



Standards of Parrot Care

© Pikes Peak Parrot Rescue

All Rights Reserved

3profco.org

Table of Contents

PREFLIGHT... 5

FLIGHT 1... 7

Recommended Front Range Veterinary Clinics for Birds

FLIGHT 2... 9

Resources for Parrot Owners

FLIGHT 3... 11

Environment + Housing

FLIGHT 4... 25

Diet

FLIGHT 5... 31

Medical Care + Emergencies

FLIGHT 6... 39

Behavior + Training

This Standards of Care guide is meant to help individuals who are adopting a parrot become educated on the most important basics of proper care for their new feathered friend; including diet, environment and behavior.

For new parrot owners, this guide will help you establish a successful and satisfying relationship with your parrot. For more experienced owners, this guide should serve as a handy reference no matter how much experience you have with birds.

This guide also covers how to get started with the right kinds of services and supplies for your bird by listing recommended local avian-focused veterinarians and listing recommended food brands, equipment and the retailers where you can purchase them.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to educate yourself about proper care for your parrot.

Recommended Front Range Veterinary Clinics for Birds

Dr. Brad Bundy
Yorkshire Vet Clinic
1815 Dublin Blvd
Colorado Springs, CO 80918
719.598-3192

Dublin Animal Hospital
888 Dublin Blvd.
Colorado Springs, CO 80918
(719) 593-1336

Resources for Parrot Owners

Other Resources

Wayfair.com (great prices and free shipping on new cages/play stands)

Drsfostersmith.com (online pet food and supply retailer with excellent prices and variety)

Mysafebirdstore.com (online parrot-specific food and supply retailer with great variety in specialty bird items and great prices)

Dancingparrot.com (great variety of excellent toys and toy parts)

Parrotenrichment.com (wonderful ideas on making toys and enrichment activities for your bird)

Aav.org (American Avian Veterinary Association)

Environment + Housing

Household Environment

3PR birds must be housed in approved residential homes that have, at a minimum, electric power, indoor plumbing with potable water, central heating, proper ventilation for residential homes and an approved area for housing bird cage(s). The space cannot be a conservatory or greenhouse, as those areas tend to warm rapidly and pose a significant heat stress danger to birds.

Temperature and Humidity

The room that the cage is in should be between 65-80° F. Do not use unapproved space heaters to adjust the room temperature as they can emit dangerous fumes. Humidity levels are important and humidifiers can be used if needed.

Sunshine

Birds benefit greatly from sunshine or full spectrum light to create vitamin D. Never place your bird in direct sunlight with no access to shade, such as sunshine coming through a window into its entire cage, as the bird can easily overheat.

Home Hazards

Due to the size, intelligence, natural behaviors and unique physiology of birds, many dangers can exist in a typical household environment.

Airborne Toxins – Highest Risk Home Hazard

The avian respiratory tract is very sensitive to anything airborne because birds circulate air very differently in their bodies (through lungs, air sacs and their bones). This is a highly efficient system that allows birds to maximize the oxygen that comes into their lungs and air sacs. Any irritant or airborne poison can kill them quickly because they concentrate the air so efficiently. **Basic rule: if you can smell it, it's dangerous to your bird!**

- » Any and all fume-generating substances such as air fresheners, incense, smoke, cleaners, perfumes, scented candles are airborne poisons for birds!
- » If candles are very important to celebrations in your home, such as birthdays, Hanukkah, Christmas, etc., use only unscented candles and remove birds to another room during use. Avoid burning candles for extended periods and use air filters and/or open the windows to remove smoke and contaminants.
- » Never use the self-cleaning feature for an oven with a bird in your home.
- » Nonstick surfaces such as Teflon pans, waffle irons, irons, etc. emit dangerous fumes when overheated. Please use extreme care when using or replace these items with stainless steel.
- » Cedar planks for cooking must not be used in the home as these emit dangerous fumes.
- » Space heaters can also emit dangerous fumes.
- » Pesticides sprayed around the home: If your lawn is sprayed with pesticides/herbicides, close the windows during spraying and for several hours thereafter until the chemicals have dried for a minimum of 12-24 hours.
- » Cleaning Agents (bleach, Windex, ammonia, etc.) – 3PR understands that cleaning agents must sometimes be used in every household. Remove birds to another area of the house (behind a closed door) and judiciously use cleaners. Open windows to ventilate, if possible, and avoid strongly scented cleaners or anything in an aerosol can.

- » If you are painting the interior or cleaning a large area (such as deep cleaning carpets), it is best to temporarily remove the birds from the home altogether. Contact 3PR for guidance.
- » New carpet installations or new foam mattresses can also emit toxic fumes.
- » Hairspray, sunscreen spray, car exhaust – the list goes on. All bird owners must be mindful of airborne toxins!

Other Pets in the Home – Highest Risk Home Hazard

Most bird owners also own dogs and cats, and most of the time these domesticated pets will treat birds as equal members of the family; however, all of us at 3PR also know someone who has lost a bird due to another pet in the home.

Supervise interactions and know your pets' behaviors. Cats, dogs, ferrets, reptiles and even other birds could seriously harm or kill your bird. When non-owned pets are at your home, do not let them have access to your bird.

Bites and scratches from other animals can be fatal to your bird even if they do not appear "serious." This is because many animals carry bacteria that are normal for them but can be deadly to a bird or other animal. For this reason, it is important for your bird to be seen by a veterinarian immediately if bitten, scratched or seen in the mouth of another animal. This is true even if you just suspect the bird was in the animal's mouth (wet or ruffled feathers) and do not see any marks or scratches. Bite marks are frequently difficult to detect, and many birds have died within hours of a bite after a caregiver decided that the bird was "just fine."

Ingestion, Drowning, Accidents – High Risk Hazards

Birds are similar to babies and toddlers in that you need to "bird-proof" your home or the areas that your bird will occupy in the same way you would "baby-proof" your home. Like babies, all parrots love to chew and will chew on almost anything within reach of their cage. Ensure that all walls, frames, trim, plants and cords are out of beak-reach from inside the cage so that your belongings stay safe and the bird does not ingest/chew any foreign materials that could be toxic or harmful. Also, closely supervise any bird that is not in its cage. Providing a proper play stand and toys to occupy him is the best way to keep him from destroying household items. Never leave a bird unattended on a play stand.

Remove or make inaccessible to your bird:

- » Toxic houseplants (list available on our website under “Resources”)
- » Leaded glass or paint found on decorative lighting, walls of older homes, stained glass windows or decorations
- » Medicine or pills
- » Holiday items such as Christmas trees, ornaments, garlands and decorations

Beware of potential accidents that can kill or harm your bird:

- » Mirrors and uncovered windows if your bird is flighted. They can fly into them and injure themselves.
- » Turn off ceiling fans when flighted birds are out of their cages.
- » Venetian blind cords and other hanging threads can strangle birds.
- » Open ovens, dishwashers, washing machines
- » Uncovered water in toilets, sinks, bathtubs, buckets, aquariums or cooking pots: birds can easily drown if they fall in.
- » Open trash cans
- » Uncovered pots/hot burners on stoves

Toys:

- » Make sure that toys provided for your bird are safe and size-appropriate.
- » Supervise the use of new toys to ensure the bird is not going to be in danger from them.
- » Open-quick links can get caught in leg bands or beaks. Loose threads can strangle. Small parts can be ingested.
- » No toy is 100% safe.

Cages

Cage Placement

Cage placement is extremely important to the health and happiness of your bird. Birds are very social creatures and enjoy a location in the home where they can feel a part of their human flock, yet also in an area that is not so high in traffic and hectic that it will stress them.

- » Cages should not be placed around a corner where the bird will be surprised each time a person comes by.
- » Cages must have at least one wall behind them so the bird feels safe – never place a cage in the middle of a room.
- » The room or area that the cage is in should have at least one window, as it is beneficial for a bird to be able to see out of a window from his cage for entertainment; however, never put a cage right in front of a window, as this will make the bird feel exposed and unsafe.
- » Cages ideally should not be in kitchens due to the high probability of fumes occurring there.
- » Cages should not be placed where an HVAC vent is blowing on them or in a drafty area.

Selecting a Cage

Please note that 3PR can usually sell adopters a gently used, appropriately sized cage outfitted with 3 perches, 3 toys and food cups for between \$50 - \$200, depending on size.

If you choose to purchase a cage from elsewhere, PLEASE CONTACT US BEFORE PURCHASING TO ENSURE THAT IT IS APPROPRIATE FOR THE BIRD YOU ARE CONSIDERING! We do have specific requirements, and cages are frequently difficult to return once purchased.

Small birds are often more active than larger birds and enjoy flying around in their cage. The cage must be able to accommodate their activity level. The horizontal space is much more important than the vertical space in a cage, as birds move and fly back and forth. Horizontally placed bars are easier for birds to climb on, and many cages have a combination of both horizontal and vertical bars. Ensure that the cage you buy is either made of powder-coated metal or stainless steel, as both are durable and easy to clean.

If you currently have a cage that you wish to use, it must be approved by 3PR as suitable for your adopted bird. 3PR cannot approve cages with any of these features:

- » Fancy or ornate cages with scrolling and other features may be dangerous for the bird and hard to clean.
- » Tall and narrow cages are not recommended for any species.
- » Old or antique cages contain many unsafe elements such as lead or corroded and sharp edges.
- » Round cages do not provide the bird with a secure and protective corner.
- » Galvanized wire cages, because birds can chew off bits of the welds and get zinc poisoning.
- » Wooden cages cannot be disinfected and birds cannot resist chewing.
- » Cages intended for other small animals.
- » Handmade cages that have not been pre-approved by 3PR. Please, if you are planning to build your own cage, you must first submit detailed plans to 3PR for approval!

If you wish to purchase a new cage for your bird, we recommend ordering from [wayfair.com](https://www.wayfair.com) for best prices and free shipping. The following brands of cages are recommended by 3PR (Figure 3.1):

- » A&E Cage – flight cages
- » A&E Cage – dometop and playtop cages
- » Avian Adventures – dometop and playtop cages

We are happy to assist you with any questions or concerns that you may have regarding cage selection and housing.

Please remember that birds are not meant to live in cages and your bird will still need plenty of time with their household flock outside of its cage, no matter how large the cage is.



Figure 3.1: Recommended Bird Cages, Available at Wayfair.com

3PR Minimum Cage Sizes and Bar Spacing (For One Bird)

Important Note: The sizes provided are guidelines only! Companion birds vary considerably in the type and amount of space required. Frequently, this has more to do with the species than the size of the bird.

All cage dimensions provided as Width x Depth x Height

- » **Extra-Small Birds:** *birds 8" or less in length (parrotlets, finches, budgies, lovebirds, canaries)*
 Bar spacing $\frac{1}{2}$ " or less
 18"x18"x18" (bare minimum!)
 3PR recommends the 30+ inch wide flight cage
- » **Small Birds:** *9"-12" in length (cockatiels, conures, Quakers, grass parakeets)*
 Bar spacing $\frac{3}{4}$ " or less
 20"x20"x30"
 3PR recommends the 30+ inch wide flight cage

- » **Medium Birds:** *13"-20" in length (African greys, mini-macaws, Amazons, small cockatoos)*
Bar spacing $\frac{3}{4}$ "-1"
32"x20"x36"
3PR recommends the 32+ inch wide dometop or playtop cage
- » **Large Birds:** *Cockatoos, Blue and Gold Macaws*
Bar spacing $\frac{3}{4}$ "-1" (6 mm bars ideal)
36"x24"x48"
- » **Extra-Large Birds:** *Green-winged Macaws, Hyacinth Macaws, Moluccan Cockatoos*
Bar spacing $\frac{3}{4}$ "-1" (6 mm bars ideal)
48"x36"x60"

When birds are housed more than one to each cage, minimum space requirements must be upgraded to meet the needs of all birds. Each bird must be able to open its wings and fan its tail without touching the side of the cage or another bird in the cage. **Only compatible species can be housed together in the same cage.**

Bird Supplies and Equipment

Cage Substrate

Use newspaper or other regular paper on or under the cage grate to collect food and droppings. Do not use any other kind of substrate such as corn cob, walnut hulls, wood shavings or any similar item due to the risk of ingestion and the ability for these substances to carry dangerous mold and bacteria (even when "clean"). Newspaper is cheap and allows you to see the bird's droppings on a daily basis, which is one of the best ways to monitor the health of your bird.

Bowls

For wet food and water, stainless steel bowls are best due the ease of cleaning, durability and scratch resistance. Ceramic and plastic are also acceptable, especially for dry foods. Do not use water bottles for drinking water, as they are more difficult to clean and disinfect. Place food and water bowls in an area of the cage that minimizes the chance of droppings contaminating the bowl. Fecal matter in food or water creates an opportunity for bacteria to spread and infect your bird. Check that your bird has clean food and water bowls throughout the day and disinfect the bowls daily in a dishwasher or hot, soapy water.

Perches

Foot sores caused by a lack of perching variety is the most common health issue that 3PR sees in birds that come to us. Supply your birds with a variety of perch types in the cage. Do not place perches or swings over food and water bowls due to droppings. Most cages can accommodate at least three perches, which should vary. Birds should have the following perching options in their cages:

- » **Rope perch or bungee spiral** – should be the highest perch in the cage so that the bird is encouraged to sleep there. Many birds enjoy a swing or bungee (a spiral rope or sisal swing) to develop their coordination, grip and just for fun.
- » **Natural branch perches** – those that are textured are better due to a bird having a more secure grip.
- » **Concrete/sandy perches** – Use concrete or sandy perches in front of food dishes for beak and talon grooming. Never place sandy or concrete perches high in the cage. This encourages the bird to sleep on them and may cause serious injury to the feet over time. Do not use sandpaper perches or sandpaper perch covers; these are far too rough for birds' feet.
- » **Dowel perches** – these are the straight wood perches that typically come with cages. One of these in a cage is appropriate, but we recommend wrapping sections of the perch with vet wrap for a more varied and secure grip for your bird. It is best not to place a dowel perch in an area of the cage where the bird sleeps or spends a lot of time as dowels are not ideal for long-term perching.

Toys

Part of the fun of having a bird is watching him play with his toys! Make sure that the toys you buy are appropriate for the size of your bird, as parts that are too big or small could harm your bird in a variety of ways. Make sure the metal pieces of toys are made only of stainless steel, the only safe metal for birds. Toys need not be expensive. You can reuse and recycle old toy parts to create new toys and provide items such as paper cups, phone books, pine cones (clean and untreated), egg cartons and cardboard boxes for foraging and shredding. Keep toys clean and inspected for safety. Have several rounds of toys to rotate to keep your bird interested.

Some bird toys are sold with unsafe parts, such as jingle bells (toes can get caught in the slits), key rings (same issue), bells with lightweight clappers (choking hazard) or toys with long, thin fabric strips or long threads (strangulation hazard).

At first, some birds may be afraid of new toys. If so, place the toy close to the cage where the bird can view it over a few weeks to get comfortable with it. Remove any item from the cage if it appears to be causing distress to the bird. He may need more time to get accustomed to it.

Play Stands and Gyms

If possible, your bird should have play stands in areas of the house where the “household flock” spends time. These provide safe and bird-appropriate spaces for him to play and socialize. Play stands should have places to hang toys, as well as food and water dish holders. Consider movability and ease of cleaning when purchasing a play stand. Hanging perches, swings and bungees can also be used instead of play stands. PVC play stands are popular for parrot owners to make as well. 3PR recommends the following commonly sold play stands for large and small-to-medium birds that you can also customize for your birds by adding toys and different perches.



Figure 3.2: Play Stands Available at Wayfair.com

Outdoor Equipment

Any outdoor aviaries or flights to be used by homes must be individually inspected by 3PR, and 3PR prohibits the exclusive housing of birds outdoors. The size, shape and design of the cages shall be appropriate for the species being housed and shall allow enough space for each of the birds to fly freely and/or exhibit normal behaviors. Flight cages must be constructed to prevent injury to birds and co-mingling with wild animals. A covered portion of the cage must be provided where the birds can avoid direct sunlight and adverse weather conditions. Birds should never be left outdoors overnight or when no one is at home. Check birds frequently while outdoors.

Carriers and Transport

All 3PR birds must be transported in carriers or cages. All swinging toys should be removed from cages before transporting, and all doors secured from opening. Cages and carriers should be placed in a secure area of a car where they will not topple over in the event of a sudden stop. Covering the cage may be necessary if the bird is easily stressed or becomes carsick. Ensure the birds can breathe normally and that the vehicle is kept at a temperature between 65°-80° F. If the trip is over one hour long, make water available to the bird either periodically or in the carrier.

Air Filters

You may choose to use air filters in a bird area as birds produce significant dander and dust. This is especially true of cockatoos, African greys and cockatiels. Some people and other birds are allergic to this dust and dander. Most air filters are completely safe, except for ionization filters. 3PR recommends Venta brand air cleaners, which humidify as they filter the air and do not require expensive filter replacements.

Bird Care Routine

Daytime

In the wild, parrots will rise with the sun and then set out to forage for food. In the midday they return to roost, relax, nap, play and socialize until late afternoon, when they set out again to eat. In our homes, parrots tend to follow a very similar routine, consuming food in bulk twice daily and resting in the midday.

Bedtime

Parrots are daytime animals, and since most species are from equatorial areas of the world, they ideally need 10-12 hours of sleep in a dark, quiet place. Your birds will want to go to sleep at sunset each day.

If your bird's cage is in an area of the house where you will be active at night (even just watching television), consider a separate sleeping cage for your bird in a quiet area of the house to ensure he gets the rest he needs. If your bird is in a quiet but not dark space for bedtime, then you may provide a cage cover. Your bird may chew the cover, so inspect daily for holes and loose threads that could pose a danger.

Bathing

Your bird should have the opportunity to bathe at least 2-3 times per week. Bathing should only be offered during the warmest part of the day, and never in the evening. Do not use any kind of cleansers or shampoos for your bird, as these can easily damage the feather oils.

Offer a shallow bowl of water, or try bringing your bird into the shower with you (away from the direct water pressure). Other options include running water in the kitchen sink, using a plant mister, or even sprinklers outside on a hot day. Observe what your bird does and does not enjoy to identify its preferred method of bathing.

Birds that do not appear to enjoy bathing of any kind should still be encouraged to do so, and with patience, all birds can learn to enjoy or at least tolerate it. Always keep it fun and light. Never douse your bird with a spray bottle or strong water flow if he is fearful or apprehensive.

Cleaning and Sanitation

A clean environment is essential to your bird's health, as its sensitive respiratory system is very susceptible to illness via mold, bacteria and fungi. Birds seem very messy in their home environments, because in the wild they would never be exposed to their own droppings or food waste while foraging in treetops.

Cleaning Tips

- » On a daily basis, change food and water, clean the bowls and examine your bird's droppings on the newspaper for any sign of illness.
- » Change cage papers at least twice a week.
- » Cages, toys and perches should be cleaned and disinfected at least twice a month.
- » Remove matter from cage, perches and toys – you can use hot soapy water or Poop-Off spray. Have a variety of cleaning brushes handy in different sizes.
- » Ensure the bird is not present when cleaning the cage to avoid chemical exposure.
- » Disinfection can be done using diluted bleach water, apple cider vinegar or OxyFresh (1 tablespoon per gallon-no rinsing required)
- » Certain toys and rope perches cannot be truly disinfected, so remove obvious debris and occasionally soak in diluted disinfectant, rinse thoroughly and place in the outdoor sun for 24 hours. You can also run them through the dishwasher, or washing machine, but let the perches air dry as putting them through the dry cycle, or dryer will damage the integrity of the rope fibers.
- » Be sure to never spray any chemicals near your bird!

Diet

Because parrots are still truly wild animals and vary greatly between species in their natural environments, the exact nutritional requirements for each species are unknown. Many birds that are coming into 3PR's care have been fed nothing but a seed diet (and/or "junk" human foods such as French fries, hot dogs, pizza, pasta, etc.). Seed diets are high in fat and low in other valuable nutrients, such as vitamins and minerals. Birds in captivity are much less active, and therefore are at especially high risk of obesity and heart disease on an all-seed diet. Please remember that foods that are bad for humans can cause many of the same illnesses in pet birds (though much sooner).

3PR works diligently to convert all the birds in our care to a best-fit, nutritionally appropriate diet during their 6-week quarantine program, which consists of "chop" and dry food. Therefore, fulfilling 3PR's standard of care requires a commitment by foster homes and adopters to provide this same diet.

3PR Standard Diet Percentages for Parrots (conures + larger)

- » 30% Cooked whole grains, beans, legumes – part of "chop"
- » 30% Vegetables – part of "chop"
- » 20% Pellets
- » 10% Fresh fruit
- » 10% Seed/Nuts/Treats
- » Weekly: small portion of lean protein such as egg, chicken or fish

3PR Standard Diet Percentages for Small Parrots and Birds (cockatiels, budgies, finches, canaries)

- » 60% Seed (a mix with no sunflower)
- » 10-20% Pellets
- » 10-20% Leafy greens and vegetables

Fresh, clean water should be available all day and night. Water should be changed twice daily, or when soiled by food or droppings. Please note that there is some variation in diet according to species (such as Eclectus parrots, budgies and lorikeets). Also, birds may have specific health or medical needs that require a different diet. Please follow individual feeding plans if provided.

Toxic Foods + Plants

- » **Avocado:** All parts may be toxic.
- » **Peanuts:** The shell is often infected with mold or fungus. Only feed human-grade, unsalted peanuts (and no more than 1-2 peanuts per week).
- » **Alcohol/Caffeine/Chocolate**
- » **Artificial sweeteners or colors**
- » **Many house plants and trees:** Please research plants and trees before adding them to your home or allowing your bird to have contact with them.

Making and Serving Chop

3PR serves our birds the cooked grains, beans and veggies in a form we call “chop,” which we make in bulk and freeze for later use. Chop recipes vary, but all encompass the basic ingredient groups:

- » whole cooked grains 25%
- » cooked beans and legumes 25%
- » leafy greens 25%
- » orange/red/green veggies 20%
- » fruits 5%

Whole grains – choose 2-3 and cook

- » whole wheat pasta
- » quinoa
- » pearled barley
- » any whole grain rice
- » oatmeal (can be added raw to help absorb excess water from cooked foods)
- » corn

Bean and Legumes – choose 2-3 and cook (but do not use canned beans)

- » Any beans except kidney beans and lima beans
- » Split green peas
- » Lentils of any color

For your convenience – This combination of these kinds of ingredients are also found in easy-to-make retail parrot food that can be ordered online listed below (see list of recommended retailers at the end of this section):

- » Bean Cuisine by L'Avian
- » Bird St. Bistro
- » Crazy Corn
- » Higgins Worldy Cuisine

Leafy Greens – choose 2 or 3 overall:

There are 2 groups of leafy greens – one that contains high levels of oxalic acid, which may be harmful due to its ability to bind calcium during digestion in large amounts, and those with low levels:

- » With high levels of oxalic acid – choose 1 only: spinach, Swiss chard, beet greens
- » With lower levels of oxalic acid – choose 1 or 2: mustard greens, dandelion greens, radicchio, cilantro, parsley, basil, turnip greens, kale, collard greens

Red/Orange/Green Veggies – choose 2-3:

- » Red beets (peeled), radishes, turnips, carrots, cooked sweet potatoes, squash (acorn, spaghetti, butternut, summer, pumpkin, etc.), green beans, red and green peppers, hot peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, broccoli rabe, turnip greens, eggplant, snow peas, sugar snap peas.

Fruits – choose 2-3:

- » There are 2 groups of fruits – ones that contain high levels of sugar and ones that contain lower levels of sugar:
- » With high levels of sugar – choose 1 only: oranges, pears, grapes, bananas, apples
- » With lower levels of sugar – choose 1 or 2: berries, mangos, papayas, melon, pomegranate

All of these fresh veggies and fruits are then chopped in a food processor into small, near-minced pieces and this blend is combined in equal parts with the cooked grains and beans. You can place it into containers such as baggies, ice cube trays or paper cups for freezing. Each day, remove frozen servings and defrost in the refrigerator, then serve.

In order to encourage our birds to consume chop, we remove their dry food upon serving. As we work to convert birds, we will oftentimes add some seed or nuts to encourage birds to pick through the chop. Since chop is made of perishable ingredients, please remove chop from your bird's cage 2-6 hours after serving.

Most birds will pick through the chop blend and eat some ingredients at some times and ignore others. Never expect that your bird will consume all of the chop offered, and do not let this discourage you from making and serving chop to your bird. A great diet is one of the greatest gifts you can offer your bird!



Figure 4.1: Preparing and Storing Chop

Serving the Dry Diet

Once the serving of chop is removed from the cage, birds should have access to their dry diet for the balance of the day. This dry mix should consist of pellets and high quality seed mix (in the proportions mentioned earlier).

3PR serves and recommends the following brands of dry, pelleted food. Each of these brands is comparable in quality:

- » Harrisons
- » Zupreem
- » Lafebers
- » Mazuri
- » Roudybush

Any seed mixes that you may add to the pelleted food should not contain sunflower seeds, as these are extremely high in fat and should only be given as treats. Larger parrots may also have 1 or 2 tree nuts in the shell per day as part of either food serving.

3PR serves and recommends the following brands of seed mix. Each of these brands is comparable in quality:

- » Higgins, Volkman
- » Kaylor of Colorado's Sweet Harvest
- » Golden Gourmet and Bountiful Harvest
(MySafeBirdStore's blends)

Where to Buy Bird Food

3PR encourages adopters to purchase their bird supplies from vendors who do not also sell animals. The vendors listed below also have generally better prices and variety than big-box retail or bird specialty stores:

- » Pikes Peak Bird Club
- » Mysafebirdstore.com

| Bird Type | AM Feeding (Chop) | PM Feeding (Dry Mix) |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Budgies/Cockatiels/ Lovebirds | 1 tbsp. chop blend, 1 tsp. seed | ½ tbsp. pellets, 1 tsp. seed mix |
| Conures/Poicephalus | ¼ cup per bird | ¼ cup per bird |
| Medium Parrots | ⅓ cup per bird | ⅓ cup per bird |
| Large Parrots | ½ cup per bird | ½ cup per bird |

Figure 4.3: 3PR Feeding Program

Note: Please observe birds carefully to ensure that they are eating. Sometimes, they will go to the bowl and pick at the food, but are not really consuming it. Because we are feeding foods that many of our new birds may not be accustomed to, they may decline to eat. They simply do not recognize the new items as food at first. This is especially true of parakeets. Many birds simply cannot be starved into eating the foods provided, and therefore they may starve to death. Check the bowls and floor of the cage for seed hulls, cracked pellets and signs of actual consumption. Watch droppings. Very green, watery droppings can be a sign that birds are not eating enough (and also a sign of other health problems). Please contact 3 PR for guidance if a bird in your care is not eating well. We may recommend a modified diet to help the bird convert.

Medical Care + Emergencies

Parrots are a prey species and therefore will mask illnesses for as long as possible to avoid looking vulnerable. It is important to recognize the signs of illness in birds. A bird that appears obviously ill is very sick and should immediately be taken to a qualified veterinarian.

If you are a bird owner, it is important to establish a relationship with a bird-experienced veterinarian before there is an illness or emergency so that your vet can understand what is normal for your bird and be better able to treat him when needed.

To find an avian veterinarian, check the **www.aav.org** website or refer to the Denver front range avian vets listed in the first section of this book.

All birds should have annual wellness exams just like cats and dogs do to prevent or identify disease, diet, care or behavioral issues.

Anatomy

All parrot owners should be educated on the important physical traits and body systems of parrots. You can find illustrations of these anatomical structures under Resources on our website.

General Physical Attributes

- » Birds are warm-blooded and have a four-chambered heart
- » They are superbly adapted animals and have as much biodiversity on Earth as mammals do.
- » They have a head that can rotate 180 degrees.
- » The ability to see in Ultraviolet
- » The ability to see 360 degrees around
- » A third eyelid called the nictitating membrane
- » Once a baby bird “fledges,” meaning it has a full set of adult feathers, it is fully grown.

Feathers

- » A small bird has 2000 - 3000 feathers!
- » Feathers insulate the body to maintain a high body temperature.
- » There are 3 types of feathers:
 - *Contour* – cover the outline of the body, including the wings and tail
 - 10 Primary flight feathers – longest feathers at the end of the wing (only these should ever be trimmed!!)
 - 10 Secondary flight feathers – feathers on the wing near the body
 - Coverts – body feathers
 - *Semi-plume* – bristle-like feathers that appear at the edge of feather tracts; they may have a sensory function
 - *Down feathers* – fluffy feathers that form an undercoat and provide insulation
- » All feathers wear out and are naturally shed once or twice per year, sometimes in phases called *molt*ing.
- » New feathers grow to replace the lost feathers and as they grow they are covered by a protective shell of keratin, creating what commonly referred to as “*pin feathers*.”
- » Once fully grown, the keratin sheaths crumble or are preened away and blood supply dries up from the feather shaft.

Hearing

- » Birds' ears are hidden behind feathers located below the eye and further back on the bird's head.
- » Birds can differentiate different sounds ten times faster than humans.
- » A canary's song would have to be slowed down ten times before the human ear could catch all the notes.

Taste + Smell

- » Birds have a poor sense of smell.
- » Birds have a poor sense of taste.
- » They have many fewer taste buds than mammals.

NOTE: If you find a baby bird in the wild, it is best to put it back in its nest. The parents cannot smell you and you are not a risk to the hatchling.

Beaks

- » Birds use their beaks for practically everything!
- » They are comprised of hollow bone with sinuses on the inside.
- » The outside is covered with keratin – the same substance that makes up fingernails and claws.
- » The covering grows continuously and will wear down from use just like claws or nails do.

Respiratory + Skeletal Systems

- » Birds' bones are adapted to flying, are filled with air and are part of the respiratory system.
- » The sternum or breastbone of birds is massive and supports the powerful pectoral muscles. These muscles comprise 20% of the bird's body weight.
- » Both the spine and the skull bones are fused, which gives added strength and power to the bird beak.
- » Air sacs are hollow spaces located in the body cavity and some bones that fill with air during respiration.

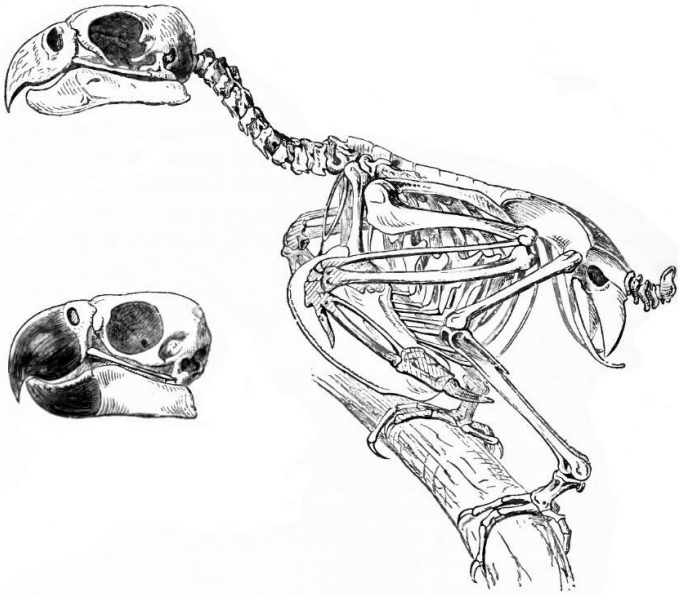


Figure 5.1: Skeleton of a Parrot + Skull of a Cockatoo (src Wikipedia)

- » Birds do not have a diaphragm; their chest muscles act like a bellows to pull and push air out of the body.
- » Birds circulate air throughout their body with every two breaths.
- » This highly efficient system is VERY susceptible to poisoning from airborne vapors in our homes!

Emergency Preparedness

Preparedness is key in order to react effectively to any illness, injury or other emergency. Create an emergency bird first aid kit with the items listed below:

- » Heating pad (portable/microwavable)
- » A carrier with towel and perch for each of your birds
- » Styptic powder for bleeding nails or beaks (not for feathers or soft tissue wounds)

- » Saline solution to be used as an antiseptic wash. Do NOT use products such as peroxide or rubbing alcohol as these can cause tissue damage.
- » Curad silver gel (anti-bacterial, anti-viral, anti-fungal agent available over the counter)
- » Tweezers/needle-nose pliers
- » Sterile gauze bandages
- » Cotton balls and swabs
- » Disaster kit with food and bowls for at least a week

Find a place in advance that you could go to with your pets in case of an emergency as most human shelters do not accept pets.

For more information contact the Red Cross or State Animal Response Team in Colorado.

NOTE: If you do not have experience and training, do not attempt to address illnesses or injuries without guidance from a veterinarian. Birds have unique anatomy and physiology and you can easily do more harm than good.

Weight Scales

A simple and effective tool to monitor your bird's physical health is a weight scale. Birds' weights fluctuate and keeping a weight chart can be a good way to catch early signs of potential illness by becoming familiar with normal weight for your bird.

Weigh your bird when its crop is empty and stick to a scheduled weekly routine. It can be considered normal for a bird's weight to vary about 15% during the course of charting its weight.

If you notice a sustained increase or decrease (trend going up or down) or sudden fluctuation, notify your veterinarian. Weight gain or loss can be an early sign of serious illness.

For further information, please discuss this subject with your veterinarian.

Normal Droppings

Normal parrot droppings have 3 distinct parts: feces, urates and urine. Normal droppings have little or no odor. The fecal portion is solid with a worm-like shape and is the darkest part of the dropping.

Feces can change colors depending on what the bird has eaten (such as berries, cherries or beets), making blue or purple droppings. Urates are a white/ivory color and the urine should be clear and watery.

If the bird has eaten a lot of high-water content food, the droppings will have more urine, often mistaken for diarrhea. Diarrhea is indicated by unformed feces that are nearly indistinguishable from the urates and urine.

Signs of Illness in Birds

Birds displaying signs of illness are very sick and should be taken immediately to the vet for medical care. Foster caregivers should notify 3PR immediately if they believe a bird is ill.

Potential signs of illness include:

- » A ceasing of normal activities such as preening, playing, vocalizing and feeding
- » Decreased food and water consumption (or marked increases, especially in the consumption of water)
- » A bird that has not eaten in 12 hours is a starving bird and may die within 24 hours!
- » A bird that exhibits a listless and ruffled appearance
- » Sleeping a lot during the day
- » Vomiting or regurgitation (non-courtship)
- » Changes in droppings: diarrhea, undigested food, blood (red/black), bright green droppings or other fecal color changes that are not food-related
- » Inability to perch
- » Sneezing, open-mouthed or heavy breathing with tail bobbing

Breathing Difficulty and Exposure to Airborne Toxins

Birds are very susceptible to respiratory distress from airborne particles or toxins and can die very quickly from exposure. If you notice wheezing, rapid breathing, breathing with an open mouth, tail bobbing, neck stretching, swelling around the eye, loss of voice or a clicking sound, then the bird is likely in respiratory distress.

Immediately remove the bird from the indoor environment if strong odors are present or if you suspect an airborne irritant or toxin. Place the bird in a carrier and keep it as warm as possible.

Keep handling to an absolute minimum as birds in these situations can die from even tiny amounts of additional stress.

Take the bird to the vet immediately. The vet will place the bird in an oxygen cage and stabilize it before conducting an exam.

Injury

- » If blood is coming from the mouth, nares or vent, the bird is bleeding internally and should immediately be taken to the vet.
- » If the wound is outside and superficial, gently clean with the water or antiseptic (only if recommended by a vet). Observe the bird for an hour to ensure bleeding has stopped.
- » If the wound is external and deep, consult a veterinarian for assistance. Handling the bird yourself to clean and bandage the wound may cause additional, unnecessary stress. However, if the wound is bleeding profusely, your veterinarian may want you to apply pressure or a makeshift bandage until the bird can be seen.
- » If any animal has attacked, bitten, or even mouthed the bird, the bird must be taken to the vet immediately as the bacteria from the mouth can very quickly cause a lethal infection.
- » If the bird has a bleeding feather, place him in a quiet area for 30 minutes. Cover the cage and resist the temptation to keep checking on him. If bleeding has not stopped after one hour, consult your veterinarian. Do not attempt to pull the feather out yourself. Serious pain and injury to the bird can result from doing this. Most blood feathers will stop bleeding on their own once the bird is calm and his blood pressure drops.
- » For an injured or broken toenail, apply styptic powder to stop bleeding and check for any other injury to the foot.

Supportive Care

For housing and transporting an injured or sick bird, it is extremely important to keep the bird in a warm enclosure, such as a wrapped carrier or plastic bin with ventilation. The ideal temperature for most sick or injured birds is 85° F. You can place a heating pad (portable/microwavable) into the carrier or bin. Birds have an extremely high metabolism and temperature, and the less energy they have to expend to maintain their body temperature the more likely they are to recover.

Birds that are dehydrated or in need of supportive care may be given Pedialyte and soft foods like baby food, which can be syringe/spoon fed or placed in a shallow bowl in the enclosure. Do not force feed or water your bird. Sick birds are more likely to aspirate this fluid into their lungs. Water must also be provided in a shallow dish.

Escaped Birds

If your bird has escaped and you do know where it is:

- » Keep it in your sight.
- » Put its cage, food and water where they are visible to the bird.
- » If you have other birds, put them outside (in their cages and weather permitting) where they will attract your bird.
- » Don't do anything that could scare the bird into flying farther away.
- » Be patient and watch the bird as much as you can. Hopefully it will get hungry and come to its cage.

If your bird has escaped and you do not know where it is:

- » Post a lost bird ad on Craigslist.com, newspaper and www.911parrotalert.com.
- » Notify all of the animal control agencies and veterinarians in your area.
- » Be prepared with the bird's band number/photo.
- » Check back to all contacts every day.
- » Offer a reward for the bird.
- » Make sure the person calling about the reward does not get the reward until they give you the bird.
- » Put posters up in your neighborhood.

Behavior + Training

The Right Expectations

Parrots are highly intelligent and social animals, but retain their natural behaviors and instincts since they are still wild animals and not domesticated. A normal parrot will have many natural behaviors that must be wholly accepted by its owners in advance in order for both bird and human to start a healthy relationship.

These behaviors include:

- » Loud and frequent vocalizations
- » Shredding and tearing items (preferably toys)
- » Emitting droppings every 10-30 minutes
- » Eating messy food and throwing it everywhere
- » Emitting feathers and keratin dust
- » Being afraid of certain things/situations, as they are prey animals

Positive Reinforcement

The only acceptable way to handle or encourage behaviors with birds is through the use of positive reinforcement. Behavior that is desirable should be rewarded with treats, praise, affection, etc. Behavior that is not desired is completely ignored.

Parrots will not respond favorably to yelling or punishment, due to the fact that most enjoy the attention (positive or negative) of a human. (If the only way a bird can get your attention is to scream, then that is what it will do!) Parrot society has no dominant/submissive structure like that of dogs, so showing birds “who is boss” does not work either.

In order to set a positive groundwork for your relationship with a bird, you must:

- » Understand and tolerate natural behaviors.
- » Understand that all behaviors have a reason.
- » Ignore behaviors you don't like.
- » Never scream at a screaming bird – you are positively reinforcing that behavior if you do!
- » Avoid scaring your bird.
- » Never hit or shake your bird.
- » Understand your bird's body language and likes/dislikes
- » Understand that your bird is not an “on-demand pet” like a dog. Sometimes your bird will not want you to pet or play with him, and this is perfectly normal.
- » Create an environment where your bird is set up for desirable behaviors.
- » Catch your bird “being good” and praise or give it a treat. An example would be when they are playing on their own.
- » You cannot force your bird to do anything it does not want to do.
- » Ensure that all of your interaction with your bird allows the bird to choose the interaction.

Parrots are very complex and emotional animals. Behavior and training is a much deeper topic that we cannot fully cover in this guide. 3PR recommends the following authors and websites for bird owners to further educate themselves on this topic:

- » Barbara Heidenreich – Goodbirdinc.com
- » Susan G. Friedman, PhD
- » Lafebers.com
- » Birdchannel.com

Some personal notes about living with birds from 3PR's management team, for the benefit of those who are considering adding a bird to their lives:

- » Add a bird to your life because of what you can give to him, not what he can give to you.
- » Demonstrate patience and compromise; much like a child, your bird needs space to explore and be herself in.
- » Let your bird be a bird. He is a prey animal who was meant to fly and have choices; understand that, and then when he chooses to come to you, you will feel like the most special person in the world.
- » Your bird will have bad days and bad weeks sometimes. Do not take it personally.
- » Treat her with respect; she is an intelligent, feeling creature who communicates visually and verbally – just like you do. Make sure you communicate with her.
- » Give him the best diet and care you can. Remember only you are making his choices for him.
- » Give her a routine to build her confidence, but also give her life experiences to make her resilient. Push her out of her comfort zone once in while, and push yourself outside of your comfort zone too!



About Pikes Peak Parrot Rescue

Pikes Peak Parrot Rescue 's mission is to provide excellent care for companion birds relinquished to shelters in the Pikes Peak Region and to find them the perfect fit in a loving, permanent home in Colorado

Donations are welcome at [**3profco.org/donate/**](https://3profco.org/donate/)

