popularity, especially when it is a parrot or other creature that require some attention every day and on-going investment, then it is likely that no-one – human or animal – will enjoy the experience, especially when the trend turns to focus on some other type of living accessory.

Don't Buy Living Gifts.

The decision to get a pet of any kind is very personal. We all have different tastes and desires.

Perhaps you want to buy a parrot for your child or a close friend. But, even if you think you know what they want, a mistake could cause great distress to them and, especially, to the unwanted living gift.



You can pay for the parrot and even undertake to give a significant amount of time and cash to its upkeep, but the decision of whether they get a pet of whatever type must be left to them in the best interests of all concerned.

Who Gets the Parrot?!

We live longer than most of the pets that we choose to share our lives with, except for many types of parrot.

So, you may need to make provision for someone, or perhaps a pet refuge, to take care of your feathered friend if they out-live you.

If some close relative assures you that they are willing to do that, it's best to make a financial provision in your Will along with the details of any verbal arrangement that you have discussed.

Many times, it might be better and less trouble all round, to make a financial arrangement with a bird refuge or other organization that routinely offers this sort of service. That way, you are not burdening any of your relatives and you will also be helping the organization and the many other animals that it helps, while providing the best you can for your own when you are no longer here.



Always make sure that you personally check the facilities they provide and, if possible, arrange to talk with other donors or their families before signing up to any sort of financial agreement.

The Costs of Parrot Keeping

Please understand that the cost of having a feathered friend is much more than the payment you make to the breeder, pet shop or previous owner.

You know that you will have to buy and prepare food for the parrot.

But there are many other expenses;

Veterinary Costs

This involves regular check-ups plus the chance of possible large and unexpected expenses for operations etc.

The cost of treatment for injuries or illness may be significant.

Parrots are generally regarded as robust but susceptible to several illnesses.

Also, many parrots suffer injuries from misadventure outside of their cage or from actions or omissions which is often the result of their owners' unintentional mistakes,

Pet Health Insurance

You might consider getting a Health Insurance policy to help with these expenses. Fewer companies offer policies for birds than offer coverage for dogs and cats.

Most policies are geared to reimbursing you for part of the expenses after you have paid them. They all have limitations which can make the policies less worthwhile.

Like with your own health insurance, you should read any policy twice very carefully and make sure that you understand and accept every point before signing up.

Always get clarification and make sure you have all the important points spelled out in writing before you sign up.

Be aware that some companies require a period at the start of the policy where they do not pay out for certain things that are part of the policy.

Most have a clause that the policy does not come into effect until the premium has been lodged in their account.

It's a good idea to check with other bird owners for feedback about any companies they have used and your veterinarian to check if payments from the company you are considering might be accepted as part payment of your account.

Remember that the premium that you pay for your bird policy will almost certainly increase every year.

If you join a parrot owners' association, you could get valuable feedback and recommendations about this topic and many others.

Time

This is probably one of the most important considerations when you are deciding whether or not you really can afford to have a parrot as part of your household.

You will need to spend time before you get the bird, preparing your home so that its first few weeks will be as smooth as possible for both the bird and your family, including any pets that you already have.

You also need to check those areas of your home to which you will allow the bird access so that it will be safe and there will be minimum chance of it causing damage to your possessions.

This is an on-going process because the parrot will become more adventurous and capable of greater damage as it grows bigger and stronger.

You need to train the bird to become comfortable being handled and in proper behaviour. This will also be an on-going process because a parrot may either forget a command that is not regularly used or decide to disobey. Then, it needs more time to re-train and re-enforce the command. A slap or other physical punishment may seem like a quick and easy answer. But, that will not work – it could quickly destroy the relationship you have built up with the bird and make it much harder to control the bird in the future.

Parrots are fairly intelligent and they need companionship. They can be affected as badly as any dog will be by being left alone or ignored. They need interaction from you every day to reduce the chance of them becoming bored and stressed. Otherwise, they can be more likely to indulge in destructive or aggressive behaviour.

Equipment Costs

Every piece of equipment that you get for your parrot should be strong, high quality and you must carefully check everything for potential problems.

A good quality cage is not going to be cheap.

If you can afford it, it would be useful to also get a smaller cage to keep on hand for those times when you have to transport the bird to a veterinarian or if it is not well and you want to isolate it from your other parrot(s).

You will also need to check that the feeding bowls and perches are suitable for your type of parrot or incur the expense of replacing them.

Fitting out the Cage

No parrot should be confined to live in a cage that has a depth measurement less than twice the parrot's full wingspan (measured from the tip of its left wing across the body to the tip of its right wing), and a width that is about equal to three times its wingspan. As a rough guide to an acceptable minimum, the bird should be able to flap its wings without the tips touching the wire at either the front or back of its cage.

Cages that are tall and narrow appeal to people with space problems but they usually offer a less healthy environment to the bird that has to live in it.

If space is such a problem that they cannot provide a cage with the dimensions recommended above, then perhaps they should consider getting a hamster instead.

Accessories

You will often have to replace the perches and feeding bowls that are supplied with the cage with ones that are safer or otherwise more suitable for the particular type of parrot that you choose.

If you use metal containers, be sure that they do not contain harmful metals which could be leached out by acidic foods or juices. Stainless steel is best.

Cover for Your Cage

It's a good idea to have a cover made of quality material with no loose threads for your bird's cage. Small parrots are particularly at risk of becoming entangled in threads. If even one thread worked loose over time, it could cause serious, even life-threatening injuries to your bird.

The cover should be large enough to cover the whole cage at night. It's important to ensure that there is some space at the bottom of the cage between the cage and the cover so there is some air circulation and also to provide some light if your parrot is of a variety, like peach-faces, that forage at night.

Fold up the cover during the daytime, or replaced it with a shorter cover then so the bird can be active, but still has a darker, more private area that it can retreat to, if it is tired or frightened.

Wire Hazards

Make sure that the wire uprights and cross-pieces are firmly fixed, sufficiently strong to withstand the repeated attentions of the particular type of parrot that you own.



Even small parrots can, over time, create considerable damage to cheap “bargain” cages”. Large parrots are extremely strong.

The uprights should be spaced closely together, sufficient to discourage the parrot from trying to push its head or a leg between the bars. This sort of action would likely lead to serious injury.

You must inspect all parts of the cage, but especially all the wire, regularly to ensure that it has not deteriorated to where it is a potential escape route or dangerous to the bird.

Carefully check that the ends of all wires used in the cage have no exposed points. Even if the end of the wire is blunt, it may cause serious injury if the bird comes into contact with it, especially if the bird is small and moving fast.

All wire on the cage should be zinc-free (electroplated). Otherwise, it should be soaked in white vinegar, have all loose bits removed with a wire brush and then be exposed to weather for at least a month before being used in your bird cage.

This treatment will not remove the threat of all the zinc that may be present in the wire, but it could reduce the possibility of serious effects on your parrot.

Paint

You would expect that cage manufacturers would use only lead-free paints but it's wise to check this when you buy the cage. If you are not sure, you might buy a different cage because removing suspect paint from a cage would be time-

consuming and messy. It could also require the use of chemicals that might leave other potentially dangerous residues.

Zinc and lead are poisonous to birds and there is no safe level of exposure because the metals can build up in the bird to a point where it eventually becomes a serious problem.

All wood in the cage should be untreated, natural timber.

Be careful that you do not use any wood that is from a type of tree that might be poisonous to your parrot.

Also, check the history of all wood that you use to ensure, as far as possible, that it has not been sprayed with any dangerous garden chemicals for at least, say, three years. Many sprays still may contain poisons that can accumulate in the tree and cause problems for your bird when it chews its perches or other woodwork in the cage.

You should scrape dried droppings etc off the perches every couple of days or you risk flakes becoming loose airborne particles that could infect the bird and also members of your family or visitors seriously.

You will need extra wood to replace your perches every so often, because most parrots will chew them and they will all become discoloured because of the droppings even if you clean them regularly.

Letting them chew the perch through their droppings would invite health problems in short order and removing the residue back to the wood is time-consuming and messy.

Each perch needs to be of a size where the bird's claws reach from half to three-quarters of the way around it.

If the bird's foot does not reach at least half-way round the perch, it is very likely to fall and the risk of injury is high. If their claws extend right around the perch and even overlap, the legs are put under too much pressure and at great risk.

I've used branches from a neighbor's uprooted cherry tree as perches for my birds.

I knew for a fact that she had not sprayed the tree for four years and she was even able to tell me the two sprays that she used that year! Both were only toxic on insects.

I would have been more cautious if the branches were from, say, a commercial orchard or from someone whose use of sprays I did not know.

Cage Doors.

Doors that drop down like a draw-bridge or swing aside like the other doors in your home are regarded as much safer for modern bird cages but most are still supplied with doors that you slide up and down.

It is inevitable that parrots will test every moveable part on the cage and doors will get special attention because they'll see moving it up and down.

Your bird could be seriously injured if it tried to get out and became caught under the door of the cage.

You don't want your parrot to get out of the cage unless you are there and able to supervise it, so you should ensure that the doors on the cage are fastened securely at all other times in a way to will keep the parrot in and does not have any potential for causing it harm if it tries to get out.

Make Cleaning Easier.

There needs to be a wire grill above the solid floor of the cage with a sliding tray between them to catch droppings, seed husks and anything else that drops down.

If you use a cage that only has a solid floor, then droppings and other waste will accumulate and the bird will wade through it before you get time to remove it.

This is an open invitation to more health problems.

Cover the tray with a piece of blank newsprint or paper towels and change them every day to minimize any chance of infection or other problems.

Scrape the bottom and disinfect it each week. Do an extra clean at any time when there has been any spillage from the food or water containers.

Clean the containers as often as necessary but at least weekly, with a weak bleach solution.

Do this in another room away from the bird and dry everything very thoroughly before returning them to the cage or the bird may be badly affected by fumes or any damp residue.

Making Your Home ‘Parrot Friendly’

There are a number of areas which you need to check so that you can provide a safe and comfortable environment for your Parrot and minimize the amount of damage to your possessions and your nerves at the same time.

Two of the most intriguing qualities that all parrots share are curiosity and high energy levels. These also are major reasons that parrots get into so much trouble, with many being injured or killed each year through domestic “accidents”.

Other Pets

Parrots are a poor choice of pet if you also intend to keep **lizards, snakes or ferrets**. The birds have a high risk of being frightened so badly that many will die or becoming a meal for their natural predators – your other pets!

Dogs and cats should not be left alone when parrots, especially the small varieties, are in the same room. Don’t be fooled by how well they seem to get along while you are watching them.

You may have heard that “some people are only honest when they are being watched”. Well, most domesticated carnivores, like Tabby and Rex, may also be opportunistic if they get the chance!

Other People – Family and Friends

Children may injure or kill a parrot with kindness by hugging it – even a robust, fairly large parrot may have a fairly delicate chest area and the pressure of an adoring, but over-excited, child cuddling it may cause fatal injury and scar the child emotionally.

Children, and even some adults, may lay down and put their parrot beside them. This puts the parrot at risk of being suffocated if it works its way into their bedding and, for whatever reason, cannot get out.

Also, though it may be hard to believe, some parrots are crushed when their adoring owners or other family members fall asleep and roll onto the bird while it is on, or in, the bed.

Parrots that are on the floor inside our homes, risk injury or worse from being unable to get out of the way of a hurrying child (and most of them are hurrying all the time they are awake) or by the oversize feet of un-observant adults.

Parrots prefer to perch and live mostly on the highest available perches wherever they are, but we prefer to entice them to stay down at a lower level, even on the floor, because it's more convenient for us.

There is danger for the parrot from people and pets unless we maintain a good watch on them. But, most of us are as easily distracted as the average parrot.

It is dangerous to your parrot and unfair to your child if you make the child responsible for the welfare of the family parrot when it is out of its cage and you are unable to provide some close support.

Chewing can be Their Undoing!

Parrots chew anything that they get the opportunity to.

This can be dangerous or even fatal.

You need to survey your whole home before your bird's arrival to minimize the potential hazards.

They include electric cords, marking and other pens, candles, imitation fruit and anything which is soft enough for them to scrape or chew pieces from.

Convenience Items can Kill

Do not let your parrot anywhere near the kitchen, especially if you use non-stick electric cooking pans or have a self-cleaning oven.

I was told that fumes from these items when they are heated cannot be seen by us but may be deadly to your birds.

Dangerous Drapes and Blinds.

If any of your drapes or other furnishings have loose, dangling threads because of their design or from wear, they are a potential cause of injury to your parrot, especially if it is one of the small varieties. Many birds are injured or die from being tangled in threads.

The Food we Love



The food we love may be dangerous or even fatal for our feathered friends.

Never give them any sort of **alcohol**, not even the smallest amount. A drunken bird is no joking matter – you could cause its death

or prolonged illness for the sake of a cheap laugh!

Their physiology is not capable of dealing with alcohol even as well as ours can. Repeated episodes are likely to ensure the lingering disability or early death of the bird.

Caffeine is also dangerous for birds, even more than it is for humans.

I've been told that **rhubarb** and also **onions** are very dangerous, but I don't know why anyone would offer these things to parrots anyway.

Avacado will definitely harm your parrot but they never last long enough at our place to be offered to our parrots anyway.

Although a parrot's diet is likely to include a variety of **seeds**, there are some which can be dangerous to them. Please consult your veterinarian for current advice.

Many parrots like sunflower seeds but their tolerance varies. I've also been told by a seed merchant that too much sunflower seed in the bird's diet may cause feather loss!

There are several places on the Internet which offer lists of "safe" or "unsafe" plants for the information of bird owners. All the lists are accompanied by disclaimers which you should read first.

The reaction of different birds may vary in degree.

Even something which my parrots have never been affected by may have some negative effect with your bird and vice-versa.

There may also be poisonous residues in some plants that we buy.

The best thing is to never give your pet very much of anything the first time that you offer it and never to let it indulge too heavily with any treat – all things in moderation.

Consult your Veterinarian about any type of food that you are considering offering your bird for the first time.

Metal Menace

I've already mentioned zinc and lead which can cause the death of your bird but you should minimize the possibility of your parrot being able to chew or even scratch at any metal objects which might have harmful ingredients or which could otherwise cause injury.

This would include metal weights, fastening, sharp metal objects and anything with loose paint, other coatings or rust on it.

Dangerous Toys

This could just about be a book by itself. There seems to be a lower standard applied to safety with regard to pet toys (and other accessories) compared to those marketed for use by children.

When my children were small, I used to think that some toys were devised by people that may have never played with a child. That opinion goes double when I look at some of the items which are offered as playthings for our pets.

A friend, who is an experienced salesman, told me that many pet toys are made to attract the eyes, emotion and cash of the pet owners without much regard for the pet's enjoyment or even, sometimes, safety!

That makes our choice harder and our responsibility to protect our pets even greater. Some things to watch for and avoid are;

- ✗ Toys made of **thin, hard plastic** that the bird might break and then injure itself on sharp edges that could result.
- ✗ Chains that have links that could trap a claw or even a whole leg.

- ✗ Chains with links that your bird might open and swallow. The potential damage from small links, whether still closed or partly straightened so that they are just a short piece of wire with sharp ends is not something I want to think about.
- ✗ Be very careful of bells. Avoid bells with clappers – my parrots removed the clapper from an open bell and then removed the small, weak metal ring that had connected the clapper to the plastic bell.

I had thought that the bell and the wire ring were too strongly joined for the small parrots to be able to separate them. It took one of them just several seconds to destroy the connection and it would not have taken much longer for them to be injured.

- ✗ Check any enclosed bells to ensure that the ball inside cannot possibly fall out or be extracted by your birds.
- ✗ Fabric toys are not suitable for parrots as they will be chewed to destruction in a short time. The fabric and the contents of the toy (which may include small plastic beads, fibre and foam) could be your bird's last meal.
- ✗ Toys that have rubber or other unsuitable, chewable material as part of their construction should never be considered.
- ✗ Try to ensure that any painted item which you put within reach of your parrot does not have any lead or other dangerous content in the paint.
- ✗ Toys which have a piece of natural rope can be attractive to your parrot as an alternative way to exercise its beak. But they can also become a potential death trap when they are partly unravelled and the bird could catch a leg or claw or even be strangled in the strong, loose fibres.
- ✗ Wooden toys are doubly attractive to many parrots because they get to exercise their beaks on them. Make sure that all materials

are safe (no poisonous metals) and there are no gaps where the bird might injure a wing or a claw.

You will need to budget for a regular supply of new wooden toys as they become damaged and less attractive, or even start falling apart.

- ✗ Don't let your bird continue to play with toys that have been fouled with its droppings or other materials. These would be potential sources of infection.

Either clean the toys thoroughly at least every week or discard and replace them on a similar schedule.

- ✗ Balloons, whether inflated or not, should never be accessible to your Parrot.
- ✗ Streamers and ribbons can also cause injury to your bird.

Vapor

Vapor from insect sprays, paint and many other common household items might poison your parrot or cause it breathing problems.

I was advised not to use any aerosols in the room where the parrots are. It might be wise to remove their cage from the room or cover it if it is too large to move easily, if you need to use any sort of spray.

Even burning ornamental, scented candles might cause some birds significant discomfort.

Water

Parrots have a constant need to drink and are thus likely to try any water source they can get access to. There are several in the average home which have proved to be death-traps for unwary birds at times.

These include toilets (another good reason to always put the seat down!), the drinking bowls of larger pets like dogs and cats, and fish tanks.

Baths and pools are designed to be inviting but make sure that your parrot does not go near them.

It only takes about a half-inch depth of water to make a drowning hazard for a small parrot.

Windows

Your windows are a big hazard for wild birds as well as your parrot. They do not know what windows are and are likely to find out when they hit a window while they are flying unless you either close your blinds or curtains before you let the parrot have its exercise or fit permanent screens so they can easily see that there is a hazard there and it is not open for them to fly through to freedom.

Wire Ties

These are the short, pieces of thin wire, covered with soft, colored plastic. that are twisted tightly around many products, that we get in plastic bags, including vegetables and locally produced seed mixes.

Some people use them to attach things to the sides or top of their parrot's cage but this is a very bad idea.

Parrots will be attracted by the challenge of removing the twisted plastic from their cage and then from the thin, sharp wire that it protects.

Swallowing the plastic coating is bad for them and the wire has the potential to cause even more damage whether the bird swallows or not.

The best type of fastener for attaching something temporarily to a cage is a stainless steel quick link. It looks a bit like a thick paper clip with just one loop of metal and a threaded tube which you use to screw over the two ends of the wire loop. It is easy to use and remove and the higher cost is justified by the much higher safety that you provide to your parrot.

Parrot Food: Nourishment and Variety

Many people think that parrots only eat seeds and fruit.

Vegetables for Extra Vitality

They also are happy to eat a wide variety of vegetables and feeding some vegetables to your bird will improve its health and general enjoyment of life.

Suitable foods include;

- ✓ **Broccoli**, including leaves and stems (which should be split so the birds can get the sweet pith in the center).
- ✓ **Celery** - only give them celery that is good enough for you to eat. Some celery is offered that is too soft or it deteriorates in a very short time, no matter how carefully you store it. Throw it away or crush and then compost it – don't risk your bird's health.
- ✓ **Corn**. I cut wheel-shaped pieces from an ear and then push wire through the center so that either I or the bird can spin the wheel when it is fixed in the cage, and they can get access to the entire surface.

Make sure that the parrot cannot get its claw, beak or even a leg caught in any part of its edible toy or the wire it is suspended from. If in any doubt, find some other 100% safe way of offering the corn to your bird or eat it all yourselves.

Thistles and dandelions are also in great demand at our house by the peach-faces. I'm happy to oblige but don't let them have too much on any one day.

Our little parrots also like chickweed and gum leaves (only certain types and they must be fresh and not glossy), but they mostly tear these to shreds rather than actually eating them.

This activity helps to keep boredom away and that alone makes the effort of gathering the leaves and weeds well worthwhile.



It's important that all the produce, even the weeds and material that you think they only play with, be fresh and should not have any chemical residue or have been fouled, as far as you can tell, by dogs or other animals.

Two things which have been very popular with my parrots;

I feed my birds some amounts of fresh **corn** and **broccoli** when they are available but I also split small pieces of the stem of the corn and the broccoli and give these pieces to them, because they like the soft center of both types of stems.

An animal trainer told me that elephants also like the sweet pith from inside the corn stalks but, of course, they are capable of splitting the stalks for themselves.

Seeds

The most important considerations with seeds are that you only buy quantities that your parrots will consume within a couple of weeks so that they are getting the freshest possible supply and that you provide other healthy material for them to eat,

Only giving them seed and water is pretty much like us having to exist only on bread and water – that's not the sort of diet we should give our companions, is it?

If you buy packaged mixes, you may find that even packs of the same brand vary significantly from time to time with some seeds becoming less well represented in the mix.

There may be climatic, seasonal reasons for this but I think that the make-up of the mixes is mostly dependent on which types of seed are available at the best prices.

I suggest that you check your local pet stores or grain merchants where you are likely to get the freshest seed and mixes which reflect the preferences of the experienced breeders and owners who are the suppliers' main customers.

Also, ask for advice of more experienced Members at your local Parrot society. That information might save you enough money to cover your annual subscription.

Seed Dust and Husks

You should also keep in mind that the level of seed in the bowls in your parrot's cage can be very deceptive.

They strip husks from most of the seeds that they eat. As the amount of husks and seed dust builds up in the bowls, the amount of useful, nutritious seed drops but the bowls may well still seem to be full of real seed to the casual glance.

Be sure to do a regular check and remove any husks from the top layer so that you can be sure that your parrot really has access to real seed or you could have a malnourished bird with full seed containers.

This seed dust can also be a problem if it accumulates and then is blown around your home. It can encourage respiratory infections for your family members and your pets. That's another good reason to clean it away at least once a day.

Packaged Food for Parrots

As well as the heavily promoted, packaged seed mixes that I have sometimes been dis-satisfied with, some companies produce specially prepared combination foods in pellet form.

Some of these seem to have a good mix and they can be a very handy alternative to preparing and storing your own meals for your parrot.

Ask your Vet's advice. They will almost certainly have some which they sell. You could buy one packet from them and then use the ingredient list on their package to select a similar, but possibly less expensive, brand from your supermarket or pet store.

You can make your own version of the heavily promoted, premium parrot mixes by adding some pellets, dried fruit and seeds together.

Keep your pet's food in airtight, plastic containers to preserve freshness and reduce the risk of rodent or insect attack.

"Vitamin enriched" seed mixes are usually a waste of money because the vitamins are dusted on the outside of the seeds and all that is on those seeds with husks will never be ingested to be used by your parrot because it strips all the husks (coverings) off the seed and only feeds on the nutritious seed inside.

The Truth about Grit

Most pet stores sell grit for you to add to your bird's diet but it probably isn't necessary for parrots.

They don't have teeth but their digestive system is pretty powerful.

Please ask your vet because recommendations on some things change over time but I don't feed my boys any and they are doing well.

If the vet says that you should add some, I have suggestions from friends who have other types of pet birds (not qualified experts, just fellow hobbyists so do your own checking):

Examine the packaged grit before you buy it. Some is mostly very fine with a high sand content and probably not much good for parrots or maybe any other bird.

Don't overdo it. It's intended to help the bird process seeds etc and they don't need much.

Don't use grit straight from the beach. It maybe illegal to take it and, very important, it may be contaminated.

Put some in a separate container and also a little (very small amount) mixed in with their seed.

Wonderful Water

We have a vast array of prepared drinks to consume but many Doctors remind us that water is still one of the most valuable and neglected components of our diet.

It is also essential that your parrot has constant access to fresh, clean water.

Often, parrots foul their water with seed they might eject from their beaks as they drink or with their droppings.

Try to remember too check your bird's water bowl frequently and clean it whenever you notice any rubbish in it to help maintain your pet in the best possible health.

Many people provide their pet with bottled or filtered water. I'm not convinced about the benefits of bottled water justify the extra cost but would be using a filter for their drinking water as well as my own if we weren't blessed with a very good local supply.

Buy Your Parrot

You have a wide range of options when you buy your parrot.

What Age?

You might want;

- a very young, recently weaned bird,
- a fledgling that has started to fly or even
- a pre-owned bird whose first owner may have died or just decided to get rid of their pet and the attached financial and time commitment.

Do not believe the old myth that “only young birds that are fully dependent on you will grow to be good companions”.

The very young birds actually are much more demanding in those first few



months in your home, because they are not socialised or confident about their own abilities. This can create stress for you both that may leave indelible marks on your life-long relationship.

Birds that are old enough to have some ability to help themselves, and even birds

that have had a long relationship with another human, and then been parted from them with all the trauma that involves, have a good chance to become the bird friend that you dreamed of when you decided to get one.

The very young bird will require the most attention to an extent that I think is beyond most of us, especially if we don't have previous experience of parrot ownership.

The adopted bird is likely to require more attention for a while than the young one that is learning to fly but many of them will reward your efforts and the second chance that you give them with a close, warm bonding.

Where to Buy?

You might get your parrot from;

- A registered breeder.
- A hobbyist breeder
- A market or bird show
- A pet shop.
- A classified advertisement
- A bird refuge

Buying from a registered breeder: You will probably pay a higher price for your parrot from a registered breeder than from most of the other options that I've listed.

But, you will probably get to see the conditions under which your bird began its life. This should give you some confidence in the soundness of the bird.

You will also be able to get reliable information, even months after the sale has been finalized and even informed help with the selection of the particular bird that might best suit you and your family situation.

Many responsible breeders will also require you to wash your hands before approaching their birds and even refuse to sell you the bird that you want!

Their first concern is for the welfare of their birds. If they decide it is not in the bird's best interest or that they think you may find that the commitment required for looking after and living with that particular type of parrot too hard then they will be prepared to tell you, "Sorry, but no".

Buying from a hobbyist breeder: These are a mixed bag, just like the birds that they offer.

Many are "just interested in the money" and their birds are their stock in which they have as little interest as if they were pairs of shoes. The only question that this type of breeder is likely to ask you is, "Did you bring the cash?"



But, there are also many amateur breeders who genuinely care for their birds. These people may not have the time, business skills or finances to make the step up to being a registered breeder.

But, they may have a deep knowledge of parrots, a genuine concern for their birds' welfare and making sure that you get a bird with which you have every chance of forming a long-term happy relationship as the best of the professional breeders.

Like their professional counterparts, they can also provide reliable advice on raising your bird and even tips about the most knowledgeable and caring bird-savvy veterinarians and suppliers.

Buying from a market or bird show: This can be a much less satisfactory option than the others. The young birds are in a strange environment and probably not displaying the qualities or even the inadequacies that they would if they were in more familiar surroundings.

Also, you do not have as good an opportunity to judge how well the breeder looks after their birds or even discuss your requirements and any questions you have in the bustle of the busy market or show like you would on their own premises.

Buying from a pet shop: The staff of most pet shops that I have seen in recent years have a deep interest in working with animals and a genuine desire to set up successful matches between the young creatures that they sell and the clients that buy them.

But, beware of the rare exceptions that only are in it for the money.

With most stores, you will get good advice and some help with the selection of an appropriate new best friend.

But, their advice is likely to be skewed to some degree according to what types of pets they are in a position to supply and the ever-present requirement to meet their overheads and make a profit.

So, they may not feel they need to tell you the whole range of options that you have to get a pet and their advice about the accessories, supplements and food will be mostly focused on those brands and preparations that they stock, just like any other store.

Buying from a classified advertisement: You can find yourself dealing with people that operate in any of the ways that I list here when you reply to an advertisement.

You may also encounter someone that is trying to sell stolen parrots! They might even offer to bring the bird to your home.

But it's a good idea, whenever possible, to take the opportunity to see the environment that your potential pet was raised in and be able to compare the different parrots in the same location.

Buying from a bird refuge: This can be a highly emotional experience though not as potentially distressing as visiting a dog or cat home where you know you might be each dog's last chance to survive beyond the next day.

The bird refuges are funded by the deceased owners of most of the birds that are in their care.

The staff are, like those in the other refuges, more dedicated to looking after the animals in their care than most people that work in pet shops.

They are usually very willing to give you all possible information to try to ensure that you will form a great relationship with whichever bird you take away with you.

And they are not constrained by any pressure to recommend a particular animal or to try to make everyone that enquires buy something from them.

Their close association with all of the birds and, quite often, knowledge of its history, can be helpful in guiding you to a bird that will be very suitable for your needs and situation.

Points to Remember:

The final decision is entirely your responsibility. You cannot blame the person or organization that you got the bird from any more than you could blame the bird.

Here are some suggestions to help you find a healthy and happy companion parrot:

The ideal parrot will have bright eyes with no foreign matter on or around them.

In normal daylight, the iris (circle in the center of the eye) might enlarge and then become smaller from time to time. This is quit normal and some varieties do it more frequently than others.

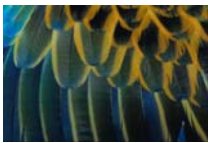
The also should be no foreign matter in, on or around the nostrils or the beak.

A encrusted beak may be a sign of disease or mite infection – problems that you .never want to introduce to your home, especially if you have other parrots.

The bird's feet should not show any foreign matter and look comfortable while gripping the perch. The bird should have an upright stance and be confident enough to stare back at you while your look it over.

A bird that seems fearful may be ill but there is also a chance that it is being bullied or just unsure because it is in unfamiliar surroundings..

A healthy and well-adjusted bird might chattering constantly or quiet, but avoid contact with any that are hunched up or shivering,



Its feather should be neatly arranged and there should not be any missing. Bald spots may indicate;

- Disease
- that the bird is pulling out its own feathers – a sign of depression that may become serious
- or that it is housed with a more aggressive bird.

A bully will also often try to prevent other birds from sharing the best food and highest perches.

Ask the seller all questions that you need to before agreeing to purchase any bird.

Some very important considerations are the bird's age, whether it has been vaccinated and has the bird had any social training (playing and handling) by them.

Also, be sure to get the seller's contact details and ask them what is the best time to call so they know that you will call them if you have any problems and you can judge them according to the manner in which they respond to that question.

You also need full details of the foods that your new bird has been eating. It is not a good idea to abruptly change the type of food, especially for a young bird or one that is being moved to a new home.

Popular Parrot Varieties

African Grey



One of the most intelligent parrots. Constant interaction will be very well rewarded. They can start destructive chewing and feather plucking if the owner does not realise they need attention and interaction, and that they will become bored they ignored.

Also, they may be noisy. They could probably live up to 60 years and may grow to eighteen inches.

Amazon

Yellow Headed



Another very popular species, best suited for experienced parrot owners. Intelligent. They can amuse themselves. They need to be socialised when young to minimise their screeching because they are **LOUD**. All will probably sound off at least once a day. Allow them plenty of covered time for sleep or they can be bad-tempered.

Budgerigar (parakeet)



Descendant of the Australian Grass Parrot which was only green. A popular and prolific parrot species. Cheap to keep. Many colors available. Loyal to owner, devoted partners if one pair. Can be promiscuous in aviaries.

Nervous with strangers. Supervise careful when out of its cage; very inquisitive and can get into very small and dangerous places. Avoid drafts. The green baby parrot decorating this book is a "budgie".

Galah

Grow to about twelve inches and may live 45 years. Great pets if you give time to their training. They love humans, adept at talking and learning tricks.

Give them toys and suitable sticks to chew. Keep fat content of their diet low or they suffer. Hand-rearing provides best results.

Lorikeet

Australian varieties grow to eight inches long but tropical varieties grow up to twelve inches and better talkers. Energetic, intelligent and fun.

Its droppings are large and messy because of its fruit, vegetable and nectar diet. Cage must be kept very clean to prevent infections. A seed diet is bad for them. Experienced supervision needed but great pet if you give time to interacting with it.

Major Mitchell or Leadbeater's Cockatoo

Cute, especially when young, but it is best suited for aviary. Intelligent. Popular as a pet but more suited for aviary. It needs strong owner and can be ***noisy***! Will chew almost anything. Supervision essential but great fun to watch.

Macaws

Medium to Large. Intelligent. Strong. Chew anything. Supervision and interaction essential. After bonding period, very good with new visitors with their owner. Emotional and behaviour problems if ignored. Keep fat in diet below 10%. Many varied colors. Very popular.

White Sulphur Crested Cockatoo

Large, best suited for aviary. Intelligent. Good talkers and very noisy, live up to 70 years. Strong – will chew almost anything. Supervision essential with people, other birds and pets and, especially, children. They require on-going training and interaction but can be a great choice if you have the space the time and very understanding neighbors.

Visiting Your Vet

Your first visit to the Vet intend to use to maintain your parrot's health should be before you actually buy the bird.

You don't need to actually see the Vet personally but you need to be sure that they have;

- suitable premises,
- caring staff and
- specialist knowledge and equipment to handle any problems of you or your bird.

In North America, you can consult the Association of Avian Veterinarians' web site <http://www.aav.org> for information about;

- basic bird care
- how the specialist vets examine their bird patients and
- contact details for specialist avian veterinarians in your area.

Most veterinarians have free, informative brochures available from their premises.

You should also check with friends, relatives and work colleagues about their experience with vets in your area.

Some bird associations might have arrangements with particular vets in their area for discounts on certain regular veterinary services.

Other Members of your association will also be a good source of feedback about their experiences with particular vets.

Get as much reliable feedback as you can because you are certain to need some Vet services for your parrot on occasion and you should get the best you can because there's no such thing as inexpensive Veterinary services.

Your new Parrot Comes Home

Suddenly leaving the only home that you've ever known and leaving behind all of your own kind is traumatic for human or bird, especially if they are very young.

Everything should be ready for the new arrival, with their cage set up in an area that will give them human contact and supervision but where they are protected as far as possible from loud noises or unsupervised confrontations with young children or other pets.



Be supportive and respect your bird's need to have time to adjust to their new situation – it must be something like visiting a different planet and they're probably the only bird on it!

The bird should have a private area near the top of the cage which it can retreat to, especially during this period.

You should try to give it a routine and some basic ground-rules to focus on from the day it arrives.

Decide your parrot's new name and use it at every opportunity.

You might try to handle it but, unless the bird gives an immediate positive response, let it alone until the next day.

Never, ever physically punish any parrot – it will almost certainly create a permanent barrier to gaining its trust which is essential to build a fully comfortable relationship between you and the bird.

You are stronger, but if you feel you have to prove it by slapping the bird or any other aggressive act, you risk putting a permanent barrier between you and the bird.

Meet the Family

Before you introduce the bird to the rest of the humans it will share your house with, you need to have a session just for your family so they know what to do and what not to do around the new arrival.

All of the family must be made aware of the potential dangers facing the parrot around their home.

You also need to be sure they are all aware that they should:

- never pick up the bird unless it seems happy to be picked up
- Never rush toward the bird, yell at it or strike it
- Never to cuddle the bird. All parrots, especially the small ones, are liable to serious injury if their chest area is pressed.
- Never put the parrot on an unmade bed or a pile of clothing or drapery. Many pet parrots suffocate each year because they become trapped under these items or their owners fall asleep and roll on the bird when it is lying on or in the same bed.
- Try to be aware of the parrot's location, especially when it is out of its cage. Parrots can be squashed by people's shoes, scooters or tricycle (if they're ridden inside your home).
- Be extra careful that the bird is never near a door they are opening or closing. That door might crush the bird or offer a quickly accepted path to freedom and almost certain death from attacks by wild birds.
- Always use the parrot's name at every opportunity and speak in a friendly tone.
- Never raise their voice near the parrot or do anything that might scare it. Some parrots can be literally frightened to death.
- Always tell you or your partner if they notice anything about the bird's behaviour or appearance.

- not act or give any indication of fear or uncertainty around the parrot. If they feel any fear of the parrot, they should act brave and unconcerned. Parrots are highly intelligent and will act in a bullying way to anyone that acts fearful near them.
- Never leave other pets unsupervised near the parrot, even if it is locked in its cage. In fact, you must try to ensure that a responsible adult is always present in those situations. It's an unfair level of responsibility to put on a child.
- To accept that the parrot may seem to act as if it prefers some family members over others, maybe even over you!

You should arrange it so that all members that want to can share in some training and fun time with the parrot when it is ready. Bonding is a two-way street.

Untamed to Trained

As well as instilling a routine and basic ground-rules, you need to train your new parrot to behave in an acceptable manner around its new family and also with your visitors, whether they are friends that regularly drop in or trades-people that might only ever come once.

As I've already said, parrots are too smart for force or shouting to be effective for very long.

Such methods will also put barriers in the way of effective training even when more acceptable methods are used later.

I favour "positive re-enforcement" as the best way to encourage the results you want and reduce the parrot's tendencies to do things that we don't want them to.

If your bird does something that you need to discourage, such as attacking a piece of furniture with its beak, click your fingers or slap your hand against your leg, and then gently but firmly take the parrot away from its target to an area where it cannot do any damage.

When they do something you want them to do in the future, provide them with a reward (but don't overdo those).

If they screech or make sounds including words that you want to discourage, the worst tactic is to yell at the bird or become agitated. The bird will probably store that occurrence in its memory and do the same thing again at another time to try to provoke that reaction.

Slap your leg or snap your fingers. Don't pick it up because the bad behaviour is probably an attempt to get more attention.

When it does something you want it to repeat, you don't need to always give it a treat unless you want an overweight sickly parrot.

Just praise it and, if it's comfortable with being handled, then you can pat it or even cuddle it very gently.

To get started with training it to step on to your finger or a thick stick, wait until it is comfortable with gentle handling, then hold your forefinger (or your whole arm if you have a large parrot, across its body and gently push into its chest about half an inch.

The bird will, by reflex, raise one claw and put it on your finger or arm. Praise it and push very gently about the same distance again.

This should get the desired result but it may take some parrots more than a few tries to grasp the idea.

Don't keep trying for very longer. Shorter sessions will be better for you both, whatever it is that you are trying to train the bird to do.

Thanks from Maureen Pace

I hope you have enjoyed and learned some good information from my primer for new Parrot owners as much as I enjoyed putting it together.

I am sure that, with perseverance and good humor, you will develop a wonderful relationship with your parrot.



**Spread the word
Parrots are the
Perfect Pet.**



Maureen Pace

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