

## Some Guidelines to Consider When Buying A Pet Bird

### Introduction

Birds are considered the pet of the 1990's. There is a distinct movement towards having smaller pets, with a growing popularity in cats, birds, fish, reptiles and small mammals. Birds are popular due to several factors. They have a wide range of size, color and temperament. They possess the ability to talk or have a wonderful singing/whistling ability. Birds are social animals and are very interactive. Bird care is relatively easy and they can be housed in a small area. Birds also can have a long life span, rivaling that of humans.

Birds can be expensive and they are a lifetime investment. Choosing a bird should not be an impulse buy. The decision should be fully thought out. Some guidelines listed below should help you make an educated decision if a bird is for you.

Birds are intelligent flock creatures and they need interaction. The larger and more personable, the more attention the bird requires. Birds are not merely an ornament. You must make the commitment to spend time interacting with your bird on a regular basis. Birds that are not given quality time become emotionally frustrated and develop bad habits, e.g. feather picking.

Initially large birds can be quite expensive. Cost of bird, cage, toys and initial veterinary examination. After initial outlay, costs are not that expensive.

Does your apartment/condo allow pets? Are there restrictions vs. birds? Check your lease and also see if an animal deposit is required.

Some birds can be quite noisy or are notorious screamers. You should research the variety of bird as to its 'noise potential'. Apartment/condo dwellers could have problems with their neighbors if they had a large, vocal bird.

Do you have adequate space for the type of bird and cage that you want? You should provide ample time and space for activity outside the cage. Never completely trust dogs, cats or ferrets around birds. Always supervise the bird when out with other animals, including other birds which can become very jealous.

### Children

Some birds have difficulty adjusting to rowdy children. A family oriented bird can fit in well but may frequently be as noisy as the kids. Sometimes it may be difficult to find a home for a bird that may be too aggressive or nervous in the family environment. Children must be old enough to understand that they should stay away from their strong beaks. Never completely trust a large parrot around small children. Even a small nip could cause significant damage to their small fingers, ears or eyes/eyelids.

### Allergies

Cockatoos, cockatiels, and African Greys are likely to cause allergic reactions in sensitive individuals. Feather allergies are fairly common.

### Cleaning

Are you willing to make the commitment to regularly clean the cage papers and the food/water cups? Will you periodically give a thorough cleaning to the bird cage, a special challenge when you have a large bird/large cage?

### Nutrition

One of the most common disease conditions we see in pet birds is Malnutrition. A seed and plain water diet is inadequate for pet birds. You must educate yourself in the nutritional needs of the variety of bird that you have. You must provide a balanced source of nutrition that is clean, fresh and stored properly. Good nutrition will provide your bird with better resistance to disease and a longer and healthier life.

### Veterinary Care

You must provide regular veterinary care for your bird. Yearly physical examinations are strongly recommended, including blood work and fecal examination. New birds should be checked by a veterinarian soon after purchase within the guarantee period. You should learn the signs of illness in pet birds and seek veterinary care if you suspect illness. Birds are actually hardy creatures but if diseases are ignored (or unrecognized) the bird can become so ill that recovery is difficult

### Longevity

There is a wide range of life spans in pet birds. Some of the larger

birds have life spans that are equivalent to humans. Realize that this will be a long term commitment. Arrangements should be made for the care of your bird if its life span exceeds yours.

### Source of Bird

**Pet Store/Breeder:** This is the most common source. Quality pet stores and breeders will sell quality birds and stand behind them. Deal with reputable sources and check references. At the time of purchase you should receive a written guarantee that you should abide by.

**Bird Show/Flea Market:** Some breeders sell their birds here. Deal with reputable sources. Get a written guarantee and a contact phone number if there is a problem.

**Previously owned birds:** If the bird is older it may have a behavioral problem, some undesirable traits, or a medical problem. Sale should be contingent upon a veterinary examination and a written guarantee obtained. Obtain a medical history and as much background information as possible.

**Questionable origin:** Sold from motel rooms or off the streets. These birds should be avoided as there is a good chance that they were smuggled and could be carrying disease.

### Experience

Your past experience should dictate what type of bird you should get. If you are a novice a smaller bird is preferable as large birds can be quite demanding. If you are unable to control a large bird it could become very aggressive and your relationship with it a poor one. Experienced bird owners will do better with larger birds.

### Which Type of Bird

It is all a matter of preference as each bird has its own special attributes and attractions. Research the type of bird that you are interested in and learn the positives AND the negatives. Rely on other experienced bird owners, breeders, pet stores and veterinarians for recommendations. After you evaluate your needs and wants, your capabilities, and your housing situation, then an intelligent decision can be made. It is so unfortunate when someone has to give up a bird because it was a poor match at the start due to poor planning - both you and the bird suffer.

### Baby Bird - Purchase Already Weaned or Hand Feed at Home?

Baby birds are a pleasure as they are affectionate, very tame and interactive. You can sometimes purchase baby birds that are still being fed formula (hand feeding) and you could continue at home. This has great potential for problems if you are not skilled with birds. Novices should get a weaned baby bird. If you want to hand raise, then you should spend time with the breeder or pet store and practice hand feeding under their guidance before you do it at home alone. Newly weaned birds, even though not on hand feedings any more, are still as affectionate.

### Talking Ability

Many people want this in a bird. A good talker is frequently a noisy bird and can quite often be aggressive, especially Macaws and Amazons. Even though a bird is supposed to be a talker there is no guarantee that it will.

### Conclusion

Hopefully these basic guidelines will be helpful when you decide to purchase a bird. I tell people that bird ownership is a sickness, because as you experience it, you want to obtain more and different varieties. I myself suffer from this sickness, and what a great sickness it is! However, there are still numerous birds that people are selling or giving away because the relationship was a poor one. Even worse, birds die due to inadequate and improper care. These owners did not fully research the type of bird and did not understand all the needs, or were just too inexperienced for the variety of bird they purchased. With proper preparation you will engage in a long, wonderful relationship with a highly intelligent, interactive and loving companion animal.

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