



Birds



How would you like to own a pet with built-in air conditioning? Yes, some bird bones are hollow and their bodies have air sacs, or pockets. The lungs pump cool air into the bones and air pockets. The hollow bones make birds lighter so they can fly easier.

Birds have been popular as family pets since ancient times, because of their beauty and singing ability. Birds are animals with feathers. There are over 9,000 species.

Selection

As a beginning bird owner, you should start with one of the popular pet breeds:

- *Parakeets* are affectionate birds that can be trained to talk and do tricks. They come in a variety of solid and mixed colors, such as green, yellow, blue and white. 
- *Canaries* are noted for their singing. There are two voices; the chopper and the warbler. When selecting your canary, remember that only male birds sing. If you want a singing bird; make sure the canary sings before you buy it. Canaries come in several different colors and color markings. One of the most popular colors is a shade of yellow or orange with black and olive markings. You may select a red, white, or blue canary. 
- *Finches* are smaller than parakeets and canaries. They are active and have feathers of blue, green, orange, yellow and red. They constantly call and chirp to one another.
- *Parrots*. Besides the parakeets, there are four other classes of parrots. Macaws are large birds, cockatoos and true parrots are somewhat larger than parakeets, and lorikeets are among the most beautiful parrots. 
- *Budgerigars* are a small member of the parrot family. They are native to Australia. The name "Budgerigar" comes from the name "Betcherrygah", a native Australian (aboriginal) word meaning "good bird". Many people now refer to the Budgerigar as the "budgie bird". Budgerigars come in a large number of colours from white through yellow to green, blue and violet. They are friendly birds which enjoy human company or the company of others of their kind. They like to whistle and sing. It is possible to teach them to speak a simple word or two with patient training. 

When selecting your bird, get one that is alert and between 6 weeks and 3 months old. Young birds are easier to train. Make sure the feathers are close together and bright in color.

Facilities

All of the small birds may be kept in bird cages. These are usually purchased rather than homemade. Most cages are made of many fine steel bars. The cage may have bars on all four sides as well as on top, or it may have bars only on the front and top with solid walls on the other three sides. If an all wire cage is used be very careful not to place it in drafts. Most cages will have glass panels which line the lower part of the cage. These sides will keep seeds and sand from being scattered outside of the cage when the bird is active and scratching about.

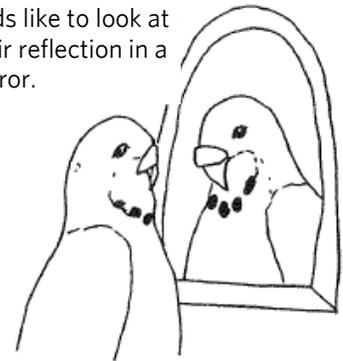
Cages should be large enough to allow the birds to fly about. Square or rectangular cages will provide a better flying area than a round or tall cage. A cage should have a removable clean-out tray. The cage should also have a door which is large enough to allow you to easily put your hand through the opening.

The cage should be placed in a room of moderate temperature in a warmer area of the house. A cage should not be placed where the sun will shine directly on it as this will make the bird too hot.

Equipment:

Bird cages should have a sand or fine gravel floor (the sand or gravel should be changed weekly). The cage should have some type of perches for the bird to sit on as it flies from place to place in the cage. The bird may also enjoy having a part of a branch in its cage. It can climb this or fly from one part to another. Some birds like to bathe so a small bowl of water should be placed in the cage for the bird to bathe in. (NOTE: Budgies are not usually fond of baths.)

Birds like to look at their reflection in a mirror.



Other items which might be placed in the cage are things which the bird can climb on; swinging perches, a bell on a cord, a mirror, or any other item which might entertain the bird. If you are breeding birds, you will also need a nesting box.

Feeding

Water: Should be available in a water bowl at all times. Vitamin supplements may be added for better health in birds (particularly budgies).

Food: Commercial Budgie (or Parakeet) Seed Mixture for Budgerigars. Canaries and finches will be fed Finch Food or Canary Seed Mixture. A "condition food" should also be used to make sure the bird gets all of the nutrients it needs. Feed cups should be emptied and refilled with fresh seeds each day.

Treats: Washed greens such as spinach are good in small quantities. They should be left in the cage for only a few minutes and the leftovers removed. This will prevent overeating and possible illness. Little clumps of twigs may be suspended in the cage. Budgies like to chew on wood and these will provide interesting food for the bird. Twigs from fruit trees, elm, maple, willow and nut trees will not be harmful to your bird.

Grit Foods: Birds must have access to a grit food to aid digestion. You may purchase oyster shell and mineral grit or other types of grit at the pet store. Crushed egg shells (from hen's eggs) are also good.

Cuttlebone: Can be supplied for birds to chew on. It supplies minerals to the bird's diet.

All food and water should be offered in feed cups which are attached to the outside of the cage. Most feeders are mounted on the outside of the cage. They have a part which extends to the inside of the cage for the bird to eat out of. This will help to prevent soiling of food or water.

Management

Did you know that some birds can live longer than people. Examples of longevity include: finches, 2 to 8 years, Canaries 8 to 15 years, Cockatiels 10 to 25 years, Cockatoos and some Parrots 77 to 100 years.

Grooming: Budgerigars may need to have their nails clipped occasionally (when they grow very long). These can be clipped with a nail trimmer by carefully removing the very end of the point of the claw. There is a "quick" in a bird's nail as in other animal's nails, so be careful not to cut the quick (the soft inner part of the claw where the nerves and veins are). The beaks of some birds may need trimming. This should be done by a veterinarian. Birds may have the long feathers on one wing clipped if you do not want them to fly. These should be the long outer feathers on ONE of the wings. They do not need to be cut close to the wing. It is only necessary to remove about half of the length of each feather. Carefully restrain your bird and use scissors to clip the feathers.

NOTE: Clipping of feathers is not necessary if you would like to allow your bird to fly about in a safe room in your house.

Most birds like to bath. Provide a small bowl of water in the bird's cage for it to bathe in. If your bird does not like to bath, you may spray it with lukewarm water in a pump spray bottle about once a week. Some birds will allow you to bath them under a small stream of water from the nozzle in a tap while they sit perched on your finger.

Handling: Birds should either be taught to perch on the hand (see Training) or they should be picked up by grasping the bird's body with their wings gently against the sides of the body. Never pick a bird up with its wings free from your hand. It will beat them and may cause injury to its wings. If your bird bites when handled, wrap it in a small towel while holding it to trim its nails or do other procedures.



Training: Young birds are easier to train.

Perching on your hand: Birds may be taught to perch on your hand and will allow themselves to be carried about once they are used to handling. Begin by letting your bird get used to the sight of your hand. Put your hand next to the cage at first until the bird is not afraid. Next, open the cage door and put your hand inside. Do not try to catch the bird. Just allow the bird to become used to seeing your hand. This may take a few days of short "lessons". Your bird may come to your hand on its own once it is used to seeing it in the cage. You may also want to put some green food or seeds on your palm to encourage the bird to come to your hand. When the bird has learned this, you may gently remove the bird from the cage while it sits on your hand. Whenever you remove the bird from the cage for exercise, be sure that the room is "SAFE".

Talking: Some birds may be taught to talk. They will learn this best if they are kept in a cage alone. You must spend some time with them each day while you repeat the same word or words over and over. Start off with one word at a time, such as "hello", and do not go any further until it has mastered the word. Use a high pitched voice, and only work for about 15 minutes at a time. This takes great patience. It may take a bird weeks or months to learn a simple word or two. When you are around your bird, you should only say the word or words that you have chosen to teach it. Male birds are usually chosen for talking but female birds can also be taught.

Singing: Canaries and finches like to sing. Males are usually chosen for singing. Birds sing best if they are kept separated from other birds. They may be encouraged to sing by whistling clear notes at them. Birds can also be taught to sing by playing "bird song" records.

Exercise: Most birds enjoy flying as their main form of exercise. It is best to have a cage which is large enough to allow the bird to fly from one perch to another. It is also a good idea to allow birds out to fly in the house regularly. If you do let your bird out of its cage to fly, pick a room to use and then take the following "safety precautions":

- Close all windows and doors.
- Make sure that the chimney flue of a fireplace is closed and that there are no open flames in the room.
- Close curtains so that the bird does not fly at the glass.
- Turn off any fans (particularly large ceiling fans!).
- Remove or cover any large mirrors.
- Remove pet such as cats or dogs.

General Maintenance Clean the bird's cage at least once a week. Most cages have a clean out tray on the bottom. Slide the tray out and dispose of soiled sand and litter. You may wish to line the cage bottom with newspaper which is cut to the same size as the tray. Cover with a thin layer of budgie gravel or fine sand. Every two weeks, use a stiff brush and some hot water with bleach and disinfect the tray and lower bars of cage.

Use a wire brush or scraper knife to scrape wooden perch bars clean. Wash all water and food bowls regularly in mild detergent and warm water.

Health Care

- Vaccinations are not usually necessary.
- Most health problems are avoided by keeping the cage clean and dry. Problems from a damp or dirty cage are sore feet (from walking on damp or dirty floors), colds (from dampness and also from drafts - keep birdcages in warm area of house). Warm to high temperatures of 29-32°C are acceptable.
- Other problems may be caused by feeds — too much green foods will cause diarrhea.
- External parasites — mites can be a problem. Clean and disinfect cage and dust with a mite powder or spray.
- Molting - all birds molt at least once a year. Molting means that the birds lose their feathers and grow new feathers. Molting may begin because of a change in the season, or it may happen because of a change in the diet. Many bird owners feed a special diet during molting because the bird is using more energy, nutrients, etc... during this time.
- In case of diarrhea, constipation, listlessness, no appetite, closed eyes or ruffled feathers, consult a veterinarian.

Breeding

Parakeets and canaries will breed in captivity. All you need to get started is a pair of birds of unrelated stock.

The cage should be around 16 x 18 x 36 inches or larger, with a nest box in one corner. After breeding, the female bird will lay one egg every other day. The average clutch is around six eggs. Incubation is from 17 to 21 days. Do not remove unhatched eggs until 10 days after the first bird hatches. Both the father and mother birds participate in feeding and care of the young. Do not handle young birds until they are about 3 weeks old.

Economics

Successful mating of your birds could result in a supply of offspring to be sold direct to potential bird owners or to a pet store.

Project Resources:



Pinterest – The Visual Discovery Tool

Pinterest is a social media bulletin board for you to virtually pin pictures of things that interest you to your own personal boards – Pin-Explore-Discover! 4-H Manitoba has a Pinterest account. Each project series has a board full of fun and interesting ideas. There are also boards for 4-H Awesome, Community Service, Volunteers, Communications and Building Blocks.

Check it out at www.pinterest.com/4hmanitoba/.

When you are doing a search for small bird information on the internet be sure to be specific about what you want to find out - just entering "bird" will yield too many results for you to check and not all of them will relate to what you want to know. For example, try finch diets instead of bird diet.

The following links may be of interest:

<http://www.pets.ca/birds/>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_canary

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Companion_parrot

Sections of the Birds Fact Sheet were adapted with permission of Manitoba Agriculture from the Manitoba 4-H Project: Small Animals Leader's Manual - 1998. Portions of the fact sheet have been used with permission from Ontario 4-H and Saskatchewan 4-H Council.



CANADA
4-H Manitoba

Manitoba 4-H Contact Information

1129 Queens Avenue Brandon, MB R7A 1L9

Ph: (204) 726 - 6613 Fax: (204) 726 - 6260

4h@gov.mb.ca

www.manitoba.ca/agriculture/4-h

www.4h.mb.ca