



Canobie Lake Veterinary Hospital  
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### **Introduction to Bird Care**

#### Water

Water should be available at all times. It should be changed at least once daily. Cups and bowls should be cleaned once a day with mild soapy water and rinsed thoroughly. We do not recommend adding any supplements (vitamins, minerals or antibiotics) to water; this could cause an aversion to water.

#### Food

A lot of controversy exists over the ideal diet for a bird. We recommend feeding a high quality pelleted diet like Harrison's or Lafeber. There are several other pelleted diets available, but we prefer Harrison's or Lafeber due to their high quality. Examples of other pelleted diets include Kaytee, Pretty Bird, Zupreem, Scenic and Roudybush. These diets can be fed alone or can be fed in combination with human food and seed mix. As a general guideline, your bird's diet can consist of 1/3 pellet, 1/3 people food and 1/3 seed mix. Seed should not make up more than approximately 30% of the diet. In fact, birds do not need seed in their diet at all. If you are buying a pelleted/seed mix, please make sure it is in the right proportion. Seeds are high in fat and low in nutrients. Try to feed a seed mix that is low in or has no sunflower seeds. The human food you offer your bird can consist of rice, pasta, vegetables, fruits, cheese, eggs (fully cooked), bread (whole grains better than white) and cereal. NEVER FEED: avocados, eggplant, chocolate or sugary items. Food should be changed at least once a day. Twice daily changes are preferred, especially in the summer. Do not let food dropped by the bird sit on the bottom of the cage, as this can harbor bacteria.

#### Seed

Many birds are addicted to seed. We recommend that you convert your bird to a pelleted diet or at minimum to a variety of human foods. You can offer the seed mix twice a day

for 15 minutes. Leave the pelleted diet in the cage at all times. Slowly reduce the amount of time you offer seed. It can take up to two years to convert your bird. Patience is the key! Seed mix should be thought of as a treat or dessert item, not a main food source. This is for all caged birds.

## Vitamins

If on a well-balanced diet, vitamins are not necessary. However, if your bird is a seed-only eater, you should consider a vitamin supplement.

## Wing Clips, Nail & Beak Trims

A proper wing clip will prevent your bird from flying into windows, fans, mirrors and other hazards. No wing clip can be guaranteed to prevent flight. Some birds can fly with very few feathers. In addition, a bird can grow new feathers year-round. A bird that could not fly yesterday may fly today. Wing clips usually need to be done after a molt. This may be as little as once a year or 2 to 3 times a year. Nail trims are essential if you handle your bird frequently. Usually nail trims are needed every 1-2 months.

Beaks rarely need to be trimmed. If your bird has an abnormally long beak because of a genetic or medical condition, it may need trimming. Beak trims, wing trims and nail trims should only be done by a trained professional. Make sure you completely trust anyone doing a wing trim on your bird. A poor wing trim can lead to several medical conditions.

## Blood Feathers

Blood feathers are young, growing, primary feathers. There is an artery that supplies blood to the immature feathers. As the feathers mature, this artery is lost. Blood feathers are characterized by their dark blue shaft. If a blood feather is broken or accidentally cut, it usually must be pulled. Call your veterinarian or emergency center if this occurs. You can also use flour or cornstarch to temporarily stop the bleeding.

## Caging

Be sure to purchase a cage that is made specifically for birds. Other cages may contain metal parts that are toxic to birds. The cage your bird lives in needs to be large enough to allow him or her to move freely both horizontally and vertically. Be sure the cage is in good condition (no rust or broken pieces) and strong enough to contain your bird. Confirm that the cage does not contain any lead or zinc in its construction. These metals are highly toxic to birds.

## Lining the Cage

Paper is the best choice to line the cage. Paper is easy to change daily and also makes it easy to monitor the quality of your birds' droppings. Corn cob or any other scoopable product is NOT recommended.

## Perches

Natural branches obtained from a pet supply store or a live tree that has not been treated with anything (pesticides) are recommended. Terracotta perches also work well. A variation in size along a branch will exercise the feet better than a straight plastic or wooden perch of the same size. Sandpaper perches should not be used as they irritate the pads of the feet. Perches should be arranged at various heights. They should not be placed over food or water bowls. They must be cleaned regularly. Try to achieve a variety of perch sizes and shapes so that your bird's feet are properly exercised.

## Exams

A thorough exam by a veterinarian who is familiar and comfortable with birds is recommended. It is important to establish the health status of your bird shortly after purchase. This can be done with an exam, fecal stains and bloodwork. Annual exams are also recommended as birds instinctively hide signs of illness.

## Vaccines

Although vaccines are available for some avian diseases, they are usually used only in special circumstances.

## Spotting a Problem

Avian diseases often progress very quickly. Because birds hide signs of their illnesses, early signs are often very subtle.

Be familiar with what is normal for your bird. Know your bird's normal activity level, droppings (number, color and size) amount of food and water consumed and vocalizations. Although in an otherwise healthy bird a change in any one of these can be perfectly normal, they should be seen as a warning. If new signs develop or no improvement is seen within a 24-48 hour period, a veterinary exam is warranted.

Signs of more serious problems include: fluffed feathers, birds on the bottom of the cage, heavy breathing, tail bobbing, closed eyes, wings being spread out, bleeding from anywhere or abnormal discharges. A veterinarian should see such birds as soon as possible.

## Emergency Service

It is difficult to find an emergency service that will see birds. If you have a medical emergency during non-business hours, please call Angell Memorial Hospital in Boston: 617-522-7282.

### Toys

Toys are also essential to your bird's health. A good selection of safe, sturdy, non-toxic toys that are suitable to your bird's size are recommended. Avoid toys containing lead or zinc. Buy toys designed for birds from reputable pet supply dealers. Toys must also be cleaned regularly.

### Cage Cleaning

Cages and contents should be cleaned on a regular basis. Weekly cleanings are recommended. The cage can be cleaned with a detergent soap. Use a brush to remove caked on droppings or food. The cage can be disinfected with bleach (1 cup per gallon of water.)

### For More Information

We recommend the following book by Brian Speer and Gina Spadafori. It is available at most bookstores and some pet stores as well:

Birds for Dummies, Speer and Spadafori, Wiley, John & Sons, Incorporated, September 1999, ISBN: 0764551396.