

## Basic Information on Parakeets



The common Parakeet (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), also known as a Budgerigar or Budgie, is originally from Australia. Budgerigar is thought to be a misunderstood term taken from an Australian Aborigine word meaning "tasty snack". Parakeets are naturally green with yellow and black, but due to selective breeding, the common parakeet is now available in many different colors. There are also English Budgerigars, or "show" Parakeets, which are nearly twice the size of the common Parakeet due to selective breeding. The average lifespan of Budgies is 5 to 8 years, although some may live up to 20 years.

### Choosing a pet

Most importantly, you should choose a healthy bird. Look for signs of good health: Does the bird seem curious and active? Look at the bird's eyes – are they bright and free of tearing? Look at the cere – is it free of discharge? Turn the bird on its back and look at the vent (area from which birds defecate) – make sure there is no evidence of diarrhea (the feathers around the vent should be clean).

It is best to choose a young bird since older birds may be set in their ways making them harder to train. A young bird has a smooth cere and black bars on the forehead close to the cere. As the bird ages, the black bars will recede.

Although we do not guarantee the sex of any bird, there are "traditional" ways of sexing a parakeet such as looking at the color of their cere (fleshy upper area of the beak that includes the nose holes). Males generally have bright blue to violet ceres, while females light blue to beige ceres. Males are often more acrobatic, active, and vocal than females. Since their cere changes colors as the mature sexually, the young birds offered for sale at B&B Pet Stop tend to all look like females.

### Diet

You should feed your Parakeet a varied diet for better overall health, improved resistance to infection, and stronger, lovelier feathers. Their diet should consist of seeds, pellets, fresh fruits and vegetables, proteins, grains, and nuts. Spray millet is also encouraged for young birds, but it is a relished treat by birds of all ages.

- Offer a high quality seed blend such as Kaytee's Grassland mix which contains the nutritional variety and mental stimulation nature intended such as canary grass seed, white and red millet, oats, flax seed, chia seed, wheat middlings, and timothy hay.
- A pelleted diet is a nutritionally complete and balanced diet. Each pellet contains the exact nutrition your bird needs to produce better feathering, brighter colors, and maintain excellent health.
- Offer a variety of fruits and vegetables. By experimenting with different fruits and veggies, you can figure out your bird's favorites. At first a bird may be fearful of the color or size of a food, but in time it will become accustomed to its presence and begin nibbling out of curiosity. It is best to cut them into pieces that are small enough for your bird to hold in their foot. Apples (without seeds!), bananas,

oranges, carrots, peppers, broccoli, corn on the cob, dark green lettuces, and peas are just some of the fruits and veggies your parakeet may enjoy.

- Good protein sources include cooked dried legumes (such as black beans, navy beans, red beans, pinto beans, garbanzo beans, kidney beans, lentils, and dried split peas), alfalfa, eggs, and lean meats (such as chicken, turkey, and fish).
  - Grains such as brown rice, whole wheat bread, baked corn bread, and spinach pasta will provide your bird with carbohydrates. White bread and white rice are also okay, but only as a treat since they are less nutritious.
  - Nuts are great treats. Not only do they provide your bird with entertainment, they are also generally high in protein, fats, and trace minerals. Almonds, Cashews, Pistachios, and Walnuts are just a few varieties your bird may enjoy. *Avoid giving your bird salted nuts of any variety.*
  - We also recommend using a vitamin supplement. Most vitamins are added to the bird's water so make sure you see your bird drink from its water cup! Some birds may not like the taste of a particular vitamin so go easy – don't over do it. By adding vitamins, you can be certain your bird is getting the nutrition it needs.
  - **Never give your bird iceberg lettuce, it is watery and offers no nutritional value. Never give avocado to any bird. Avocados contain a toxic fatty acid derivative called Persin that is poisonous to ALL birds. Never give your bird caffeine or chocolate, they are also toxic to birds. Never give your bird foods that may be moldy or spoiled food. Avoid giving your bird shellfish as it may have higher levels of iodine and bacterial contamination.**
- When you eat in front of your bird, try giving it something healthy from your plate. It will be more inclined to try a food if it sees you eating the food first.
- One rule of thumb when feeding your bird "people food": if it's not good for you - it's not good for your bird! For example, ice cream is okay for you in limited quantities. This is also true for your bird. A few licks are okay, but too much could cause diarrhea. Avoid greasy, salty foods like french fries and potato chips. They are not good for you or your bird!
- Converting a "seed junkie" over to a varied diet requires persistence and patience. Slowly is the key – some birds may take months for the conversion.
- **Step 1** – Give your pet only as much seed as it can consume in one day. This is a very important point - so try to be accurate. Sprinkle a layer of pellets over the seed and include another food cup in the cage (the same color as the regular seed cup) filled with pellets.
  - **Step 2** – Cut back *very slightly* on the amount of seed, so the bird will be a little hungry – NOT STARVING – only a little hungry. During this time leave pellets and other healthy foods in a separate food cup of the same color. When the bird begins to eat, investigate, or nibble on non-seed food, go to the next step.
  - **Step 3** – Remove the seed dish at night and don't feed seed until later the next morning. Do not give in to "seed beggars". At some point you will see your bird eat pellets and other healthy foods. When this occurs move on to the next step.
  - **Step 4** – Slowly reduce the amount of seed offered until your bird's diet includes a good variety consisting of the healthy foods we've discussed.

## Cage, Toys and Dishes

A parakeet cage should be large enough for the bird to completely spread its wings without touching the sides of the cage. The smallest cage we suggest for one parakeet is 14"l x 11"w x 16"h. If you keep two parakeets together, you will need a larger cage. When selecting a bird cage, keep the bar spacing in mind. Ensure the space between the bars is not large enough for your bird to get its head through. Remember: the bigger the cage - the happier the bird.

Parakeets must have toys, or they will literally go crazy from boredom. Include several toys in its cage, rotating different ones in every few weeks. Some birds like bright colors, some birds are fearful of them. Some birds like beads, bells or wood, and some don't. Each bird is an individual and has their own preferences of toys. We have a large selection of toys designed for all types of birds. A word of caution when selecting a mirror as a toy: some trainers believe that mirrors will prevent birds from bonding with their owners; instead, they believe the bird will bond to the "bird in the mirror".

Concrete perches are a good alternative to frequent nail trimming. The rough quality of the concrete will help file the tips of the nail as the bird grips the perch. Remember to keep different types and sizes of perches in your birds cage to help exercise their feet.

Include a mineral block or cuttlebone in the cage. Not only do they provide much needed minerals like calcium, but they also help wear away the bird's beak to prevent overgrowth. Should your bird's beak become overgrown, it may have to be filed down by your local avian vet.

Your bird needs three dishes: one for seeds and pellets, one for fresh foods, and one for water. Some Parakeets do not like to stick their heads into a dish and may not eat or drink if a covered dish is their only option. Try not to position the dishes under perches to prevent contamination from fecal matter.

Parakeets may throw seed hulls, so you may wish to include some sort of seed guard or seed catcher in your purchases. This is one bad habit we must learn to live with, however feeding pellets reduces this problem.

You may also wish to use a cage cover at night to protect your bird from drafts and to provide a feeling of safety for your bird as it sleeps. A cover may also be used as a training tool. When your bird is unusually loud or disobedient, remove it from its "flock" by covering its cage. When your pet quiets down, reward it by removing the cover.

Allow your bird out of cage time with your family. A table top perch or play stand is great for out of cage time.

## Cage cleaning

We recommend you clean the bottom of the cage on a daily basis. Using litter such as crushed walnut shells or corn cob makes this task easier. Remove fresh foods after a couple of hours. Clean all food and water dishes thoroughly with soap and water on a daily basis to prevent unwanted bacterial growth.

Scrub perches weekly. Allow the perches to dry completely before they are returned to the cage. We recommend you purchase an additional set of perches just for this purpose.

Because birds regularly chew on the bars of their cage, we recommend scrubbing the bars once a week. Use a brush to remove all droppings from the bars then wipe the bars with a product like Clean Cage by Super Pet.

## Cage placement

Because birds are social animals, we recommend placing the cage in a room where the bird can spend time with the family. When there is excitement in the room, the bird will respond by jumping and chirping. When the family is quiet, the bird will also be quiet.

## Grooming

Many birds love a bath. You may spray your bird with warm water or place a shallow bowl with water on the bottom of the cage. Remember to remove the water quickly at the end of bath time to prevent the bird from drinking the water. Like any new item or experience, slowly introduce a bath to your bird.

Wing clipping should be done approximately every few months. The length of time varies from bird to bird since feather growth - like hair growth for people - is different for each bird. Toenails should be trimmed on an "as needed" basis. Look at the nail when the bird is at rest. If the nail leans to one side, it needs to be trimmed. If you do not feel comfortable trimming your birds wings or nails, B&B Pet Stop (as well as your local avian vet) can do it for you. Rewards Club members get wing & nail trimming for their birds for half-price. Ask any member of our staff for more information about our Rewards Club!

## Talking

Parakeets can be trained to talk. Remember they are social animals and will crave your attention. Start with one word like "hello". Repeat the word slowly, over and over and over. In order for you to understand the bird, slow repetition is essential, since the bird will say the word faster than it was taught. Children are usually more successful than adults because birds tend to be drawn to children's higher pitched voices.

## How many Parakeets to keep

If you want your Parakeet to bond with you and you intend to give it lots of attention and training, it is best to keep one Parakeet. If you do not intend to train or bond with your bird, keep two parakeets. Introduce the birds slowly to each other. Set them in two separate cages side by side. Allow them time to meet and greet each other. After a day or two, open the cage doors and allow them access to each other's cage. Monitor them for any aggression. Two males or a male and a female make the best roommates.

## What NOT to do

**Never** smoke around your bird. They have very sensitive lungs and are prone to respiratory infections if subjected to the stress of a smoky room.

**Never** place your bird in a drafty area. Test for drafts from ceiling fans before leaving a cage for any extended length of time. Birds can tolerate low temperatures, but never a draft.

**Never** place your bird in the kitchen. When overheated, non-stick cookware, such as Teflon®, releases a gas which is TOXIC to all birds. Smoke from burning food will also leave your bird's respiratory system vulnerable to infections.

**Never** use fabric fresheners around birds. Remove your bird from the room and return only when the product has dried.

**Never** use aerosol products around birds. This includes products like perfumes, hairsprays, room deodorizers, spray paint, and strong cleaners.

**Never** place your bird's cage close to an item it can chew. Electrical cords, blinds, curtains, window facings, and picture frames have all fallen victim to bored birds at one time or another. Observe your bird when it thinks it's alone - see what it can grab when it reaches out with its foot.

**Never** place your bird's cage directly in front of a window because the heat from the sun can quickly overheat your bird. Also, if the window is open the bird will receive a draft.

**Please Note:** The information in this handout is meant to provide basic information only. Please see a salesperson for more information.

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