

# BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO PARROT KEEPING

BY DESI MILPACHER

## ***So You Want to Get a New Parrot!***

### **Before You Make the Decision to Get a Parrot, Ask Yourself These Questions:**

1. Am I willing to devote the time required for the proper care of a parrot?
2. Do I have the funds and other resources to properly care for a parrot?
3. Do I have the physical space to devote to a parrot?
4. Do I fully understand what is involved in caring for parrots, particularly parrots in captivity?
5. Realizing that parrots are very different from cats or dogs, am I willing to learn about parrot behaviour as best I can?
6. Do I have a family? Children? How will this impact them? The parrot?
7. If the parrot is noisy, how will this impact my family? Nearby residents?
8. Will the parrot get the attention it requires?
9. Will the parrot receive the veterinary care it requires? Is there an avian (parrot) vet nearby?
10. Will I always try to do what's best for the parrot?
11. Is my house parrot-safe? Am I willing to make it so?
12. Will the parrot be outside or in? For the area I live in, which is safer? Will my parrot be flighted, or will it have its wings clipped?
13. If something should happen to me, will my parrot be looked after? Am I willing to make arrangements in the event that my parrot should outlive me?

## ***Over 350 Species of Parrots! Which One?***

### **The Parrot Groups**

There are many groups of parrots, each with their own physical characteristics, habits and idiosyncrasies. They are:

- Lories and Lorikeets
- Cockatoos
- Pygmy and Fig Parrots
- Racquet-tailed Parrots
- *Tanygnathus* Parrots
- Eclectus Parrots
- King Parrots
- *Aprosmictus*, *Polytelis* and *Purpureicephalus* Parrots
- Ringneck Parakeets
- Rosellas
- *Psephotus* Parrots
- *Neophema* Parrots
- *Cyanoramphus* and *Eunymphicus* Parrots
- Budgerigars
- Cockatiels
- Swift, Night and Ground Parrots
- Vasa Parrots
- African Grey Parrots

- *Poicephalus* Parrots
- Lovebirds
- Hanging Parrots
- African and Asian Parakeets
- Macaws
- Conures
- Parrotlets
- *Brotogeris* Parakeets
- *Pionites* and *Nannopsittaca* Parrots
- *Pionopsitta* and *Graydidascalus* Parrots
- *Hapalopsittaca* Parrots
- *Pionus* Parrots
- Amazon Parrots
- Hawkheaded and Purple-bellied Parrots
- Various Neotropical Species

**This is quite the extensive list!** However, some of these species are not available in captivity. For the 220 or so that are, there is information on how to care for them on the World Parrot Trust website in the [All About Parrots > Parrot Encyclopedia](#) section, on a species-by-species basis (*Captive Care*).

Some species are easier to care for than others. People who are acquiring a parrot for the first time should stick with smaller, easier to handle species such as cockatiels, budgerigars, lovebirds and caiques. Cockatoos, macaws and Amazon parrots should be handled by people with experience. **The best way to start the process of owning your own parrot is to arm yourself with lots of information.**

#### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT A PARROT'S...

1. **Physical Requirements** - diet, exercise
2. **Psychological Needs** – environmental enrichment, socialization
3. **Health Concerns** – safety issues, disease, nutrition

#### 1. Physical Requirements

Physical requirements, diet and exercise differ for each of the 220 or so species of parrots kept in captivity. There are some similarities for each of the parrot groups -- cockatoos, Amazons, and so on. But in many ways each parrot will be as individual as you or I. What one Orange-winged Amazon likes, another may not.

**Without a proper diet, a captive parrot is prone to disease and nutrient deficiency.** To learn about diet and exercise requirements for parrots kept in captivity, see the World Parrot Trust website in the [All About Parrots > Parrot Encyclopedia](#) section, on a species-by-species basis (*Captive Care*).

## 2. Psychological Requirements

**Parrots are highly intelligent and active animals.** In the wild, their days are routinely spent travelling to and from feeding areas to forage and, during the breeding season, engage in courtship displays and mating. A parrot in captivity will have the urge to do these things, but will not be able to. So it is up to us to provide them with an outlet to expend this energy, through environmental enrichment or playing with toys. We can do this by providing safe, complex toys for the parrot to work on and climb all over, or with other visual or auditory stimulation. We can also help by providing the parrot with the largest cage or aviary possible. (This is particularly important for the larger species such as cockatoos and macaws.)

Parrots are, for the most part, very companionable animals. **Regular socialization with you and other members of your family is very important for a parrot's well being.** Again, different species will have different needs; it is up to you to find out what these requirements are. For information on socialization, and on safe and suitable toys for stimulating a captive parrot, see the World Parrot Trust website in the [All About Parrots > Parrot Encyclopedia](#) section, on a species-by-species basis (*Captive Care*).

## 3. Health Concerns

Having a parrot in the house may be likened to having a toddler who is just beginning to walk – with all of the accompanying dangers. A toddler that can fly, that is.

- **Windows and ceiling fans** – a parrot that is able to fly can pick up enough speed to do itself serious damage should it fly into a window or up into a ceiling fan that is running. While a parrot is out and about, windows should be covered, fans turned off, and drawstrings and cords carefully tucked away.
- **Kitchens and non-stick cooking utensils** – it's best **not to** have your parrot in the kitchen: the dangers are obvious and endless. Teflon® and other non-stick cookware give off fumes when heated which are toxic to your parrot. Cooking sprays are also harmful to their respiratory tracts. And, of course, the stove is off-limits to both kids and parrots.
- **Washrooms** – should be off-limits due to receptacles in which the parrot may become trapped and drown.
- **Electronics and cords** – as parrots are natural chewers, this one is obvious.
- **Heaters and appliances** – eliminate the chance of your parrot receiving burns and electrocution by keeping your pet situated well away from these dangers.

- **Cleaners and other toxic chemicals** – should always be kept locked up. Some cleaners are also very irritating to a parrot's respiratory tract, so if you must use them in your household, be sure your parrot is kept well away from them in a well-ventilated area.
- **Chocolate, coffee and other foods** – some foods are off-limits for pets, especially for parrots. Get to know which foods are known to be dangerous to parrots.
- **Toxic houseplants** – the less these are in the house, the better. Learn which common houseplants are known to be toxic to parrots.

**If possible, a parrot should have its own play area set up** – a parrot gym, for example, or some other stand where it can climb, play, vocalize and be safe, away from all the hazards mentioned above. And, of course, a parrot should never be left out of its cage or enclosure unattended. *Ever.*

**Like us, a parrot may become sick from time to time.** Learn to recognize these signs, which may indicate your parrot is ill:

- The bird is lethargic or less active than usual
- It may not be hungry
- It may not be thirsty
- It may sit hunched over, feathers puffed out
- It may sit on the floor of the cage and not move
- It exhibits a drastic change in behaviour at times other than the breeding season
- There are changes in the appearance and consistency of its droppings
- The bird has episodes of vomiting, regurgitation or diarrhoea
- It is sneezing or has nasal discharge
- It is unsteady on its feet

**If you notice any of these signs, an avian veterinarian should be consulted.**

## **WHERE TO ACQUIRE YOUR NEW PARROT**

1. Reputable Breeders
2. Buying Only Hand-raised, Weaned Birds
3. Buying or Adopting Healthy Birds
4. Assuring the Parrot Was Not Trapped in the Wild
5. Adoption from Parrot Rescue Centre

## **Reputable Breeders and Hand-raised, Weaned Birds**

**So, after careful consideration, you've made the decision to buy or adopt a parrot.** Where to look? There are a number of options available to you, depending on where you live. Many pet stores offer hand-raised, weaned youngsters for sale. Make sure the bird IS hand-raised and weaned. A hand-raised or parent-raised and human-socialized baby will make the best pet, as it will have had a lot of human contact. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions, and talk to the breeder if possible.

Many breeders will band their babies before they are sent to the pet store. A band is a closed ring that fits around the bird's leg. The closed (solid) band is a good way to tell if the bird was hatched in your country, as the band can only be slipped on the leg up to a certain age, usually about a couple of weeks of age. **If there are any doubts as to the origin of the bird, don't purchase it.**

## **Buy or Adopt Healthy Birds**

**You should also ensure the aviary the parrot came from is free of disease.** Illnesses could affect other pets you may have in the house, including other birds, and your family, as some diseases carried by parrots may be transmitted to people. This is especially important if you have newborn, elderly or immune-compromised people in your household. If possible, find out as much information about the facility your parrot came from. Leave no room for unpleasant surprises.

## **Don't Buy Wild-caught Parrots!**

**Buying a parrot that was trapped in the wild is never a good idea.** Parrots that have been brought in from the wild and sold as pets almost always do poorly due to mishandling and fear of humans. A wild parrot's journey from the wild to your living room, if it survives the trip, is cruel and inhumane. The sad fact is that the majority of parrots trapped in the wild die of malnutrition, rough handling and stress before they can be sold as pets.

## **Adoption from a Parrot Rescue**

**Another good option for acquiring a parrot is adoption from a parrot rescue.** Often people jump into parrot ownership without any concept of what proper parrot care involves. The parrot frequently ends up suffering for this. Many parrots end up in shelters or rescues, which may be crowded and understaffed. There are always parrots in need of a good home. Be sure you have extra resources and time to devote to an adopted parrot, which may have special needs.

## Resources to Help You Get the Best Information Available

1. World Parrot Trust (<http://www.parrots.org/>)
2. Parrots in Aviculture, by Rosemary Low (publication)
3. Parrot Toys and Play Areas, by Carol S. D'Arezzo and Lauren Shannon-Nunn (publication)
4. The Gabriel Foundation (<http://www.thegabrielfoundation.org/>)

### Bird Societies

Memberships and publications can help you obtain further information.

**The World Parrot Trust** (PsittaScene quarterly magazine) -- Glanmor House, Hayle, Cornwall, TR27 4HB, UK Tel: 01736 751026 [www.parrots.org](http://www.parrots.org)

**The Grey Play Round Table** (Natures Corner quarterly magazine) -- P.O. Box 139, Purchase, NY 10577-0139, USA Tel: 212-888-1784  
<http://www.naturescornermagazine.com/> or [www.africanature.com](http://www.africanature.com)

**Good Bird Magazine** (quarterly) -- Good Bird, Inc., P.O. Box 684394, Austin, TX 78768, USA Tel: 512-423-7734 [www.goodbirdinc.com](http://www.goodbirdinc.com)

**Parrots** (monthly) -- Imax Ltd, 12 Riverside Business Centre, Brighton Road, Shoreham-By-Sea, West Sussex, BN43 6RE, UK

**The Amazona Society** (Amazona quarterly) -- The Amazona Society, 235 North Walnut Street, Bryan, Ohio 43506, USA

**Australian BirdKeeper** (monthly) -- ABK Publications, P.O. Box 6288, Tweed Heads South, NSW 2486, Australia [www.birdkeeper.com.au](http://www.birdkeeper.com.au)

**The Avicultural Society** -- The Avicultural Society, Arcadia, The Mounts, East Allington, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 7QJ, UK [www.avisoc.co.uk](http://www.avisoc.co.uk)

### Additional Sources of Information

Local veterinarians, newspapers and other community publications - can be helpful if you are looking to purchase a bird from a breeder, or considering selling a bird to a new home. If you are considering purchasing a parrot, contact WPT for help and guidelines.

Reference - often available through libraries, books by noted aviculturist Rosemary Low are recommended for sensible, up-to-date advice. There are also videos available, including *Understanding Bird Behaviour and Training Through Possible Reinforcement*, by Steve Martin. The magazines *BirdTalk* and *BirdKeeper* are reputable sources of information.

If you do not know the sex of your bird, contact Avian Biotech in the UK for advice.  
Tel: +01872 262737

**Websites**

There are many websites where you can find information about parrots, their behaviour and requirements. Visit the World Parrot Trust website at <http://www.parrots.org/> for listings.

**Behaviour Training**

There are quite a few bird behaviourists and trainers around. They would be delighted to help you and your bird through the many problems that often arise. Contact the WPT for referrals.

**Rescue and Sanctuaries**

Please look into any rescue centre or sanctuary (as you should pet shops, breeders or any other potential location) before you send your bird there for re-homing or if you wish to rescue a bird. For referrals, contact Safe Haven Parrot Refuge. Tel: +01708 349596

**Bird Auctions**

We DO NOT recommend going to bird auctions where you will not be able to ensure that bird sellers are creditable or that birds are suitable for pets or breeding.

INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY: the World Parrot Trust

Please note: we are still gathering information for this page. If you have suggestions, please contact the World Parrot Trust.

*Copyright© 2005 World Parrot Trust*