

BIRD – HOUSING & HANDLING

HOUSING

Choose a heavily trafficked room in your home for the cages location. Birds are flock animals and you are their flock, therefore it is stressful for them to be separated from their flock. Having said this the kitchen is a poor choice because of potential dangers associated with cooking. The most common danger is from over heated Teflon surfaces. When overheated these pots give off a gas that is deadly to birds. Birds respiratory tracts are sensitive to impurities in the air. Smoking in the house is harmful for a pet bird.

The cage itself should be rectangular in shape. Round cages are discouraged because birds like corners and since birds fly across this is the most important dimension. Tall, thin cages are not good because birds do not fly up and down. The cage not be composed of galvanized wire because there is zinc in the coating that dissolves when wet and can then be ingested by the bird. Zinc toxicity is a common disease in pet birds. The bottom of the cage is best lined with inkless newspaper. Birds often enjoy shredding this and it is safe for them. Change the paper daily

so that fecal material does not dry out and become particulate and then airborne. This is important because birds carry a couple of diseases that are contagious to humans and can be transmitted in this manner. Clean cage and "furniture" weekly with a 5% bleach solution which is rinsed well. The size of the cage depends on the amount of time the bird will be spending in it. In general there should at least be enough room for the bird to easily flap their wings without interference. If the bird will be out frequently this is adequate. If the bird will be spending long periods of time in this cage provide enough space for flying and exercise.

Perches should be composed of natural, washed tree branches of various diameters. Maple trees are a good choice. Be aware that some tree barks are toxic. Manzanita branches are available at pet stores. This is a very hard natural wood branch (also very expensive). One cement perch (Polly perch) is recommended to provide a rough surface to polish beaks and nails. Sand paper perches are not recommended as they can contribute to sores on the feet, especially if there are too many of them in the cage. Arrange the perches so there is one up as high as possible (the bird will roost on this one at night), and others near the food and water. Do not overcrowd the cage with perches so there is still room to exercise the wings.

Grit is a controversial topic. It has not been determined whether it is necessary. The general consensus is that seed eating birds should have some grit, whereas birds on a pelleted diet probably don't need it. If you do offer grit, it should be placed in very small quantities (20 granules at a time) in a clean dish. The reason for this is that small birds who aren't feeling well will sometimes consume huge quantities at once resulting in an impaction which can be very serious.

Lighting requirements depend on whether the bird will be getting any natural light from the outdoors. Be aware that windows filter important rays so if your bird will not be spending any time outdoors a full spectrum fluorescent should be provided above the cage. Birds love routine so try to put them to bed and wake them up at a consistent time daily.

Toys are vital for a happy healthy bird. Birds are highly intelligent and easily bored. Bored birds are prone to behavioral problems such as feather picking. Toys should be carefully chosen to be safe and non-toxic. Have a large supply of them which can be frequently rotated so there is always something new and stimulating. Tooth brushed and shoe laces are two examples of safe toys.



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