

Adopting a Parrot; Much to Learn

Parrots and other domestic birds can make wonderful pets. If you have never owned a parrot, you will be charmed and entertained by their beauty and intelligence. However, the care that they require is very different from that of Dogs and Cats in order to maintain good health. **They require a long-term commitment due to the longevity of their lifespan.** This commitment also requires meeting their environmental and enrichment needs, as well as providing the right amount of sleep time, a proper diet, and protecting them from hazards. Above all, they need your love and companionship in order to be happy.

We ask that you review the following materials before adopting from GCCBC. This collection of information is not meant to discourage adoption, but is intended to educate the “unexperienced” and refresh the “experienced” bird owner in proper animal husbandry.

BEFORE ADOPTING; SOME CONSIDERATIONS:

- Parrots can be noisy and messy. Instinctively, many parrots are programmed to chew and shred wood and other items within their reach. Many like to fling food and seed husks.
- **Parrots are an exotic animal and require appropriate fresh food in addition to seed or pellets.**
- Vocalizing (squawking, chirping, talking) is an important part of any parrot’s social communication. **Consider the noise level you or others in your household are willing to accept** from a pet bird; some species can be very loud, while others can be quiet. However, “quiet” is a relative term.
- Some birds talk; some do not and may never. Even parrots species known for talking, may never talk. **This should NOT be the primary reason you want a pet bird.** You will need to accept any bird as an individual and provide unconditional love regardless of talking ability.
- **Pet birds require 10-12 hours of sleep** in a safe, quiet environment free from fear of other pets.
- Some birds shed a lot of a powder-like substance (ie. Cockatiels, Cockatoos, and African Grey are prone to this). All birds shed feathers and particles of the covering of a new feather (a silvery, shiny sheath on the new pin feathers), which may aggravate asthma and allergies in some people.
- Are you aware of the common **hazards** to birds in the home?
- Do you have an existing Avian Veterinarian? Do you know where the nearest Emergency Exotic care is located in your area?
- Will you be able to keep your bird if you must move?
- Birds need enrichment through toys and with interaction outside of the cage; will you have time daily for this purpose?
- **Learn about the species you are considering and possible behavioural issues** associated with that species. Separation anxiety, screaming, feather plucking, fear biting, and night-fright, are just some of the problem issues parrots in captivity have demonstrated.
- Some of our shelter birds may have had unhappy backgrounds but with patience can flourish in a forever home. Some are friendly and hand-tamed; others need patience and work to develop trust and build a bond with their new human companion(s). Learn how to “read” body language.
- **Continue to learn;** Our meetings offer a great forum for learning from top Avian specialists in the Chicagoland area, as well as other experienced bird owners. Please consider joining our club or another in your area.

We thank you for adopting from GCCBC and we hope to see you at one of our meetings.

For more information, visit us at www.gccbc.org, or “Like” us on Facebook.

CARING FOR YOUR BIRD

A guide to basic health information

Introducing the bird to a new home

- *Don't force anything the first couple days. Let the bird learn to trust the new environment. Talk gently and make the bird feel secure. This can help gain their trust and make them feel at home.*

Diet

- **Seed versus Pellet diet:** *There are varied opinions about which is best, however, only feeding seed and/or pellets is **NOT** sufficient to maintain health. **Your bird requires fresh fruits and vegetables, grains, and legumes** in addition to the seed or pelleted diet **DAILY**.*
- *If you are **changing a bird's diet...do it gradually**. **Never** switch from one food to another all at once. Consult your Avian Veterinarian for advice.*

➤ ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:

- **Fresh whole food** –*Fresh is better than frozen, Frozen is better than canned. Be sure to purchase food that is sodium free and preferably organic. Wash thoroughly before serving. See PAGE 7 for recommended fruits and veggies.*
- **Fresh water daily**
- **Raw and salt free Walnuts & Almonds** (*Some experts believe that Peanuts are best avoided due to their fat content; these nuts are a healthier choice*)
 - *The truth is that peanuts (particularly the animal grade peanuts in more parrot mixes) are loaded with aflatoxins - molds that can kill your parrots.⁸*
- *Treats, such as Lafeber's Nutri-Berries[®], Avicakes[®], and Millet.*
- *Calcium (Cuddle bones) or mineral blocks (especially in birds prone to egg laying)*
- *Other supplements recommended by your avian veterinarian.*
- *Foraging opportunities – Parrots like to “Work for food”.*

AVOID:

- **dairy** (parrots are lactose intolerant)
- **Caffeine**
- **Alcohol** (and products containing alcohol in their ingredients)
- **Avocado**
- **Chocolate** (Highly Toxic)
- **processed meats**
- **junk food**
- **wild bird seed** (use **ONLY** seed that is enriched for the type of bird intended)

Rules for Feeding Table Foods:⁴

- *Nothing greasy, salty or sugary*
- *Stick with “health food” type diet*
- *Give a wide variety of foods*
- *Introduce new foods gradually*
- *Do not leave fresh food in the cage for more than 4 hours (especially high protein foods), then remove and clean the dishes for the next meal. Remove all food from the cage in the evening.*

Environment

➤ Cage information - Placement

- **AVOID** Drafty areas and areas where the bird will be isolated or in danger from other pets or fumes.
- **AVOID the kitchen:**
 - The kitchen is one of the worst places to place a bird cage. Dangers include natural gas (stove or water heater), carbon monoxide, overheated or burning food, overheated PTFE, cleaning agents, and aerosols.¹
- **Watch for wear and tear** of the cage as parts may become damaged and pose a hazard. The cage should be placed in an area free from cold steady "drafts" and sites with potential for exposure to fumes or gases.¹

➤ Proper cage size and bar widths

- **Size Matters - Purchase the largest bird cage, suitable for the species of bird you own, that you can afford and comfortably accommodate in your home. A pet bird needs enough room to fully extend and flap her wings inside the cage. Add some square footage for bird toys, extra dishes, several perches, a swing perhaps and maybe even a sleeping "tent."**⁶

Proper Bar Widths (Chart Source: <http://www.drsofostersmith.com/pic/article.cfm?c=5059&articleid=223&d=157>)

Bird Size	Bar Spacing	Bar Diameter
Finch, canary, parrotlet, parakeet, lovebird	no more than 5/8"	1/2" to 1"
Cockatiel, conure, lory, senegal	1/2" to no more than 7/8"	3/4" to 1.5"
African Grey, Amazon, macaw, cockatoo	3/4" to no more than 1-3/8"	1.5" to 3"

- **Proper size perches & materials**
Provide a variety of sizes for good exercise of the feet. Purchase perches that are meant to be used for birds; do not use metal rods, varnished wood, or other "make-shift" type items. These are NOT safe to use as perches. Commercially produced perches made of approved materials are the safest for your bird. (However, some perches can be home made, but must be done with prior knowledge of the proper safe materials to use. See the **Plants and Trees That are Hazardous for PARROTS** attachment for woods to avoid using.)
- For more details about cage types, accessories and other products for birds, see the links at the end of this document.

➤ Proper cleaning

- **Birds kept in filthy conditions are prone to picking up disease.** Cage papers should be checked and changed daily. If wood chips, shavings, corn cob or similar substrates are used they should be changed regularly. Regular cage cleanings should be performed.¹
- Dirty food and water cups are a prime source of infection for pet birds. **Cups should be thoroughly cleaned daily.** Cups should be covered or placed strategically to avoid fecal contamination.¹

"The bottom of the cage should be lined with a disposable paper such as newspaper or paper towel that can be thrown away every day."

Source: <http://nilesanimalhospital.com/pet-health-resources/pet-health-articles/articles/?rid=806>

➤ Sleep and Light requirements

- **Light exposure and sleep are very important to birds.** Birds need at least 4 hours exposure to UVA and UVB rays from sunlight or full-spectrum lighting to provide them with vitamin D, which promotes vitamin A absorption, critical for upper respiratory health. Birds must have a minimum of 10 hours of sleep each night.⁹

➤ SAFE out-of-cage time & Enrichment

Supervise out-of-cage time... do not leave a bird out of its cage while no one is home or nearby. They are curious creatures and also like to chew...anything, such as electrical cords, varnished furniture, and other inappropriate items that are hazardous. They also like to hide in small spaces at times; be extra careful with rocking recliner chairs, moving furniture, and the like. **Know hazards in advance and keep your new friend safe.**

- **Closely monitor birds in households with other pets.** Cats, ferrets, dogs, and other birds have caused severe and sometimes fatal injuries to birds that are not properly monitored.¹
- **Supervise interaction with young children.**
- **No parrot toy is 100% safe.** Please observe your parrot playing with every new type of toy you introduce to his environment before you leave him alone with it. Check old toys often for frayed cotton rope or long strands of any material. Birds have been known to get pieces of string or threads wrapped around their toes, necks and wings. There is no need to be paranoid or overly suspicious of every toy, just be knowledgeable and careful, and use good sense.²
- **AVOID** hanging “loops” of rope or anything that could strangle your bird; avoid using coat hangers or inappropriate materials to connect items in a cage. Avoid metal items that could contain Lead. Avoid using curtain rod hangers to connect toys that a bird’s head will fit into.
- **Birds that fly free are at great risk to be severely injured.** Mirrors, windows, ceiling fans, and other objects can be dangerous to free-flying birds.¹

****Please note; Some birds may have free-flight but ONLY WHEN TRAINED. Do your research before letting a flighted / unclipped bird fly around, inside or outside.**

- **AVOID** running any **ceiling fans or other fans** while birds are out of the cage.

General Household Hazards

- **AVOID** any use of heated **TEFLON** coated appliances in the same air space with your bird.
- **AVOID Ionized** air cleaners...Ionized air is not good for birds. The only safe thing to do is **not use Ozone** air cleaners. Standard HEPA air filters are a much safer choice.³
- **AVOID** using **chemicals (ie. pesticides), air fresheners; plug-ins and sprays, and candles** (soy based candles are the exception), around your bird. Take care if you have a fire place; this can cause drafts and fumes. Do not spray perfume or hair spray anywhere near birds.
- **AVOID** using any **household Paints** in the same air space or where the fumes could drift into the air space where your birds are located. You must move your birds out of your home if you are having home improvements done, such as carpet installation, painting, staining furniture or cabinets, sanding, or any other interior home construction, until the danger of fumes is completely gone. Water based paints should be chosen over other compounds. Pet birds have been negatively affected even when exposed for a short time to these type of fumes.
- **AVOID** use of **oven cleaner** or any **aerosol spray cleaners** in the same air space with birds.
- **Many birds naturally eat plants as part of their diet.** Some birds will chew on and possibly consume plants out of curiosity or in the course of play. Birds left unsupervised out of their cage may easily encounter plants kept around the house and in the garden.¹

- Plants and Trees That are Hazardous for PARROTS (see attached list – PAGE 6)
- Food Hazards (see PAGE 1)
- Additional Informational documents provided by Jason J. Crean, MA, MS; TASC
 - *Parrots Produce, Edible Flowers, Tea article, Benefits of Coconut Oil***

HELPFUL LINKS:

Greater Chicago Caged Bird Club website: <http://www.gccbc.org/links.html>

Species Education and more: <http://www.birdchannel.com>

Avian Articles:

<http://nilesanimalhospital.com/pet-health-resources/articles/avian-articles/>

<http://www.scottemcdonald.com/articles.html>

<http://www.thepoliteparrot.com/pages/posts/the-importance-of-a-good-nights-sleep4.php>

Recognize common signs of serious illness in birds

Seek **immediate AVIAN veterinary care** if you notice any of the following:

- *bird seems weak*
- *stays on the bottom of the cage not perching*
- *bird is fluffed up while perching for long period of time*
- *sleeps excessively*
- *bird isn't talking or vocalizing as normal*
- *droppings appear unusual – Loose, have blood in them, strange color that wasn't caused by food coloration.*
- *bird appears to be straining to pass stool or an egg*

Chicagoland Area Avian Veterinarians:

NORTH:

<http://nilesanimalhospital.com/>

<http://www.exoticpetvet.com/>

<http://www.midwestexotichospital.com> **Emergency Vet Phone:** (708) 453-4755

<http://www.animalhouseofchicago.com>

WEST:

<http://www.scottemcdonald.com/> (*travels often –availability limited*)

<http://www.downersgrovevet.com/> (*All Creatures Great and Small – Dr. Ken Eisenberg*)

<http://www.nessexotic.com/>

REFERENCES:

¹Source: <http://nilesanimalhospital.com/pet-health-resources/articles/avian-articles/>

²Source: http://www.parrots.org/pdfs/all_about_parrots/reference_library/behaviour_and_environmental_enrichment/Parrot_Enrichment_Activity_Book.pdf

³Source: <http://www.greenandhealthy.info/toxinozone.html>

⁴Source: <http://www.midwestexotichospital.com/birds.html>

⁵Source: <http://www.birdsnways.com/articles/plntstox.htm>

(Sources: *American Medical Association Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants;*

R. Dean Axelson, *Caring for Your Pet Bird*; Gallerstein, Gary A., DVM, *The Complete Bird Owner's Handbook*; Garry Gallerstein, *Bird Owner's Home Health and Care Handbook*; Greg and Linda Harrison, eds, *Clinical Avian Medicine and Surgery*; Gillian Willis; Wade and Carol Olyer *Parrot Pleasures, Safe Wood Products* and more)

⁶Source: <http://www.birdchannel.com/bird-housing/bird-cages/choosing-bird-cage-guide.aspx>

⁷Source: <http://www.scottemcdonald.com/articles.html>

⁸Source: <https://companionparrotonline.com/Dangers.html>

⁹Source: <https://www.petfinder.com/pet-adoption/other-pet-adoption/bird-adoption-tips/>

**Source: Jason J. Crean, MA, MS; TASC

Plants and Trees That are Hazardous for PARROTS

Some plants are **toxic to your bird**. Following is a list of indoor and outdoor **plants and trees** which are hazardous to birds. It has been gathered from various sources and is by no means complete.⁵

AVOID:

<p>Amaryllis – bulbs Alacia Apricot American Yew Autumn Crocus/Meadow Saffron Avocado Azalea - leaves Balsam Pear - seeds, outer rind of fruit Baneberry - berries, root Beans - all types if uncooked Birch Bird of Paradise - seeds Black Locust - bark, sprouts, foliage Bittersweet Nightshade Bleeding Heart/Dutchman's Breeches Bloodroot Blue-green Algae - some forms toxic Boxwood - leaves, stems Bracken Fern Broomcorn Grass Buckthorn - fruit, bark Buttercup - sap, bulbs Caladium - leaves Calla Lily - leaves Castor Bean - also castor oil, leaves Chalice Vine/Trumpet vine Candelabra Tree Cardinal Flower Cherry Tree - bark, twigs, leaves, pits Chinaberry Tree Christmas Candle - sap Clematis/Virginia Bower Coral Plant - seeds Cowslip/Marsh Marigold Crown of Thorns Croton Daffodil - bulbs Daphne - berries Datura - berries Deadly Amanita Death Camas Delphinium Deffenbachia/Dumb Cane - leaves Eggplant - fruit okay Elderberry Elephants Ear/Taro - leaves, stem English Ivy berries, leaves English Yew Euonymus/Spindle Tree False Hellebore False Henbane Fly Agaric Mushroom - Deadly Amanita</p>	<p>Ficus (weeping) Firethorn/Pyracantha Foxglove - leaves, seeds Four O'Clock Glory Bean Golden Chain/Laburnum Ground Cherry Hemlock - also water the plant is in Henbane - seeds Holly - berries Honey Locust Honeysuckle Horse Chestnut/Buckeye - nuts, twigs Hyacinth - bulbs Horsetail Hydrangea - flower bud Indian Turnip/Jack-in-Pulpit Indian Licorice Bean Iris/Blue Flag – bulbs Ivy Jack-in-the-Pulpit Japanese Yew - needles, seeds Jasmine Java Bean - lima bean - uncooked Jimsonweed/Thornapple Jerusalem Cherry - berries Johnson Grass Juniper - needles, stems, berries Kentucky Coffee Tree Lantana - immature berries Larkspur Laurel Lily of the Valley - also water the plant is in Lobelia Locoweed Lords and Ladies/Cuckoopint Lupines/Bluebonnet Mandrake Marijuana/Hemp - leaves Mayapple - fruit is safe Mescal Beans - seeds Mistletoe - berries Mock Orange - fruit Monkshood/Aconite - leaves, root Morning Glory Mango Tree - <i>wood, leaves, rind-fruit safe</i> Moonseed Mountain Laurel Mushrooms - several varieties Narcissus - bulbs Nightshade - all varieties Nectarine Nettles Nutmeg</p>	<p>Oak - acorns, foliage Oleander - leaves, branches, nectar Peach Pencil Tree Periwinkle Philodendron - leaves and stem Pigweed Pikeweed Pine needles - berries Plum Pointsetta - leaves, roots, immature Poison Ivy - sap Poison Oak - sap Pokeweed/Inkberry - leaf, root, young berries Potato - eyes, new shoots Pothos Privet Prune Rain Tree Ranunculus/Buttercup Red Maple Rhododendron Rhubarb - leaves Rosary Peas/Indian Licorice - seeds Skunk Cabbage Snowdrop Snow on the Mountain/Ghostweed Sweet Pea - seeds, fruit Tobacco - leaves Virginia Creeper - sap Water Hemlock Western Yew Wisteria Yam bean - roots, immature roots Sandbox Tree Scarlet Runner Beans Snowflake Sorghum Grass Sorrel Sudan Grass Tansy Ragwort Vetch Yello Jasmine Yew (Amer,Engl,Japan) - needles, thistles</p>
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Sources: *American Medical Association Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants*; R. Dean Axelson, *Caring for Your Pet Bird*; Gallerstein, Gary A., DVM, *The Complete Bird Owner's Handbook*; Garry Gallerstein, *Bird Owner's Home Health and Care Handbook*; Greg and Linda Harrison, eds, *Clinical Avian Medicine and Surgery*; Gillian Willis; Wade and Carol Olyer *Parrot Pleasures, Safe Wood Products and more*

Suggested List of Foods for Parrots:

alfalfa apple apricots asparagus* banana beans (cooked) such as: chick peas kidney lentils lima mung navy soy beet blackberries blueberry broccoli brussel sprouts cabbage cantaloupe carrot carrot tops	cherries (not the pit) Chinese vegetables (bok choy) coriander coconut corn cucumber dandelion leaves/flower dates endive fig grapes grapefruit kale kiwi lemon melons mango mustard greens nectarines orange papaya parsley (in moderation)	parsnip peaches pear peas peppers (red/green & hot) persimmons pineapple plum pomegranate potato pumpkin rapini raspberry rice (brown) romaine lettuce spinach* sprouted seeds squash strawberry sweet potato tomato turnip zucchini
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Source: <http://nilesanimalhospital.com/pet-health-resources/pet-health-articles/articles/?rid=868>

Remove pits from fruit...in most cases, they can be toxic.

Please see additional informational sheets provided by Jason J. Crean

* views vary about these being safe...use sparingly or avoid completely. Research to decide.

Coconut Oil – Benefits for Mammalian & Avian Physiology

For thousands of years, coconuts have been a staple of tropical cuisines, and those who followed a traditional coconut-based diet, such as Pacific Islanders, had none of the heart disease, cancer, diabetes, or other illnesses that plague modern America.

According to its advocates, when taken internally, coconut oil:

- Reduces the *risk of cancer* and other degenerative conditions
- Improves *cholesterol* levels and helps fight heart disease
- Improves *digestion* and nutrient absorption
- Heals *digestive disorders* like Crohn's disease, irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers, and colitis
- Contains *powerful antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal* agents that prevent infection and disease
- Relieves *arthritis*
- Prevents and treats *yeast and fungal* infections, including thrush and candidiasis
- Prevents and treats *viral infections*, including herpes, measles, and the flu
- Helps balance the body's *metabolism and hormones*
- Promotes normal *thyroid function*
- Helps prevent or control *diabetes*
- Rejuvenates the skin *and protects against skin cancer*, age spots, acne, and other blemishes
- Helps prevent *osteoporosis*
- Reduces *allergic reactions*
- Supplies *fewer calories* than other fats.

Applied topically, its boosters say that coconut oil also does the following:

- *Disinfects cuts*
- Promotes wound *healing*
- Improves *skin health* and hair condition
- *Deodorizes* whatever it touches (some people brush their teeth with it or use it as an underarm deodorant)
- *Clears up skin conditions* like warts, moles, psoriasis, eczema, dandruff, precancerous lesions, athlete's foot, jock itch, diaper rash, ringworm, vaginal yeast infections, and toenail fungus.

All of this is excellent news for people and their pets, for most of coconut oil's human benefits are shared by animals. And they love the taste, which makes feeding coconut oil and other coconut products easy and pleasant.

Medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs)

Most of coconut oil's health benefits come from medium-chain fatty acids (MCFAs), also known as medium-chain triglycerides (MCTs). According to former University of Maryland biochemist and dietary fats researcher Mary Enig, PhD, "The lauric acid in coconut oil is used by the body to make the same disease-fighting fatty acid derivative monolaurin that babies make from the lauric acid they get from their mothers' milk. The monoglyceride monolaurin is the substance that keeps infants from getting viral, bacterial, or protozoal infections."

Coconut oil's capric and caprylic acid have similar properties and are best known for their antifungal effects. Like lauric acid, capric acid helps balance insulin levels.

In addition to protecting the body against infection, medium-chain fatty acids are efficiently metabolized to provide an immediate source of fuel and energy, enhancing athletic performance and aiding weight loss. In fact, several coconut diet books are now in print.

"The energy boost you get from coconut oil is not like the kick you get from caffeine," says Dr. Fife. "It gently elevates the metabolism, provides a higher level of energy and vitality, protects you from illness, and speeds healing. In dogs, the medium-chain fatty acids in coconut oil balance the thyroid, helping overweight dogs lose weight and helping sedentary dogs feel energetic. As a bonus, coconut oil improves any dog's skin and coat, improves digestion, and reduces allergic reactions."

During the last few decades, extensive research on medium-chain fatty acids has documented their health benefits, and many supplements and health foods contain MCFAs or MCTs. You'll find them listed that way on their labels – but their source, which isn't listed, is always coconut oil. "We've become so phobic about coconut oil," says Dr. Fife, "that manufacturers who appreciate its benefits have been smuggling it into all kinds of products. Start reading labels and you'll be surprised at all the MCFAs and MCTs. Those abbreviations always mean coconut oil."

How long have people been consuming coconut oil?

Coconut oil is an edible oil that has been consumed in tropical places for thousands of years. Studies done on native diets high in coconut consumption show that these populations are generally in good health, and don't suffer as much from many of the modern diseases of western nations.

Coconut oil was once prevalent in western countries like the United States as well. With a long shelf life and a melting point of only 76 degrees, it was a favorite in the baking industry. But a negative campaign against saturated fats in general, and the tropical oils in particular, led to most food manufacturers abandoning coconut oil in recent years in favor of hydrogenated polyunsaturated oils that come from the main cash crops in the US, particularly soy, and contain trans fatty acids. These polyunsaturated oils were not a big part of the diet of previous generations, so how has the health of Americans changed now that polyunsaturated oils are for the most part all one finds on supermarket shelves across the US?

Other favorable oils for birds:

- Borage oil
- Primrose oil
- Hemp oil
- Flax oil
- Red palm oil



Oils are typically available in organic form and are usually available in the refrigerated section of health food stores.

Credit: the Whole Dog Journal