

Environmental Care for Parrots

Introduction

Your bird's environment is one of the most influential factors in your bird's health, longevity, and behavior. The size of their cage, kind of toys, perches, and what is in your home are all important parts of their environment. The information provided in this pamphlet is not exhaustive and we recommend to always contact your avian veterinarian for the most current and species specific environmental care for your bird.

Cage Size and Bar Spacing

The required dimensions of your bird's cage and the spacing of the bars all depends on the species of your parrot. The minimum dimensions of your bird's cage is twice the size of your bird's wingspan, as required by Kent County Animal Control. For medium to large parrot species, the bar spacing can be 1" wide. For smaller parrot species (parakeets, cockatiels, lovebirds, parrotlets, conures), the bar spacing must be ¼" to ½". Smaller parrot species can get stuck and injured between the bars if the spacing is more than ½". For more detailed information about the correct cage size for your species of parrot, please ask for our handout ["The Wingspan of Parrots" by Scott McDonald, DVM and Karrie Noterman 2016](#)

Cleaning

Your bird's cage needs to be cleaned on a weekly basis, at the least. Do not use any cleaning products with strong scents or that have bleach or ammonia. For the bottom of your bird's cage, we recommend paper that can be changed daily when needed to help monitor their droppings. Never use paper with shiny coatings, they can be toxic if ingested. It is also not recommended to use pine shavings, woodchips, or litter of any kind at the bottom of the cage. Your bird's food and water bowls must be cleaned daily to prevent any bacterial build-up.

Perches

No matter what species of parrot and what size cage, there needs to be different kinds and sizes of perches available for your bird. We recommend at least a cotton or sisal rope perch, natural wooden perches, and a grooming perch (not a perch with sandpaper!) The perches should have different diameters to prevent foot sores. Also, the diameter of the perch should allow your bird's foot to encircle $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ of the perch's circumference. We recommend the cotton or sisal rope perch be in the highest place of the cage because that is where your bird will spend most of its time, especially at night.

"But the cage I got came with 3 wooden dowels for perches, I can just use those, right?"

No, those perches are all the same diameter and will cause painful lesions on the bottom of your bird's feet. We recommend using one of those dowel perches, and then 2-3 other kinds with different diameters.

Toys

The more toys, the better! Your bird needs at least 3-4 toys that hang around the cage to start with, and it is recommended to offer a couple foot toys as well. In the beginning, it will take time to discover what kind of toys best support your individual bird's activity needs. The toys need to be arranged so your bird can open up their wings completely and not have them touch anything. Have a toy that can be used for foraging, shredding, preening, and a longer lasting toy that can be plastic or metal as your "starter pack". Also, don't forget a couple foot toys will be very beneficial in discovering your bird's preferences for playing. Please ask for the article "[Foraging for Parrots](#)" for ideas on creating your own foraging toys at home to keep your bird stimulated and alleviated from boredom.

"Are there bird toys that can be harmful or dangerous?"

Yes, no toy is 100% safe. Even with the "safest" kind of toys, you need to constantly observe the condition of all toys in your bird's cage daily. Accidents can happen, especially since your bird will explore and try new things just like a human toddler. There are some materials that are known dangers and should never be available to your bird.

Do not have the following materials in your bird's cage:

- Mirrors
- Spring loaded clips
- Split key rings
- Lead, zinc, copper, and galvanized steel
- Any loose strings, like from cotton or flannel
- Huts or tents

Bird huts, or tents, are no longer recommended because they can increase hormonal behaviors. Also, birds can shred and ingest the soft material and get it impacted in their crop which can lead to death if not taken to an avian veterinarian immediately.

Lighting

Your bird's cage should be placed in a location of your home that receives indirect sunlight, not directly on the cage. New research has shown that UVB lights can cause cataracts and they are no longer recommended, nor are they needed. Your bird will need 10-12 hours of sleep every night. If they are located in a room that stays socially active at night, we recommend covering their cage to make sure they can get the necessary sleep of 10-12 hours.

Climate/Temperature

We recommend your bird's environment stay between 68-75 degrees. Birds can tolerate temperatures that are comfortable for humans. There is no need to overheat your bird's environment. But, rapid and frequent temperature changes can be stressful, so avoid those situations as much as possible. Birds can also adapt to a wide range of humidity levels. If they live in a dryer climate, regular bathing will help them.

Household Dangers

The following list of items that can be found in your home are dangerous and can be toxic to your bird:

- Plants (if ingested): Crown vetch, *Rhododendron* species, *Kalanchoe* species, oleander, yew, lily of the valley, foxgloves, acorns, oak leaves, Lantana, lilies, rhubarb, dumb cane, and umbrella plant
- Rodenticides
- Insecticides
- Medications
- Electrical cords
- Zinc and copper
- Airborne Toxins:
 - Tobacco
 - Marijuana
 - polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) (nonstick cookware)
 - Engine exhaust
 - Burning food
 - Self-cleaning ovens
 - Malfunctioning furnaces
 - Carbon monoxide
 - Hydrogen cyanide
 - Acidic fumes
 - Smoke
 - Air fresheners
 - Hair products
 - Nail polish
 - Scented candles
 - Aerosols
 - Gasoline fumes
 - Paints
 - Polyurethane
 - Mothballs
 - Fumigants
 - Drain cleaners
 - Bleach
 - Ammonia