# Table of Contents

Introduction  
Page 4

Chapter 1  
An Overview  
Page 6

Chapter 2  
The Joys of Pet Parrots  
Page 11

Chapter 3  
Adopting the Perfect Parrot  
Page 15

Chapter 4  
So Many Parrots – So little Time  
Page 28

Chapter 5  
Preparing for Your New Arrival  
Page 32

Chapter 6  
Feeding Your Parrot  
Page 39

Chapter 7  
Taking Good Care of Your Parrot  
Page 56

Chapter 8  
Teaching Your Parrot  
Page 63

Conclusion  
Page 74

References  
Page 76
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

INTRODUCTION

This book was written with the notion that you, like many individuals, know very little about this bird. It was written to give you an overview of what to expect should you decide to adopt a parrot and enjoy its wondrous company.

For, indeed, the friendship and love of a bird (especially any variety of parrot) can create an astounding bond. Those who had never owned birds before have been totally taken aback by the quality of friendship generated as well as the ability of the parrot to actually interact with his human friends.

How To Use This Book Wisely

This book is intended to provide you with what's involved of owning a parrot – before you decide to jump into the car, cruise down to your local pet shop and pluck that bird out of his cage.

Indeed, a spur of the moment decision to buy a pet – any pet, but especially with that may have a 50-year lifespan! – is not a good decision.

View this book as the first step in a series of actions you plan on taking to seriously research whether a parrot is the right pet for your family.

Read what's involved in responsible bird ownership. Apply these ideas to your own lifestyle. Do you have time for a bird? Do you have the true desire for one?

Or are you motivated simply because one member of the family (usually a child) thinks that it would be “cool” to have a bird in the house?
Once you have a better idea what is exactly involved in living with a feathered creature, then you can begin to get a better grasp on whether you’re cut out to be the owner – and more importantly – friend of a parrot.

If you read the entire book and you still think that owning a parrot is right for you, great. You just might want to read through certain parts again to gain an even deeper understanding of certain issues.
Living with a parrot isn’t a choice every family makes. Whether it’s a choice you and your family should make - only you can tell for sure.

If you discover that it is, you’ll be delighted and amused by the endless hours, the countless days and wonderfully satisfying years of love, affection, companionship and entertainment that lies ahead.

Polly wants a cracker. The constant companion atop the shoulder of the proverbial pirate who sails the seven seas. These are typically most people’s responses when they think of a parrot.

For the most part, you think of a bird that talks. In fact, so well known are these birds for their remarkable ability to mimic what we say, that the word “parrot” is even used as a verb. “He parroted back the teacher’s argument.”

But along with this bird’s ability to talk is the natural beauty, intelligence and genuine grace of the species.

We in no way even begin to think that we’ve exhausted the wide array of parrots that are squawking somewhere in the world right now. But we will give you an idea of just how diverse this group of birds truly is.

If you’re thinking about adding a parrot to your family, you may be limited in thinking about the type of bird you may be adopting. For members of the parrot family are as individual as you and I.

What Makes A Parrot A Parrot?

Lots of different characteristics, actually. First off, let’s get that scientific name out of the way. Parrots belong to a family called Psittacidae, otherwise identified as climbing birds.

Within this large, extended families are different branches, including the parrot proper as one branch is referred to, Macaws, Cockatoos, Lories, Paroquets or Parakeets depending on the spelling.

Parrots are so terrifically diverse. Just what makes them all parrots? Quite a bit apparently. Every parrot, no matter his size, color, or personality, all share certain traits.
Each member of the parrot family has a tongue. But not just any tongue. It’s soft, thick and fleshy. And it’s really quite mobile. And each member of the parrot family possesses a complex larynx that has three distinct muscles. And this not only helps to distinguish them as parrots but it allows them to “parrot” us humans quite well.

In a few of the parrot species the tongue even comes to a point, looking somewhat like the end of an acorn. Additionally, you may find that the skin of the tongue is covered with small papillae – fingerlike appendages that are slightly flattened and arranged longitudinally.

Even though you may think that the tongue on these birds evolved specifically for mimicking sounds, nothing could be further from the truth. In the parrot, the tongue is actually one of the sense organs, much like it is for us. The parrot tastes, touches and swallows with this organ.

And, of course, each parrot has a beak. Some possess one that’s larger than another specie, but make no mistake about it, each parrot has a distinctive beak to call his own. If you were to study the beak of each member of this bird family, you’d learn that each is large, thick hard and fairly solid. And it’s more than often has a rounded shape. The beak is also a very valuable tool he uses in climbing, walking, and even resting his body weight comfortably on his beak.

The jaw is only loosely hinged with the skull. It’s, nonetheless, connected to the beak with a strong membrane as well as bones placed on either side of the bird’s head. And because of this the parrot can lift and depress his upper jaw at will. This also allows the bird to open his bill wider.

It’s that little cock of his head that makes the parrot so delightfully cute – and at the same time gives him the appearance of great intelligence, when he seriously studies an object that is close to him.

And there’s good reason for this. His eyes are placed on either side of his head. He actually cannot distinguish small objects which are held close to him without turning his head to one side.

The upper and lower lids of his eyes are actually a continuous single lid, forming a rounded opening for the eyeball. If you ever really take a good, long look at a parrot, you’ll notice that he seldom winks like you or I do. He really doesn’t need to. Even though the upper portion of the lid is mobile, the bird possesses the power to contract his pupil at will, independent of the presence of light or dark.

This contrasts to our pupil which dilates or expands automatically when we enter either the bright daylight or a dark room. He uses this power, most notably, when he’s angry, fearful or struck by some other strong emotion. As the bird ages, additionally, the color of his iris deepens.
Where Are Parrot’s Ears?

The ears of a parrot are small, oval openings. And they happen to be placed right above their eyes. You can’t see them well because the ears are covered in feathers, and they’re placed beyond the border of the cere – or wrinkled skin. In some species of parrots, this area also includes the eye.

If you take a critical survey of parrots, you’d discover that these colorful birds – at least most varieties of them – have short wings. Some varieties of the Macaw are the exception to this rule. They have long wings covered with long feathers.

The body of the bird itself is really quite bulky. This presents a few problems, one of them presenting a physical difficulty in raising themselves from the ground when attempting their take off for flight. But don’t worry, once they’re off the ground the they fly gracefully and easily. If you ever watch them in the wild, you’ll see that some varieties simply rise from one branch to another, seldom flying long distances.

Twelve. That’s the usual number of tail feathers a parrot has. Of course, depending on the exact variety of parrot these feathers differ wildly in length. On some species they’re short and on others they’re long, elegant and graceful looking. But usually there are 12.

It’s amazing that a bird that presents itself as being so graceful and so beautiful really has short, clumsy legs. Go ahead and study them. They are short. And with two toes that point forward and two that point backward, the average parrot looks a little awkward.

But these toes are one of his most prized possessions. They enable him to climb – and climb well, quick and with ease. When he walks he has an odd swing to his body.

The toes are also instrumental when the parrot eats. He uses much like hands. He holds his food firmly with the claws of one of his feet, places the food in his mouth. The second foot, obviously is then used to support him.

In addition to this his feet, physically, are covered with scales, strong scales. And these legs are nothing if they’re not muscular. This helps him to hang on to a perch without much thought and very little effort. Aided by the strong hooked claws of the toes, sitting securely on a branch comes very naturally to this creature.

Don’t Call The Parrot A Bird Brain

Indeed, according to recent research, the brain of your average parrot is larger than that of any other species of birds. It’s more developed.

Start his education when he’s a baby and you’ll discover that you’ll have a parrot that really never stops learning new words, phrases and even sentences, regardless of his
age. Some owners report that those birds who have started young enough never really stop learning.

Sagacity. It’s just another word for judgment. Who would even think that parrots possess some sort of sense of judgment? But they do. If you decide that the parrot is the right pet for you, you’ll discover just what scientists mean by that.

The same sense of judgment, which they use as pets, the experts say, they also exhibit in their natural habitat. They use this trait, as a part of a large flock, in keeping predators away.

And then there those glorious feathers! If the bird has brilliant colors, hues of reds, yellows, blues, greens, chances are it’s a parrot. Of course, there are exceptions to this as well but these are few and far between.

And then there is the size factor. If all parrots were the same size perhaps it would be easier to distinguish a parrot. But this family of birds comes in a wide variety of sizes including the tiniest of Australian Paroquets, or lovebirds, which can’t be housed in a normal barred cage. These birds are so small they would slip right between the rungs.

The parrot also comes in the extra large size – as in your classic Macaw.

What Attracts People To Parrots?

Parrots are popular pets for a variety of reasons, not the least of which are their natural beauty, the high level of their intelligence and their sociable natures. Nearly 15 years ago, USA Today, the national newspaper conducted a poll, discovering that some 11 million birds were kept as pets in this country. While the article didn’t specify, you’ve got to believe that a large number of them were parrots. In fact, the most popular of all the pet bird species in the country today is a species of parrot, the domesticated Budgerigar.

If you adopt a larger bird, then he’ll ultimately need a larger cage (which by the way needs cleaning regularly). Many of the larger birds can be on the destructive side when they get bored.

Parrots also need some form of exercise as well as social interaction (and if you can’t provide your parrot pet with this interaction, then you’ll need to make sure that he can get this from another parrot).

Now take into account that if you adopt a large parrot like a Macaw, his odds are actually in his favor that he’ll out live you! Just who are you going to bequeath this guy to? The smaller parrots, by contrast have only a lifespan of 15 to 20 years. But that’s still an impressively long time!
Think about this long and hard: if you buy a parrot, you’re making a lifetime commitment. While you’re not going through that wedding ceremony, or the nine months of waiting for your baby to be born, it’s a commitment that requires work, time, effort and expense on your part.

If you’re ready to make that kind of promise to a feathered friend, then you’re ready to choose your ultimate parrot. If you have any kind of second thoughts, it’s absolutely necessary then that you, at the very least, postpone your decision. You may also want to just choose another type of pet.

The desire and love of parrots goes far beyond their beauty. A parrot is a quite wonderful companion to a human. The two can form a close, affectionate bond with its owner. And if you adopt a parrot who has been bred specifically for being a pet, you’ll be delighted with the ease you can hand feed him. Your parrot has been interacting since nearly birth with humans. You can also be confident that your new member of the family will be tame and come to trust you – and others in your family – in a relatively short amount of time.
If someone you know owns a bird, chances are it’s some species of parrots. For the most part, nearly half of the pet birds worldwide are parrots. Of course, the many species and subspecies account for some of the popularity, but the truth is that many individuals are drawn to their nearly human like qualities.

In the United States, though, four species of parrots are the most popular, one of which is the African Grey, legendary for his ability to talk fluently to his owners.

Another of the four most popular parrots is the Amazon. These birds are renowned for their loyalty. The other two of the four most popular parrots are the Cockatoos and the Macaws.

Some people enjoy bird ownership because they require only a minimal amount of grooming. Birds in fact seem to take a certain amount of pride in keeping themselves clean. They preen their feathers every day, keeping them shiny and clean. The most help they need from you is a quick trim of their nails every now and then. And a bath? All a parrot really craves is a quick shower of plain water once a week or so.

Another reason why parrots make such popular pets is their ability to socialize with their owners. To those individuals who know little about parrots, it may not seem like a parrot would be a pet who would bond with his owner. But, indeed, he is.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

You’d be surprised that many parrot owners actually take their birds with them when they run their daily errands, taking their feathered friends to the bank or grocery store.

Parrots are entertaining. It’s a fact. They are beautiful no doubt. But they are in many ways the clowns of the bird world. They possess a wide range of comical behavior patterns that can keep you entertained for hours. Ask any individual who owns a parrot, and he’ll tell you that the mere presence of a parrot in his home seems to bring a natural vibrancy and life to the home.

While the longevity of a bird may be a disadvantage to many, to parrot lovers it’s a great benefit. You’re unlikely to deal with very many grieving experiences when you adopt a parrot. It may very well be the only parrot you ever own, the bird’s lifespan is so long.

To Speak or Not to Speak: Will My Bird Talk?

A unique attraction of parrot ownership is his ability to speak. Many potential parrot owners choose a parrot especially for this reason, whether it’s a proper criterion for selection or not.

So how can you be sure that the bird you’re considering adopting will eventually talk? The truth is that you’ll never know for sure, it’s merely a matter of probability – not certainty. But there are certain choices you can make to increase those odds.

First, choose a baby parrot. We’ve already noted that if you train a parrot at a young age, he’s far more likely to learn how to talk. But more than that, he’s actually more likely to keep learning throughout his entire life.

You can also choose certain species of parrots who are known to be easier to train and are known “talkers.” One of these is the African Grey. Without a doubt, this particular bird is the most well known of all the parrots who talk. This bird is also known for his ability to adopt a large vocabulary and for his native intelligence.

Another talker in the parrot world is the Quaker Parrot. A medium sized bird, the Quaker Parrot is an impressive talker when he wants to be. And in addition to words and short phrases, he’ll repeat back various sounds he hears around him as well.

If a parrot who talks is important to you, then definitely take a serious look at the Budgie. He may be a little more difficult to train to talk, but once they learn, it’s almost as if they never stop talking!

You may also want to investigate the possibility of owning an Indian Ringneck Parakeet. This bird has a crystal clear voice. In addition to that, he’s an absolutely stunningly beautiful bird, with brilliantly colored feathers.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

Don’t rule out the Cockatiel when searching for your ultimate talking parrot, either. While these birds are small, they talk as well. But more than that, they whistle and repeat the sounds around them. And as a bonus, they are also quite loving birds.

You may also be interested in owning an Amazon Parrot as well. This bird is well known for his distinctive ability to speak. And he also makes a loyal pet.

Keep in mind, though, the ability to speak varies not only within a species, but also with the individual bird himself. Just because you adopt a particular species of bird, there’s no guarantee that he’ll learn how to talk.

Don’t Think Parrots Are Low Maintenance

But don’t think for a moment that this means that these gorgeous birds are low maintenance. Because they’re not. Like any pet they require your daily feeding. They also do need grooming, veterinarian care, training as well as toys to keep them from getting bored.

Frustrating. Time consuming. Even exhausting. These are all words used by those individuals who keep parrots as pets. It’s no secret that these birds demand more time and effort than many people would like to think – or really expect.

Yet, the ranks of parrot owners swell year by year. In some cases, people adopt parrots not really knowing how complex a creature he is. Being highly intelligent, this animal demands more of your time than your average dog or cat.

You can expect a complex creature. And a creature that has various needs and then quite a few desires as well. If these needs and desires aren’t met, then not only can these birds come down with physical illnesses, they may also develop psychological problems as well. They don’t do well being alone. And if they don’t have other birds to interact with, they’ll basically adopt you as another bird.

Parrots are just “noisy” animals by their very nature. They scream! There’s no other way to say it. And the larger the parrot is, the louder he screams. And these birds squawk naturally at certain times of the day – guaranteed. Expect your bird to squawk like clockwork several times in the morning, then around noon and again in the evening. It’s a given.

They make noises at these particular hours because these are innate calling and gathering times for them. If you walk out of the room, the odds are very good that they’ll call to get you back in there with them.

Parrots are not neat

It’s a parrot fact of life. Parrots are messy. Not only do you have to deal with cleaning out the cage of this messy bird (who, by the way, may actually defecate every 10 or 15
minutes) but his eating habits are less than neat. Before you decide to adopt one, take a look at one in the pet store at feeding time. It could make even the most ardent parrot lover think twice about adopting one!

Okay, here’s another disadvantage to parrot ownership. They bite. Even the tamest of the pet parrots will occasionally bite. Why? They bite for a variety of reasons – and sometimes its not easy trying to figure out exactly why! Sometimes, they’ll bite out of fear, or they just may be doing it out of boredom. But it could also be that a parrot may bite you or a visitor in your home out of frustration. And biting could also be related to their innate territorial instincts. Indeed, parrots truly are complex animals.
Macaw certainly looks nothing like a Cockatiel. The Macaw is large, colorful and even a bit intimidating. The cockatiel on the other hand is smaller, and almost an inviting friendly animal, even if you’re not totally comfortable around birds.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

Amazingly both of these birds are classified as parrots. But what’s even more amazing is that between these two disparate types of birds lies yet a rainforest of birds that are also considered parrots.

If you’re considering adopting a parrot, don’t limit your choices to either one of these two. You have a wide range of birds to choose from. In addition to the Macaws you have the cuddly Senegal Parrot. Never heard of it? Not surprised. We’ll tell you a little bit more as we traverse through the birds together.

You may also want to consider a bird called the Eclectus parrot, or even a member of the species of the Amazon parrots, whose natural habitats extend from South American into Mexico and into the Caribbean.

For now, I just want to introduce you to the fact that there are indeed so many parrots, and deciding which parrot is the right pet for your family is not a task to be taken lightly.

Parrots and Children

There’s no hard and fast rule that says parrots and children don’t mix. The success of this combination depends on the characteristics of the individual bird, the ages and personality of the children and the type of household everyone is living in.

No parrot should be allowed to be left alone with very small children. If you adopt a parrot and you already have small children, this needs to be understood from the very beginning. This protects both the child and the parrot.

While for the most part parrots tolerate and some even love children, you’ll always hear the stories of a parrot who discovers a child he just will not tolerate. And the only way the parrot has to express this displeasure is through biting. One of the species that is particularly prone to intolerance of children is the Conure.

Macaws are another species require adult supervision. Macaws are not inherently mean, but they do have powerful beaks. Should this bird get provoked, he may bite a child and cause considerable harm.

The Poicephalus parrot, on the other hand, is a friendly bird who is known for his exceptional gentleness around children.

Parrots and Other Pets

Many households have dogs, cats and parrots coexisting quite peacefully under the same roof.

Let’s take a quick look at the most notorious of animal rivalry in a house: Dog versus cat. While historically these two species are considered rivals, the truth is that when
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

raised in the same house many a dog and cat have become the best of friends. Why not give them a parrot friend as well?

The key to this arrangement working rests primarily on one consideration: You!

Parrot Parent Tip

Take your lifestyle into consideration when choosing a parrot. How much time do you spend at home? Do you have the time to devote to a single bird?

If your answer is no, don’t worry. The wide variety of species and sizes provides you with an option of buying several smaller birds. You can still bond with these marvelous creatures, but they’ll also have each other to provide them with companionship, friendship and entertainment for those times when you’re away. Several varieties of parrots are kept in cages, similar to an aviary. The birds will not only keep each other company, but you’ll have nice hobby tending to them. You may even be considering that the fact that eventually you’ll want to breed parrots.

Other Options

If your ultimate goal is to breed the birds, you may eventually want to establish outdoor aviaries. Here you can care for the parrots in as natural an environment as possible, providing them with the opportunity to fly as much as they can.

Whatever your ultimate choices are, you need to consider what type of parrot you’re most attracted to as well as what type of parrot you can actually afford. If you’re attracted to a $1,000 Macaw, but he’s not in your price range, there are options for a more affordable bird.

It’s not a bad idea starting out with a finch or a canary who carries a tenth of that price tag. It’ll give you a great idea of evaluating the ins and outs of parrot ownership within your current budget.

If you find you absolutely love it then you can always save up for a more expensive bird for the future.

What Type Of Living Space Do You Have?

If you’re setting your sights on a large bird and you live in a small apartment you may have a slight problem. Every bird requires a certain amount of space to fly. The larger the bird is, the more space he needs to exercise.

Another aspect to consider when choosing the perfect parrot for yourself, is the condition of your house. Are you the type of person who must have everything in the home absolutely perfect? A bird, just like a dog may chew things. Those things could
include items of the house. While these not only may be poisonous to your pet, they could wreak havoc on a well-tended, well-cared –for everything-in-its-place home.

If you’re not willing to tolerate a little mess and perhaps some damage to things you already own, then you need to take this into account in choosing your ultimate bird.

When it comes to parrot ownership, considering what your neighbors think should be taken seriously – especially if you’re considering adopting an Amazon or a Cockatoo. These guys can get very noisy.

If you have neighbors who live close or if you live in an apartment complex, you may want to scratch the noisier of the birds off your option list right now! They squawk loudly at least twice daily. If your neighbors already have an alarm clock then they just might not have the need for a daily wake up call from your parrot!

If you live in a rural area with no neighbors who live that close, then you have the luxury of consider these gorgeous birds.

If you keep your bird indoors, you may find that your pet joins in the “singing” when you start up your vacuum cleaner, or even when the television set is turned on. Yes, these are the loveable quirks of a parrot!

Another aspect of being a good parrot parent is in the realm of stimulating your bird intellectually. Any given parrot may reach the intelligence equal to a three-year-old child.

One pet parrot requires plenty of your time. If you live alone, work many hours throughout the day, perhaps this bird isn’t right for you. However, if you have a family and the bird always has some companionship at home – someone to talk to, to entertain, someone to give him praise and encouragement – then a larger single bird could be perfect.

**Before You Adopt**

A parrot of any kind, make sure you know as much as you possibly can about the particular species you’re choosing. In addition to surfing the web to find the ultimate parrot, go to your library to find some books on him.

But don’t let your research stop there. You’ll want to search out others who already own the species you have – or are at least familiar with parrots in general. Don’t be afraid to ask them questions about the hours involved in ownership as well as the ultimate costs. If you’ve never been around birds much, here’s your chance to spend some time with them as well.

If you can seek out individuals who own a variety of different parrots. Familiarize yourself in the differences in species in size, their needs, and their habits. The more
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

you learn about your potential new pet before you adopt him, the better parrot parent you’ll be in the long run.

Where do you go to get your parrot? You have any number of choices: A friend, a bird breeder, a dealer, through an advertisement in a bird magazine, or even a pet shop.

If you are lucky enough to know individuals who keep parrots, then you may feel comfortable enough asking if they have a parrot they would sell to you. If they’re breeders, the chances are good that they do. Or if they have several, they may be willing to sell you one of their own birds. This is actually a wonderful way to adopt, not only for you, but also for the bird too.

You’ll have a good idea how the bird has been raised up to this point. You’ll know what’s he’s been eating and how he has been housed. And a continuing friendship with this person ensures you always have a veteran parrot parent who can provide you with key advice as you mature into your own role as parent.

It is also a great situation for the parrot. The overall stress level of the bird is reduced when he’s adopted by an individual who keeps his routine as similar to what he’s been accustomed to. He’ll appreciate you not changing his diet drastically or adjusting any of his well-established habits too radically. Overall, the stress levels for the two of you will be reduced.

Adopting a bird who you’ve already met and whose background and habits you know will increase the odds that you’ll have a successful adoption process.

How Much Does a Parrot Cost?

Let’s just walk you through the process, so you can have some idea of the cost involved in acquiring and taking care of your new pet. Depending on the species of this bird, the actual cost of purchasing the bird can vary greatly.

If you’re looking at a small bird, like a Budgerigar – which is a parakeet – are the least expensive, ranging anywhere from $10 to $25. As you choose other small birds, the prices of these slowly creep up. Canaries start at $25, for example, and they can cost up to $150. Finches come in a wide range. You can find one inexpensively as $10. But, you can also have your heart set on a $100 finch as well.

Lovebirds though cost a little bit more, starting at $75 and climbing all the way to $200. If you have your eye on a Parrotlet, though, be prepared to start by pulling out that $100 bill and then adding several more to that. You can spend as much as $300 for this type of bird.

If you choose to adopt a hand-fed bird, expect to pay a little bit more. In some instances, you’ll pay a lot more. The Hahn’s Mini-Macaw may cost you $600 or more.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

A Congo African Grey parrot can cost $900, a Cockatoo may cost a little more, with an average price tag of about $950.

If you’re looking at a baby Amazon though, hand-fed, expect to spend a minimum of $900. Similarly, the initial outlay for the Macaw starts at $950 and rises to $1,400 depending on the quality of the bird and the breeder.

But the expense of the bird’s adoption is only the beginning. Now, where is the bird going to live? Exactly, he needs a cage. Even if you buy the smaller Conure, you should plan on spending a minimum of $400 for his house. If you’re madly in love with the larger species, like the Macaw, your love affair is going to cost you several thousand dollars just for a cage for him.

Parrot Parenting Tip

So you’re looking at cages for your parrot. Yes, they don’t come cheap. However, you need to realize that this cage becomes your new friend’s home. If you were looking for a house for yourself, you’d no doubt find the best home within your price range.

So take a second look at those cages. Regardless of whether you’re expecting to adopt a smaller bird or a larger of the parrot species, my suggestion is to buy the largest, practical cage that fits your price range. The bigger the cage your pet bird has, the more freedom he’ll experience and the more comfortable he’ll be.

When choosing a cage, remember to consider the overall width of the parrot cage. Here’s a great rule of thumb when deciding on the size of cage you need. Estimate the wingspan of your new parrot – or the species you intend to adopt. Now, multiply this by four to get the minimum height of the cage you should purchase. Take the wingspan and multiply by three. This gives you an idea of the smallest depth the cage should be. Now multiply by 2.5 to wingspans for the minimum width of the cage.

This area gives your bird more welcome space to fly from one side of the cage to next. You’ll have one pleased bird!

When you purchase a parrot, keep in mind you’ll have to buy some items that can help him exercise and feel more at home – and in the process keep him healthy as well. These include play gyms and T-stands. Don’t be too shocked at the need for this expense.

Now, let’s talk about some toys for your new little friend, too. In this category, you can spend as much or as little as you like (But, if with every moment you’re falling more in love with your new friend, we have a feeling that keeping that wallet in your pocket is getting harder with each passing day!).
Toys for Polly – or for Paul – may cost as little as $50 or as much as $100. Or you may also want to surf the web, read some books and perhaps make some toys on your own. It’s not out of the question, you know.

Now that you’ve adopted your new pet, have him set up in a fine parrot condo, equipped with some exercise equipment and toys . . . just what do you expect him to eat? Parrots – all types of parrots – need a balanced mix of seeds, pellets and fresh fruits and vegetables.

This cost varies on the size of the bird you’ve adopted, but here are some rough estimates. You can expect to pay anywhere from $8 to $20 monthly for seeds, another $10 to $30 a month for the pellets. Factor in the cost of the fresh fruits and vegetables and you’re looking at another $15 to $50 every month. That totals up to a minimum of $65 to $140 every month (In a year’s time, that runs you an extra $780 to $1,680 in a year. Realistically, can your budge accommodate that?

Think about that question carefully, because it’s not really meant to deter you. But, I’m mentioning it now, because we’re not finished outlining the money you’ll need for the continued of your bird. Think, for example, about veterinary care. This not only includes the annual examinations your new pet needs, but also immunizations. You can plan that this will run at least $100-300 a year depending on the size of your parrot.

And while you’re thinking about health, don’t forget that you may occasionally need to give your bird emergency health care because accidents do happen and birds do get sick sometimes. Factor in about another $250 to $2,000 for emergency care.

And what happens when you vacation? You need to think about the costs of boarding your bird while you’re away from home. The fee for a 10-day stay can cost anywhere from $100 - $250.

Ask any person who currently owns a parrot, and she’ll tell you that parrot ownership doesn’t come cheap. In fact, just with what we’ve outlined here, you can expect to spend between $2,000 and $4,000 a year on your pet alone!

**How To Talk To A Breeder**

This may seem a bit odd, but if you ask the correct questions, you can learn volumes about your new potential buddy. A good breeder will help you out along the way. A good breeder’s sole motivation is not to make money.

A good breeder very much wants his baby parrots to go to good homes. So if in the process you forget a few of these questions, he’ll probably jump in and answer them anyway.

**When were these birds hatched?**
You want a baby bird who is old enough to leave the nest. If he’s not old enough a good breeder will tell you this. He’ll also tell you when you can return to adopt your friend.

**Do you keep a closed aviary?**

Optimally, your breeder tends a closed aviary. A bird raised in this environment has a lower chance of developing a disease. Many avian diseases travel through the air. That means they spread quickly.

**Has the parrot’s sex been determined?**

The sex matters little when it comes to the quality of your companion pet. Both a male and a female make wonderful companions. But, to many individuals the sex of the bird really does matter. This is especially true if you’re taking the bird home to be with other parrots.

**Has the bird been tested for any diseases?**

This is an especially good question to ask if you discover the babies have already been sexed. Many times breeders will have these two activities performed at the same time. If the breeder answers positively to this question, then ask to see the documentation or the certificate from the lab which processed the results.

**Can I view the baby’s parents?**

You’ll probably discover that, indeed, the baby’s parents are on the premises and you can view them. But the odds are very unlikely you’ll be able to hold them. Many breeding parrots are not raised as pets and the parents of this bird may not be tame. In the parents, if they look generally healthy, then they probably are. And healthy parents most often produce health babies.

**Has the baby been hand fed or parent raised?**

If the bird has not been hand fed, don’t necessarily dismiss his adoption right away. It’s more important that the breeder socialized the baby.

**What has the baby been eating?**

This is probably one of the most important questions you could ask the breeder. Changing the baby’s diet as soon as you bring the parrot home can cause great distress to his system – and could even be fatal. The diet should be gradually to cause the least amount of stress to his system as possible.
These simple guidelines can help increase the chances that the baby parrot you bring home with you is healthy. It also helps ensure that the two of you start off on the right foot in a relationship that hopefully will last a lifetime.

**What About Advertisements?**

Of course, another alternative is respond to advertisements in bird and parrot magazines. You’ll discover these particular ads all the time. They may be large colorful display ads or just as likely be tucked away quietly in the classified section of these specialty publications.

Either way, before you actually adopt a pet parrot through this method, be sure to research everything you possibly can about the breeder or previous owner of the bird.

If the supplier you choose isn’t in your area, but promises to send you the bird, don’t do it without first visiting the bird at least once. In fact, try not to have him sent to you by cargo or commercial carrier. It would be much less traumatic for your new feathered friend if you can go pick him up in person.

As you can probably already imagine, you’re also protecting yourself as well. Even with email, camera phones and other ways to send photos and videos, it’s also best to visit with your potential new partner in person.

**Adopting A Rescue Bird**

It’s a great option. Don’t close your mind to it. You may decide that you want to adopt a parrot who has already been raised by another family who, for some reason, couldn’t keep him. These birds are surprisingly easy to find. Thousands of birds yearly can be found on what’s called the “secondary market.” The parrots are in desperate need of a loving commitment from a family.

Many parrots, through no fault of their own, have found themselves being transferred from one home to the next even before they reach full maturity. It’s a sad testament to the impulse nature a bird purchase may become. By adopting one of these birds, you’re not only receiving a loving (and very grateful) companion, but you’re making a crucial difference in the life of a displaced bird.

Not every rescue, though, was bought by an impulsive individual. Considering the long lifespan of these creatures, many birds simply out live their owners. With a little research on your part – either by talking to a breeder or your local pet store – you may be able to find a parrot who is in need of a home.

Many individuals are taken aback by the screening rescue aviaries perform on potential parents. While this may seem excessive to you, consider the fact that the bird you’re planning on adopting may already have been with at least one family and maybe even more.
The job of a rescue aviary is to find the parrot a loving permanent home. The staff feels its first responsibility is the place the bird responsibly. And that means to not allow it to go home with someone on an impulse. The staff ensures, as well, that the potential new parrot parents have the financial resources to care for the bird responsibly as well.

**Adopting A Baby Parrot**

Adopting a baby parrot can be very rewarding. And it gives you the chance to train this little guy from the very beginning. Not only that, but he'll have ample opportunity to bond with the entire family. But, make no mistake about it, a baby parrot costs more than an older one.

If you decide to adopt a baby parrot, you'll soon discover that you can choose from either one who has been raised by his biological parent or one who has been hand raised.

A parent-raised baby parrot normally has been bred in an aviary in which purposeful adult breeding is conducted. The eggs are laid, then incubated and the chicks are fed in a closed nest box. The result very often is a young bird who retains many of the behavior characteristics of his wild cousins.

This chick may never be actually handled by a human as they are weaned from their parent. In fact, very often the only interaction this chick may have had with people is not a favorable one. Usually, a parent-raised chick has no concept of people until he's caught in a net or being held down with a thick glove or a towel.

Is it any surprise that when he finally gets to your house that he squawks, claws or maybe even bites in an aggressive manner? This little guy not only needs plenty of love, but he needs a knowledgeable, experienced handler to help him through this very frightening period.

Very often this type of bird isn’t even destined to be a pet, though. More than likely this young chick finds itself as part of the next generation of captive breeding pairs. Not only is he ensuring the demands of the pet trade are met in a humane way, but he’s actually playing a large role in making sure his species doesn’t suffer from extinction.

**The Hand-Raised Parrot**

A more viable option as a pet is the hand-raised parrot. While hatched in an incubator, this baby is then removed from the nest box even before his eyes are opened. He’s then hand fed by humans literally around the clock. By the time he reaches your house, he’s already practically domesticated. A hand-raised parrot is tame, trusting, friendly, and he bonds easily with to family members. Without a doubt, he quickly becomes a beloved family member himself.
When you’re considering a hand-raised baby for adoption, you need to look at several important factors. First, find out at what age the chick left the nest box for hand feeding. Ideally, it should be before his eyes are even open. (Of course, this assumes that the breeder and feeder has the expertise to perform these tasks.)

If done after the eyes have opened, the baby parrot then shows signs of fearing humans. The exception to this is what breeders call the “one-week grace period.” This is the first week following the opening of his eyes. He can be left with his parents for this short of time and still be taken from them without the fear of developing the fear of human contact.

Curiously, you can tell this grace period has ended if his feathers begin to unfurl. That’s the initial sign that the baby may be too old to “pull” (as it’s called) from his parents.

It’s not unusual for a breeder to wait either. Hand-feeding a parrot is incredibly time consuming, especially right after birth. While it may not seem like it makes a difference, waiting that extra week really saves the breeder much time and effort. By this time, the chick only requires several feedings throughout the day.

The disadvantage to waiting, though, will become amply evident as the chick grows. The young bird, indeed, will eat when offered food. However, it will “grudgingly” accept it. But even more important from your standpoint, as a potential parrot parent, is that the baby never really achieves that special person-baby parrot bond.

You also need to consider exactly how your young friend was hand-raised. Ideally, the chick should be spoon-fed or fed through the use of syringe. This allows the bird to swallow naturally. And it makes the person a much more natural substitute for the parrot’s natural parent.

The Not-So Hand-Fed Option

Now, I’m sure you’re wondering at this point what the other option could possibly be? Well, the truth is that some baby parrots are fed simply by putting a flexible tube into the crop. The food is placed into the tube and the crop is in essence refilled.

And yes, it does save quite a bit of time, this method lacks any affectionate interaction between the newborn and the caregiver. It’s actually simply a poor form of “factory” feeding, if you ask true parrot lovers.

Not only that, but the tube potentially may irritate the soft lining of the intestines and crop. This potentially may lead to an infection.

Yet another consideration is the separation of the baby from his brothers or sisters after they get to be four to five weeks old. It’s probably not hard to imagine that a young chick is more willing to bond to people when no other form of companionship is available to him.
Don’t be fooled By Deceptive Sellers

When you go searching for a baby parrot to adopt, you may encounter some parrot sellers who are only interested in making money. They’ll try hard to convince that any parrot younger than a year is considered a baby. Or they may actually knowingly misrepresent the age of the bird you’re interested in adopting.

So how can you know? Insist that the seller allow you to see the hatching year on the closed leg band. This proves the age of the parrot.

Another trick of some unscrupulous sellers is to tell you a baby parrot was hand fed when he really wasn’t. You can already see the advantage to this. Not only is a hand-fed baby is an advantage to you, but the seller can charge more for this type of parrot. Again, don’t take his word for it. Insist on interacting with the parrot yourself. A good seller allows this to happen.

You’ll be able to tell from the parrot’s reaction to you if he was hand fed. If he was hand raised the baby will step up onto your hand or arm. He also allow you to gently pet him on the head and neck.

One of the most prominent characteristics of a hand-raised baby is the lack of fear they display. His response to you will be one leaning towards affection. He’ll be cuddly, nuzzling up to you when you stroke him. He might even gently nibble (not aggressively bite) your fingers or your hair. He may even try to play with your jewelry.

If he had not been hand raised, you’ll see this immediately as well. By the time you see the parrot, he’ll have already developed a true and unfortunately innate fear of all strangers. He will not climb on your arm of his own accord nor will he allow you to pet him.

So How To You Ensure You Adopt A “Youngster”

There are several techniques you can use to ensure that you don’t fall prey to some unscrupulous buyer. The first way is to intentionally search for a bird that is in the process of being weaned. You’ll recognize this because the youngster won’t be fully feathered yet.

He’ll also display some physical traits of young birds. He may still be “clumsy.” If he appears uncoordinated, you can be relative certain he’s still young. Being uncoordinated, he’s learning how to deal with his body.

A lesser known trait of a bird being weaned is that he may make out of the ordinary growling noises. While it may sound strange to you, it’s actually his way of begging for food.
If you choose a bird of this age, you undoubtedly will wait a few weeks before you can take your new bundle of joy home with you. But, in the long run, all of you and the parrot will be much happier.

One word of caution should be interjected here. Don’t choose a bird of this age only to insist on bringing him home on the spot with the intention of finishing the weaning process yourself.

**Weaning Or Waiting?**

Weaning is actually a very delicate balance of a variety of factors. It should never be performed unsupervised by one with limited knowledge and ability. You’re only putting your new baby at risk. Just be patient. If you choose a bird this age, your patience indeed will be rewarded in the long run.

If you suspect that the seller is attempt to sell you the bird earlier than prior to the completion of the weaning process, there is one step to take. You can ask to watch the bird eat. A bird ready for his new home should be eating quite well on his own, thank you.

However you choose your parrot, you’ll undoubtedly experience a wonderful bonding with him as you, your family and your new pet begin to explore a whole new world.
CHAPTER 4
So Many Parrots - So Little Time

Introducing The Parrots

So just what are the species that make up this truly diverse family of celebrated birds? Those parrots who are among the most popular and best loved as family pets include first, the Parrot group itself. This group is distinguished, for the most part, by its marvelously color plumage, and their clever mannerisms. They’ll win a family over in a heartbeat with a few well chosen actions.

In fact, simply doing what they do in the wild, climb trees and pick up items with their feet make them a fascinating companion for most people. Among the smallest is the Buff-faced Pygmy Parrot (bet you’d never guess his size from his name) who originates in Papua new Guinea.

On the other end of the spectrum is the Hyacinth Macaw from South America. Without a doubt, he’s the largest of the parrots. Also included in this group are varying sizes in between from the short-tailed Parakeet, the Amazon, and the Senegal parrot.
Then there is another group called the Eclectus Parrots. The only way to describe their coloring is to call them “glossy.” When you see when one these in person you’ll completely understand why so many people use this term. The male of the species is bright green with blue and red patches. The females are a bright crimson with a brilliant blue belly. Within this group is a famous subspecies call the Vosmaeri and the Solomon Island varieties.

The large Vosmaeri presents itself as an elegant-looking bird, while those of the Solomon Islands variety have a smallish, “cute” appearance to it. And for all their beauty, they’re also bright birds. Scold them once. Most of the time they get the message. This bird will never perform that action again.

If you expect him to only repeat the words and phrases he hears you use, you’ll be delighted to discover that this bird is able not only to “hold a conversation” with you and any companion brethren birds you may have, but he’ll sing to you as well.

The Senegal Parrot

The Senegal parrot measures usually no more than nine inches in height. His smaller size goes right along with his shorter life span as well. He lives only 20 to 25 years.

If you’ve never heard of this parrot, that’s all right. When you see a photo of him, you’ll know that you’ll recognize him immediately. With his gorgeous grey head and beautiful green body, his belly and other areas are colored in a wide variety of hues.

Not only does the Senegal Parrot talk, but he does impressions as well. If you adopt one of these guys, you’ll discover that he can fool you into thinking you have a phone call by imitating the telephone ringing. He’ll also make that rather obscure noise of a creak in the garage door. Yes, the Senegal parrot is quite the entertainer.

He’s called the Senegal Parrot because that’s his first and natural home. But he’s also found in Gambia, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea.

The Amazon Parrot

If you’re looking at the Amazon parrot in the pet store window, you can thank Christopher Columbus for his presence. According to legend, he’s the individual responsible for bringing this particular category of parrot to North America. If you care to count them, you’ll discover that 27 sub-species of this bird exist. They can be found in many areas of South America as well a Mexico and the Caribbean Islands.

How do you know you’re looking at an Amazon parrot? First, this bird is green. And he has short wings. And if he’s older and already trained, he, like his Senegal cousin, can not only talk, but imitate certain sounds as well.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

If you’re looking for intelligence, the smartest of these birds rival a three-year-old human. They are, scientists say, every bit as smart as the dolphin and the monkey.

In addition to his brains, the Amazon Parrot has energy! This bird is not only a playful bird, but he actually craves interaction with his human family. But be careful, just like any human toddler, he’s subject to the “terrible twos.” He can also be a moody bird.

As you might be able to guess from this list of attributes, it takes a special person or family to own an Amazon parrot. He needs lots of love! In fact, he craves far more love and attention that the average parrot owner can even imagine. Some owners have said that owning an Amazon is like owning a dog with wings.

Once he’s fully grown, the Amazon grows to be just over a foot tall and his life span is about that of the average human.

The Quaker Parrot

And then there’s the parrot with perhaps the most engaging name, the Quaker parrot. He originally came from South America and can be found from Brazil to Argentina. He’s about the same size as a Cockatiel, growing no larger usually than about a foot. He’ll live to be at least 20 years old. Like some of the other parrots, this particular species requires lots of attention. If you can’t devote time to him, then you should probably pass him up without getting too attached when you’re bird browsing.

You may know him better as the Monk parrot. He has a bright green head and body. His tail also is that same green. There’s only a bit of blue on his tail and on a few of his flight feathers.

You may encounter this bird, expecting him to be wearing the outfit that the gentleman on the oatmeal box wears. Well, you’ll be disappointed. Because he won’t. The Quaker parrot is like just about every other parrot an excellent talking. He enjoys listening to being told that he’s a “Goood Bird,” or that he’s a “Pretty baaaby.” Just make sure when you give him these compliments that you make wonderfully cooing sounds.

When you hear this bird practice his “human sounds” don’t hesitate to respond. The more you invite him to talk, the easier and more quickly he’ll acquire his ability to talk.

Humans have tamed many a sub-specie of parrots, but the Green parrot seems to be our collective favorite. Obviously called the Green Parrot because of his bright green plumage, this particular bird brightens up the house in more ways than one. This is an intelligent parrot and unlike some of his relatives, he’s quite affectionate as well. He also has a natural curiosity about the world around him and is easily trained.

He’s rather large, growing about an inch and a half taller than a foot. And you can expect him to live 50 to 75 years.
African Grey Parrot

The African Grey Parrot is known for plucking his feathers. If he’s been abused he may develop this bad habit. Similarly if he is bored or if his diet is just not quite right, he’ll resort to taking his feathers out . . . one by one.

There really are two related sub-species of the African Grey parrot. The first it the Congo African Grey and the second is the lesser known Timneh sub-species.

African Grey parrots have the potential not only to talk but to make a host of various sounds and different whistles as well.

If you decide to adopt an African grey, the important thing to remember about him is that each bird is a unique individual – as unique as any human.

African Greys grow to a size just of about 13 inches and you can expect them to live anywhere between 40 to 60 years of age.

We still have several more types of parrots we can speak about briefly. One of these is the Conure. As a wild bird, this species is friendly, peaceful and actually quite solitary. A single Conure seldom flies in a flock.

Without a doubt, this bird has a very sweet disposition. He is also very playful. But be forewarned: the Conure has a mind of his own.

The Cockatoos are a fairly well known group of parrots because they make great pets. Like the Conure, they have a sweet nature. This bird loves to be cuddled and bonds very easily with his human friends.

Parakeets come in a variety of colors and are smaller versions of the parrot. They are probably among the best known of this family of birds.

Many people own the lovable Lovebird. These tiny members of the parrot family are named aptly. They indeed are easy to love.

Think of a big personality inside a small parrot body and you have the Parrotlet. If nothing else, many people fall in love with this bird simply because of his petite size.

And then, if you like your birds from Australia, you’ll want to consider the Budgie. This affectionate nickname is short for Budgerigar. A brilliant green and yellow. Gentle yet gregarious, the Budgie has a great personality and makes a fantastic pet. He’s certainly worth your consideration and definitely your love!
CHAPTER 5
Preparing For the New Arrival

Before you can actually bring your Polly Parrot home, you need to ensure that she has everything she needs when she gets home.

It’s not quite like creating a nursery for a new baby. But then again, in many ways it is. Before you even decide to bring your new adopted family member home, you need to prepare your house for her. This lessens the stress level of the event considerably.

And here’s a quick parrot fact: Did you know that the danger of your parrot flying away from home is greater within the first few days of your bringing him home than any other time? It’s true. Any steps you can take to prepare your home, household and family members for the new arrival are sure to reduce these odds.

Let’s start with never bringing your bird him home at the end of the day.

The reason for this may be obvious. Your new family member needs as much time as possible to adjust to his new surroundings. If you go out to adopt your bird late in the day only to plunk him down in a room, then go to bed, you’re not going to have a well-adjusted parrot.
For the first week you have your parrot you'll want to allow him to sleep with a night light. Before you “tuck him into bed” at night, be sure that he has everything he needs. This means plenty of food and water. But also include in his cage several well-chosen toys.

Make sure you've place his cage where the parrot can easily see his new family. At the same time, though, you want to ensure that your new bird feels secure. The best way to do this is to place the cage the cage off to a side, even against a wall or in a corner. Your new friend will feel much better with this arrangement.

Especially for the first few weeks you'll want to feed him the same diet he was eating in his previous home - even if you know it was a poor diet. It’s better that he stay on this diet than suffer one more stressful situation. Keep him on what his previous owner was feeding him for a few weeks. Then after that initial period, gradually change his diet to a healthier one.

Don’t try to handle your bird for the first day. But you will want to talk softly to the little guy, making sure he knows you’re paying attention to him. Pay enough attention so that he doesn’t feel lonely, but not so much that you overwhelm him.

**Coming Out Of The Cage**

Even though your parrot is not afraid of people and he needs less handling than other pets. The younger the parrot is, the more careful you need to be in handling him. Treat him tenderly, gently and with loving care.

As tempted as you might be, don’t pick up your bird very often. This is going to be tough, I know. In many ways, this is more a warning to protect you. By doing this, he’ll become more dependent on you – and in the long haul that just isn’t a good thing.

Your goal as a parrot parent is the same goal most parents have when raising their own children. You really want your baby parrot to grow into an independent bird who is able to care for himself with very little help from you.

A clingy bird leads to a squawker as well as one who you just can’t leave alone for any length of time. You’re looking for a good balance between a bird who shows loving affection and one who is willing to spend some time in solitude.

**The Cage**

The cage is probably the most important item you can purchase for your new parrot. From your parrot’s perspective, the cage is his sanctuary. He needs to feel secure in his cage – “at home” in a very real sense. Consider the cage your parrot’s bedroom. It’s where he goes to spend some time alone, to beef up his self confidence, as well as to fully relax without the threat of any intruders.
The Ultimate Guide to Parrots

Avian experts say that being without the security of a safe cage is the main cause of many parrot behavioral problems, including the loss of sleep and the failure of receiving adequate exercise.

While you need a cage large enough for your new friend you may need a “starter cage” if you bring home a baby bird.

Your baby bird needs the security of a nest in the first few days or even weeks of her stay with you. This is especially true if your parrot is an African Grey, Poicephalus or a Cockatoo.

Actually, both the psychological and physical consequences of an ill-fitting cage are numerous – and none of them is especially good. For example, a cage that's too large may be too difficult to climb if it has too many vertical bars and not enough horizontal ones.

Additionally, you really don’t want the perches to be too large for him either. He may thrash about and fall. Or, the chances are he may start demanding more of your attention, or revert to needing to be hand fed.

But that’s not all that could occur as a result of a cage that’s too large for your avian youngster. He may also chew his feathers, squawk excessively or develop aggressive or fearful behaviors.

If you notice your bird thrashing about or falling more than a foot off his perch, transfer him to a smaller cage as soon as possible. This provides him with the security he needs. I know that this may be an additional expense on your part. But, you can always use this smaller cage later either as a travel cage or as a roost cage. Many parrot owners have a roost cage that they use as a parrot’s “bedroom.” It’s a cage, set aside, where the parrot can go and get some uninterrupted sleep.

Covering the Cage

You can help your new arrival feel more secure by keeping a portion of his cage covered for the first several weeks. This could be as simple as hanging a towel over just one end of the cage. This is also an excellent idea if your new friend is shy.

One of the options is to hang the towel down approximately four to five inches all round the structure. This action creates something like a sanctuary. The effect of flying into this shrouded area is much like flying high into the branches of a tree to remain out of sight. Be sure though to put the baby bird in the cage after you place the towel.

Setting Up The Full-Sized Cage
After you have chosen your parrot’s cage is now the time to learn how to care for his home. First, have you “accessorized” his house with the necessary toys? Every parrot needs a mirror, a swinging perch and even a squeaking toy. Just remember to buy the non-toxic versions of these toys, since a parrot gnaws on just about everything.

Parrots are tropical birds. That means their bodies are made for warmer climates. Their health suffers when they’re exposed to cool drafts and cooler weather. Temperatures of 70 to 72 degrees are usually fine with these birds. Your parrot will also experience the best of health when no sudden fluctuations in temperatures occur.

While you want to keep the cage out of high traffic areas, be sure that it’s in a location accessible to you as well. Parrots, as we’ve noted, are social creatures. If your pet doesn’t have another parrot friend he can talk and interact with, he not only will want to interact with you, but he’ll need to. It’s just built into his system. If you do decide to add a new parrot to your household, in addition to the one you already own, you must quarantine the newcomer for a minimum of 30 days.

Do not place the cage in the kitchen. The fumes from cooking – especially with those non-stick cooking pans – may be hazard and even fatal to your bird.

**Lining the Cage**

The bottom of your parrot’s cage needs to be lined with shredded paper. Some owners use newspaper, but this is dangerous to your bird. The chemicals in the newsprint are potentially harmful to him. Alternative linings to paper are sawdust, straw or even sand. If you chose sand, this serves as dual purpose. It not only covers the bottom of the cage nicely for you, but your parrot gains some minerals from this. And he can also use this to shape his beak.

Your parrot’s beak grows just like our fingernails do – constantly. The sand acts as a file to keep it down to the right size. If you additionally place the bird’s cage near a wall, any vinyl wallpaper will also help ease the cleaning process for you.

**Food and Water Trays**

All right. This sounds obvious. But I can’t tell you how many times I’ve come home with a new bird only to find that I’ve bought everything but . . . yes, containers for his food or water. So, that’s exactly why I’m reminding you right now.

Your new friend actually needs three dishes for his assortment of food and water. The first of course will be used for water. The other two serve as a dish for his wet food and another for his dry food.

These should be of a variety that you can easily remove and clean them.
Your parrot’s cage needs a deep, removable tray. Actually, the best situation would be to have a grate that can be easily removed. Parrots love to forage – it’s their social time, and this grate provides a “great” alternative environment to the natural habitat.

The grate is wonderful because it allows the bird’s droppings to fall through, without having the risk of your foraging buddy actually consuming any of it or any of his leftover food. The bars on the grate should be about the same distance apart as those on the cage itself.

**The Proverbial Mess Catcher**

Yes, this is about as technical a name as you can give it. These are winglike structures which attach above the floor, but close to the bottom of the cage. The purpose of the mess catcher is not only to help contain the mess but also the bird himself.

**Perches**

While a perch is indeed a necessary place for your bird to, well, perch himself, he’ll also view it as a convenient and delightful toy. It’s true! He sees the perch as a toy that he can just happen to sit on. Your bird would love nothing better if you but him a “chewable, destructible” perch.

Of course, you’ll have to replace it. But, do you really think that what his cousins sit on in the rainforest are even remotely related to some stainless steel rod? No, they sit on tree branches. Tree branches, in fact, that the birds nibble and chew on.

So, seriously think about going out to purchase a wooden perch if you don’t already have one. If you have a smaller bird, he’ll probably like a softer wood. If, on the other hand, your bird is larger, you’ll definitely want to choose a harder perch.

Perches which are made from real tree limbs – bark and all – and are actually ideal. A wooden dowel or branches that no longer contain any bark may actually be too smooth as a perch. Your friend may fall from these. If your friend falls from his perch because he can’t get a good enough grip, he’s bound to lose his enthusiasm for this activity. He may even develop a fear of it.

Consider using branches from crabapple, plum or even peach trees. Similarly, the soft woods, like ailanthus and various members of the birch family also give your parrot the entertainment he needs.

Remember though that once your parrot has stripped the bark from the branch, he needs a new one.
But this perch provides your bird with much more than entertainment. It’s also an excellent grooming accessory. The bark keeps both his feet and beak in peak condition. And the texture helps him to chew.

**What’s A Parrot Without His Toys?**

What is your parrot without at least several toys? Bored.

We’ve mentioned them in passing. Toys. Glorious toys. Every parrot needs some play things. And your new arrival is certainly no exception. So just what type of toys do you buy a bouncing baby parrot?

You’ll want to be a few “indestructible” toys. But you certainly want to keep these to a minimum. Instead, you want to purchase accessories that he can chew on. Some of the textures which your bird welcomes include vegetable-tanned leather, wood, cardboard, paper, rope and even cloth.

Don’t be afraid to rearrange your parrot’s cage when it comes to the toys. You may even want to rotate the toys he plays with. This keeps him from getting bored. If you discover, in fact, that he’s lost interest in a certain item, by all means, take it out of his cage. Replace it with another. Then in a few weeks you may want to introduce it again. He may in fact think it’s a brand new toy!

**Choose Toys That Won’t Injure Your Parrot**

Before you purchase any toy make sure that the toy won’t injure your friend. If the item contains any openings for example, make sure that they aren’t just that odd size. You know, the size that’s large enough for him to stick his head into, but seems to be too small for it to come out again.

If any of the toys contain strings of any kind, be sure to clip these shorter so his toes don’t get tangled. And as the toys age, remove any from his cage that have become mangled or deformed that could potentially injure him.

Have you bought him a great toy that you simply attach to his cage? That’s great. But, take a close look at this. Typically, it’s that fastener that’s is the most dangerous part of the toy. It can all too easily get caught in your parrot’s beak.

If your parrot is a baby, you can help him learn how to play with the toys you’ve provided him. Praise your new family member when he starts to play with any of these items. Pay special attention to his actions when he starts to ring his bell or shred the wood. That positive reinforcement encourages him to return to that specific activity.

Similarly, when you’re holding your parrot, take one of his toys to play with. Show him how it’s done. He’ll appreciate this. And you can be almost sure that when he returns to his cage, he’ll start playing with this toy.

One of the most important aspects of pet ownership is knowing when to feed your parrot. And if you have a baby parrot, it's even more crucial. At first, you'll notice that he may not have much of an appetite. Don't confuse this initial reaction to a new surrounding as his normal eating pattern.

To help him overcome his initial loss of appetite, you may want to try to feed him some treats. Not only does this entice him to eat, but it also tells him it just might be a good place to live. Wouldn't you love it if you entered a strange environment and someone offered you your favorite food?

So what do you offer a scared baby bird? Some suggest a cracker with a little bit of honey on it. This should cheer your new friend up nicely!

The Diet
Isn’t Polly gorgeous, sitting there in your dining room, hopping from foot to foot? Now that you’ve brought her home, she really becomes a part of the family.

Without a doubt, you’ll discover that keeping Polly well fed – both so it satisfies her taste buds as well as her overall health – be the greatest challenge of owning a parrot. You’re entering this venture fully armed with all the necessary information to keep your parrot healthy. And as you’re about to see as you are more involved in your parrots life, that’s a good thing.

Unfortunately, if you ask three different experts on parrots what you should be feeding your new family member, you’ll receive three different opinions on what foods create the ideal diet. That’s not only frustrating, but it’s extremely confusing for you. And ultimately, the one individual who suffers is your parrot.

But your parrot doesn’t help the situation either. For as you’re about to see your parrot can be a finicky eater. If you discover, once you bring Polly home, that she resists trying new foods, don’t be surprised. This is a common trait among parrots.

**Malnutrition: Number One Cause of Death**

The sad fact is that the number one cause of death in pet parrots is malnutrition. This is not a piece of information I offer joyfully, but I tell you this to help you prepare to care for your bird as responsibly as possible. Undoubtedly, no bird owner intentionally “starves” their parrot. And indeed malnutrition doesn’t even indicate your parrot is starving. It means the foods he does eat are not providing him with the nutrients his body needs for proper functioning.

The surprising aspect of our knowledge of parrots is just how little we really do know about the nutrient needs of this bird. Parrots have literally been kept in captivity as pets for thousands of years. More than enough time to learn about their dietary needs. But still we know very little about what type of diet actually keeps them healthy.

Few scientific studies exist even today that are concerned parrot nutrition. Surprisingly, no single authority or any specialized organization has determined an optimum diet for the parrot.

That doesn’t mean though that you should surrender to the easiest route and feed your parrot only a commercially premixed seed product. If you gave up trying to get your parrot to eat healthy “people” food, you’d soon discover that his life span would be shortened drastically. And that’s the last thing you want.

**Your Omnivorous Parrot**
The one fact that many pet owners do not know is that all parrots are omnivorous. If you recall from your science in middle school, omnivorous means that an animal eats both plants and animals. The average human diet is based on our being omnivorous. Unless you adopt a vegan lifestyle, you subsist not only on plants – fruits and vegetables – but animals as well – beef and poultry for example.

Not only could malnutrition cause your bird to die sooner than he should, some experts believe this problem is also the root cause of many behavioral problems in parrots as well. Just compare how we feel when we eat certain foods as opposed to others. When we eat diets that contain an abundance of sugar or fat that are for the most part void of essential nutrients, we feel it in our actions. By contrast when we ensure we eat healthy fruits and vegetables, we feel more energetic.

Today, many doctors believe that a diet may even be at the root cause of a host of human behavioral problems, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) as well as bipolar disorder. Why wouldn’t a poor diet also affect your parrot in a similar way?

As difficult and time-consuming it may seem, as a responsible parrot parent you need to resist the idea of relying heavily on seed mixture alone. Your parrot craves a variety of foods in his diet. And with a little patience you’ll discover what truly makes him both happy and healthy.

In the process, though, you may discover that your particular parrot requires foods that many so-called experts in the area of bird care may not wholeheartedly recommend. Don’t worry about that. If you discover you’re feeding your bird a food that one authority has passed judgment on as unnecessary, you’re bound to be rewarded if you research a little more. Certainly another professional in the subject encourages this type of diet.

That’s not to say you can feed your parrot junk food. We’re talking about fruits, vegetables and yes, even some types of meats! Perhaps this is the biggest surprise of all to those who are bringing their first parrot home. The absolute variety of foods that a parrot has the potential to eat is staggering.

You’ll come to appreciate the fundamental problems of determining the most nutritious diet for your parrot if you know a little about the history of the parrot as a pet. In this way, you’ll learn how the ideas of parrot diets evolved. And you’ll have a better idea of what your parrot really needs.

The Myth of the Seed-Based Diet

Until recently – in fact the last few decades – pet parrots have lived on a seed-based diet which has been supplemented by what many call “table foods” and a variety of fruit. But we’re beginning to learn that these seed mixtures don’t supply your parrot with the overall nutrition needed for robust good health.
Why? Well, for one thing, seeds don’t possess an adequate calcium and phosphorus ratio. This leads to a calcium deficiency. And you can’t find much vitamin A in a seed mixture, and this nutrient is essential to the bird’s immune system. And most importantly, seeds don’t even come close to providing the proper protein requirements a parrot needs.

But there’s even more reason why that commercial seed you may have thought your parrot could live on isn’t a nutritious diet. The seeds used in this mix are also grown for the production of cooking oils. This means that aren’t even the same quality as the seeds your parrot would find in the wild. So as much as you may think you’re feeding your bird a “natural diet” of seeds, you really are not.

Some animal experts had recognized this fundamental dietary problem and tried to correct it. The answer was a product called “pellets.” And indeed it was a more nutritious alternative than the seeds.

**The Myth of the Pellet-Based Diet**

Now that we’ve had enough time to look at the effects of feeding parrots a strictly pellet diet, we realize that wasn’t the total answer. Protein levels, for example, in some parrot species are actually too high when they’re fed a pellet-only diet. This produced some surprising health consequences. Some birds developed gout.

But that’s not all. Other instances of iron toxicity were reported as well as vitamin D toxicity. A little less common were reports of a condition called perosis, which is the twisting of the bird’s leg bones. This is caused by low levels of chlorine.

Now you’re beginning to see the ultimate problem. Science just doesn’t know enough about the overall nutritional needs of the parrot to think that one “manufactured,” artificial diet can supply 100 percent of the bird’s needs.

But the “pellet-problem” nonetheless brought the parrot experts and scientists back to square one in the diet handbook. Just what do you feed a parrot – and more importantly – in what proportions.

**The Controversy Continues**

The sad fact is that experts still aren’t in agreement. Some avian veterinarians fully believe that despite the deficiencies a total “manufactured” diet is best for your bird’s health.

This opinion, though, isn’t exactly based on the nutritional status of the food. It’s based more on the lack of faith of pet owners on the part of the vet. These professionals believe the average pet owner doesn’t know enough to supply his bird with an ideal diet in any other way.
And indeed the pellet-only diet is an improvement over the seed-based one. And this makes an adequate “default” diet for your pet. But, there are a variety of excellent reasons why you should include some variety – in the form of “table food” – in Polly’s diet. With a little research, reading and encouragement, you can keep Polly healthy and happy and extend her lifespan immensely.

Polly expects and needs some real “people food” unlike the canine and feline members of your family. In fact, Polly needs some “tropical” fruit. Of course, she’ll eat all sorts of fruits and vegetables, her favorites – and in fact those that supply her with the most nourishment – are those that are native to the tropics.

But more than just what to feed Polly, you also need to learn how to feed her. Yes, this may sound strange now, but it really makes all the difference. Part of a parrot’s constitution are the habits that have been formed for thousands of years in the wild. Even if your parrot was born and raised in captivity, he still possesses certain traits he shares with his ancestors.

Many owners complain that their parrots just don’t want to eat. These individuals don’t realize that the parrot really does desire to eat, but on his own terms. Once you learn more about this, you’ll discover that he really does like to eat – and he’ll be open to eating a variety of foods.

One of the traits that lingers from his ancestors, for example, is how he gets his food. Parrots forage for their food when they’re in the wild. Now, to you and me this may sound like a synonym for survival, that’s not how the parrots view it.

Foraging is actually a social event. They actually enjoy it! Parrots in the wild forage twice daily: in the early morning and in the late afternoon or early evening before dark. If you develop the habit of feeding your pet at these times – his natural foraging times – you’ll discover that he’ll more readily accept the foods and eat them with more gusto.

You may want to feed your bird right after dawn – or at least no later than 8 a.m. – and again about an hour or so before dusk sets in. In this way, you’re helping to keep him aligned with his natural habits and it appears to be more of an event for him.

These feedings usually consist of fresh, raw vegetables and fruit, as well as some cooked legumes, grains and beans. Many pet owners also include some seeds and nuts into this feeding as well.

**Two Square Meals A Day**

The one thing that may strike you immediately about this feeding schedule is that, unlike people, parrots don’t eat lunch. We eat three meals a day for the most part. Parrots don’t need this noon time meal. If you try to feed your bird at this hour, he more than likely, refuses to eat. If you didn’t know that noon time wasn’t a part of their normal
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

eating pattern, you may assume that your bird just doesn't like the foods you’re trying to feed him.

And that could very well be the farthest thing from the truth. In fact, one owner swore that his parrot hated fresh fruits and vegetables. The only time he fed them to his pet was a noon, however. When he began to feed his parrot these foods according to the parrots foraging schedule, though, he discovered the bird ate them with pleasure.

You can always have a dish of pellets available to him that he can “munch” on at any time throughout the day as well.

The types of foods you offer your parrot can affect his appetite over a period of time as well. Just as we get all too used to a diet of junk food or other less than nutritious foods, a parrot develops this same pattern if allowed. If you insist on allowing your parrot snack on pretzels, pizza or other so-called treats, he may be too full to actually eat his nutritious fruits and vegetables in the evening. One expert calls this the “perverting” of the parrot’s diet.

Your parrot, in the wild, didn’t have access to cooked foods. This sounds obvious when stated bluntly in this manner, but it’s a fact we all forget now and then. Because we’re so used to eating foods that are cooked, we very often don’t even give a second thought to feeding our parrots these foods.

But they are anything but natural to your bird. Parrots live naturally in the wild, where they eat foods that are solely fresh, live foods. Because of this, their systems still require this type of food. Raw foods contain an abundance of enzymes, as well as essential fatty acids, not to mention phytonutrients. Cooking, unfortunately, destroys many of the nutritious substances.

While you may be feeding your bird all the proper foods, if you’re cooking them, he’s not getting the nutrients from them he should be.

Whether your parrot eats the food you offer him also rests on another factor that has nothing to do with nutrition. It has everything to do with recognition, however. Let me explain.

Parrots are conservative creatures. To survive in the wild they need to be. They tend to shy away from anything – and in this case anyone – unfamiliar to them. This means that if you hand your bird a piece of broccoli, he may not eat it right away.

Broccoli, after all, isn’t a food native to his habitat. Never mind that it contains an abundance of just about every nutrient known to man and has an overwhelming amount of antioxidants. The bottom line is that he doesn’t recognize it. And he may refuse to it the first time you present it to him.
He may refuse to eat it the second or third time as well. You may think, from this reaction, that he "doesn’t like" broccoli. Well, that’s not quite the case. Birds may need to see that food many times over before they actually agree to try it. If your parrot hasn’t even tasted a particular food, then, don’t automatically assume that he “doesn’t like it.”

**Having Polly Accept “Foreign” Food**

You’ll find that your parrot is more accepting of “foreign” foods if you include them in a plateful of a different variety of choices. Some owners offer their birds what is called a “mix” of foods. As you’ll discover, your parrot comes to recognize this mix and automatically eats anything that’s included in it.

One parrot owner feeds his pet three distinct mixes. The first is a “fresh-food” mix. It consists of chopped greens, chopped vegetables, cooked beans, grains and legumes as well as fruit, whole grain pasta.

His bird accepts anything else he “throws” in there, because he’s accustomed to the overall, general appearance of the meal.

The second mix this owner uses consists of three different cooked grains, along with shredded or chopped sweet potatoes, carrots, squash or pumpkin. He then adds other shredded vegetables and ground nuts in this meal for some variety.

The third and final type of meal is what he calls a “birdie bread” mix. The main ingredient in this is a homemade bread created especially for birds which he has made himself.

The fresh-food mix is provided the bird in the morning. The other two mixes are alternate feedings for the evening meal. Nothing is fed to the bird at noon.

Now we come to a surprising fact. Your own attitude about the food you’re feeding your parrot plays a huge role in whether your bird accepts or rejects it. Birds are nothing if not incredibly empathic and excellent readers of body language. Hard to believe? It’s true.

Many owners present their birds with a crock of fresh vegetables – exactly what the parrot should love. But they already believe that the bird won’t eat them.

They somehow “cue” the bird in on the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the food. And the parrot shies away from them. But, if the same food is offered with the expectation that the feathered pet will love them, he really will!

Now that you understand how and when to feed your bird, you really should learn, at a minimum, the basic of sound parrot nutrition. When you break it down, it’s really not much difference from our nutritional needs.
Your parrot has an inherent need for proteins – also called as amino acids – carbohydrates, fats or essential fatty acids, as well as a variety of vitamins, mineral and other trace nutrients.

**A Parrot Needs Protein**

Let’s start first with examining your parrot’s need for proteins. Your parrot needs proteins, which are comprised mostly of amino acids, for muscle growth and repair, as well as their organs, feathers, beak as well as other body tissue.

Amino acids, known as the “building blocks” of proteins, are divided into two broad groups: non-essential and essential. Non-essential amino acids are those that the body itself manufactures. Essential amino acids are those which the body cannot manufacture. These must be supplied by the diet. For parrots, there are a minimum of ten essential amino acids. They include: arginine, lysine, methionine, tryptophan, histidine, isoleucine, leucine, phenylalanine, threonine and valine.

Moreover, proteins in foods are also classified as either complete or incomplete, depending on whether the foods contains a full complement of amino acids or only some of them. A good example of this is corn. It contain protein, but it doesn’t contain the whole host of amino acids. For this reason, it’s considered a poor source of protein.

Eggs as well as other animal proteins contain high levels of all of the amino acids. These are considered by many nutritionists to be a complete diet by themselves.

Other excellent sources of protein for your parrot include garbanzo beans, lentils, soy beans, pinto beans, red kidney beans, split peas as well as white kidney beans. Both diary products and meats are considered sources of complete protein as well.

**The Lactose-Intolerant Parrot**

Many pet owners have acquired the idea that their parrots are lactose intolerant, meaning that their systems cannot process the specific sugar found in milk and other dairy products. This, however, isn’t quite correct. They actually can digest small amounts of this type of foods.

So don’t shy away from feeding your parrot small amounts of eggs and cottage cheese. Both of these are excellent sources of protein. If you decide to feed your parrot dairy foods, just do so in moderation. At the same time, you’ll want to monitor your parrot’s droppings. If they become watery, then reduce the amount of dairy foods you provide him.

**How Much Protein Is Enough?**
When it comes to the human diet, we often believe that more protein is better. This isn’t necessarily the case for us, and it certainly isn’t true for your parrot either. Many animal husbandry experts believe that a parrot’s diet should only be approximately 10 to 16 percent protein. The only exceptions to this are young, growing birds and birds who are breeding.

Believe it or not, some veterinarians believe that your medium-sized parrot only needs one teaspoon of complete protein daily. But, if he doesn’t even receive this much, he’s not going to enjoy good health. And you’ll notice this in certain traits that emerge. For example, a parrot who is protein deficient may start plucking his feathers. Not only that but you’ll notice that the overall appearance of the feathers aren’t as healthy-looking as they should be.

Not only that, but a protein deficiency shows up in birds who are breeding as decreased fertility. If your bird isn’t growing as it should or experiencing more than its share of bacterial or other infections, you may suspect he’s not receiving enough protein in his diet.

But Then Too Much Protein . . .

And then there are the owners who insist that if a little is good, more is even better. And that’s not true either. An over-abundance of protein can also be detrimental to your parrot’s health. If your parrot eats too much protein, he may develop gout. Yes, gout! That same disease that plagues humans when we overindulge in such items as red meat.

When he eats too much protein, your parrot is obviously consuming more amino acids than what he really needs. Any extra are then used for the creation of energy. The end product of this process is uric acid, which needs to be eliminated with the aid of the kidneys. If left unattended, your pet parrot may develop kidney damage.

The protein requirements of your Polly, though, are not independently written in stone. They also depend on how much fat your bird is receiving as well. Here’s what I mean. Ultimately the protein needs of your parrot are determined by the amount and especially he type of foods he eats. If his diet is high in calories—even empty snack food calories— he’ll consume less foods. His eating habits are based on the number of calories he needs, unlike us who tend to eat no matter what.

By contrast, if your parrot’s diet is low in overall caloric value, he’ll eat more food and he’ll need less protein in each mouthful to remain health.

And now, you have probably already figured out the fundamental problem with feeding a parrot junk food. Our snack foods are high in calories. We eat them anyway and for the most part eat our “real” food at the same time.
Your parrot won’t do this. If you feed your parrot junk food – like pretzels or even pizza – he won’t eat the more nutritious foods. And if those junk foods don’t meet his protein requirements (as junk foods seldom do!) then your parrot isn’t getting all the protein he needs for vibrant health. It’s just that simple.

Remember though that proteins are readily found in either fresh fruits and vegetables. The exception to this is the legume or bean family of foods. Here you’ll find at least some protein that your bird should eat.

Now What About Those Carbohydrates?

Yes, what about those carbohydrates? Your parrot needs these for good health as well. But learning to distinguish exactly what carbs your bird needs is the key to maintaining your bird’s health.

Carbohydrates refer to foods such as simple sugars, starches and non-digestible fiber. Good examples of carbohydrates are your fruits, vegetables and grains. With the exception of fiber, carbs are the parrot’s source of real energy, just as they are for us.

Fiber contains no nutrients, so many avian specialists like to speculate that your bird doesn’t really have a need for it. But, just because we’re don’t know the role fiber plays in your bird’s diet, doesn’t mean it’s not a necessary nutrient.

Until several decades ago, the medical community thought that fiber was essentially useless in the human diet as well. Now, we know that it’s an essential part of a balanced diet. It’s the substance that helps slow our insulin levels and maintains a healthy triglyceride level in humans. Not only that, diets high in fiber have been credited with helping to ward off a host of degenerative, age-related diseases, including heart disease and cancer. So it’s far too dangerous to dismiss your parrot’s potential need for fiber.

It’s difficult to supply you with an exact amount of carbohydrates that are necessary for your parrot. Obviously some species have a greater need for them than others. But, I can tell you the food sources that will give your feathered friend the highest quality of carbohydrates available. Fresh fruits not only meet this criterion, but they also help your bird’s system retain a healthy balance of acid and alkaline. While fruit is wonderful for us, too much fruit will only serve to make your parrot fat.

Why? First, most fruits are not a great source of proteins. Try to limit your parrot’s consumption of fruit to no more than 10 percent of his diet daily.

Other indispensable sources of carbohydrates include grains and non-oily seeds. The foods that fall into this category include millet canary seed, rice, amaranth, oats, buckwheat, rye, barley,, kamut, spelt, quinoa and wheat. When you feed these to your bird remember to soak or cook them or feed the sprouted version of the foods.
Fat? Yes, Fat!

More specifically the term is fats – in the plural. Believe it or not, fats are considered a nutrient, not only for your bird by for you as well. Fats provide your bird’s body with essential fatty acids. These work with the carbohydrates to provide a natural source of energy.

Parrots in the wild naturally seek high fat – you can easily read this as high calorie – foods. And the pet birds – like the one you’re feeding – naturally do the same. And here’s a perfectly good reason why you need to place a limit on your feeding your bird junk foods (if you do! If you don’t, please don’t start!) Obesity in parrots is caused essentially by the same set of factors that cause obesity in humans, a diet high in fatty foods and low in exercise.

If you’re feeding your parrot a seed mix, he’s already getting a source of fats and essential fatty acids. Seeds are indeed a great source of these. And they also provide your bird with a good source of carbohydrates while giving him some vitamins at the same time. In fact, not only are they good source of the essential fatty acids, your parrot enjoys these too! What more can you ask for?

But here’s the catch. If you offer the parrot seeds as part of diet in which he is allowed to choose all of his foods, the trouble begins. More than likely, he’ll choose seeds to the exclusion of all other foods. Seeds are great, but they don’t create a balanced diet.

Just like peanuts and almonds are among the best snacks for humans, if we ate nothing but those two nuts, we’d get fat in no time and still be malnourished. Why? Because even thought they contain an abundance of healthy essential fatty acids, they also are very rich in calories.

The Vitamin-Enriched Seed

Many seed manufacturers today offer an alternative to this. It’s a seed that’s enriched with a wide array of vitamins. This product is sold in the hopes of reassuring the parrot parent that his worries in this area are over.

But it’s not as great as it initially sounds. The vitamins have only bee coated from the outside with the nutrients. So many times when the bird takes the hull off, he’s taking the vast majority – if not all – of the vitamins off as well.

A commercially prepared seed mixture should not exceed more than five to 10 percent of your friend’s diet. Limiting it to this, and feeding it to him in the evening though can create not only good health and vibrant energy, but a very valuable foraging experience as well. You may want to include some seed with his evening foraging food.

Which Vitamins? Which Minerals?
Now that you know some of the basic requirements in foods, it’s also essential that you become familiar with the vitamin and mineral requirements of your bird’s diet as well. If you are at all familiar with a human dietary requirements, then this should be relatively easy for you as well.

Vitamins are divided into two broad categories: fat soluble and water soluble. The fat soluble nutrients are vitamins A, D, E, and K. All the other vitamins are water soluble.

Birds manufacture their own vitamin A, but they need a substance called beta carotene, just like we do, in order to do this. It’s not unusual to find companion birds with vitamin A deficiencies, especially if they are kept on diet that consists mostly of seed. You can help your bird make his own vitamin A by feeding him foods rich in beta carotene. And while you may not know exactly which foods these are, you can tell by their colors. The odds are with you if you choose fruits and vegetables which are reddish or orange in color.

For example, good sources of beta carotene include sweet potatoes, winter squash, apricots, and carrots. Even if the food isn’t an orange hue, it still may contain beta carotene valuable to your parrot’s health. Examples of more mundane-looking green vegetables that fall into this category include broccoli, Brussels sprouts, cauliflower, cabbage, turnip greens, dandelion greens as well as mustard green.

**Vitamin A**

Vitamin A is essential for the respiratory health of your bird. The respiratory system of the parrot contains cilia, hair-like structures that remove the dust, fungi and bacteria from the air. They trap these in mucus and eliminate them from the body. If your parrot’s diet is deficient in vitamin A, leads to the ultimate destruction of these cilia. Then he’s pretty much defenseless in this area.

But the eventual vitamin A manufactured from beta carotene also is used in the creation of the beautiful plumage of your parrot. Specifically this substance is used to help manufacture the pigment of the feathers. If you notice that your beloved Polly is looking a little dull in color, you can be relative sure that she’s not receiving enough beta carotene in her diet.

**Vitamin D and Polly’s Health**

Parrots make their own vitamin D – when they’re exposed to the correct frequencies of ultraviolet light from the sun. Birds then that spend more time outdoors probably have a lower need for this nutrient in their diet.

If you bird doesn’t get outside very much, then you want to be sure that you feed him pellets. These contain the vitamin D necessary for good health. Not only is a vitamin D deficiency harmful to your parrot’s diet, but too much of this good vitamin can also hurt him.
This brings us to vitamin E. Your parrot uses this vitamin to sustain many metabolic processes. Birds in the wild seem to eat an abundance of vitamin E-based foods. While exactly how much of this vitamin is needed for a parrot is not exactly known, every attempt should be made to feed your bird foods that are rich in this nutrient.

A parrot’s body manufactures it’s own vitamin C. This means that your bird shouldn’t really need any supplements of this nutrient. The only times you may want to add this to his diet is when he’s ill or stressed. These are the times when his need for this vitamin increases.

To Supplement Or Not To Supplement

According to Dr. Joel Murphy, a veterinarian specializing in exotic birds, a parrot is eating getting less than 80 percent of his total diet from pellets, he should receive vitamin supplementation. A powdered mixture exists especially for birds that can easily be sprinkled onto his fresh foods.

Minerals, too, are essential to keeping your parrot vibrant and healthy. And just like with humans, a little goes a long way. Let’s start with calcium. This, without question, the most vital mineral your pet parrot can receive. He needs this for just about every body part and every function of his body. Calcium is used not only for his muscle contractions and his heart and nerve functions, but also to support proper blood coagulation.

Not only that, but just as you and I need calcium for strong bones, so does Polly. And she also needs calcium to support healthy egg formation. What should she be eating so she can receive the best sources of calcium? Almonds, watercress, apricots, tofu, parsnips, beans, kale, broccoli, hazelnuts, cabbage, figs, carrots, endive and eggs.

But bird does not live by calcium alone. Other minerals your feathered pet requires includes phosphorus, manganese, sodium, iodine, and zinc.

Parrot Parent Tip: “Polly Wants a Salt-Free Cracker!”

It’s hard when you’re sitting in the living at night watching television not to share some of that snack food with Polly. I know, I’ve been there! But, for the health of your bird, you really must not give him potato chips or other salty foods. Why not?

While too much salt is unhealthy for us, consider the size of this guy. Too much salt in a parrot – especially if he’s a smaller breed – can be extremely dangerous. Veterinarians report that many parrots are brought in with sodium toxicity. What does
that mean? They’ve consumed far too much salt and usually through eating far too many snack foods intended for humans.

So you know what you need to do . . . teach Polly how to say “Polly wants a salt-free cracker!” And Polly really doesn’t need those potato chips or pretzels . . . or any other of those salty snacks.

The Hand That Feeds You

So you think you want to hand-feed your baby parrots. I’m obligated to tell you that hand feeding these young birds requires knowledge and experience on your part.

The best method of learning how to hand-feed a parrot is with an experienced breeder at your side. I also understand that not everyone has that luxury. So, here are some of the more important points of the process.

The parrot’s body contains something called “the crop.” While it may sound like what your local farmer harvests, it really is a food-storage mechanism that Mother Nature built into these birds.

Birds, as you’ll soon notice the longer you own one, possess a fast metabolism. If it weren’t for their crop, they would need to eat every few hours. The crop, by the way, is simply a bag of skin surrounded by muscles.

As you travel up this bag, about two-thirds of the way up, you’ll encounter the opening to the stomach, the esophagus. When the stomach is empty and ready for more food, the muscles of the crop contract. This pushes the food into that opening.

If the muscles here are weak or if the crop is stretched too far, the muscles won’t be able to fully contract and the food in the bottom of this storage bag won’t be able to travel to the stomach.

What does all this have to do with hand-feeding, you ask? Plenty.

When you’re hand-feeding your parrot, you’ll need to know not only the location of the crop, but also what it should feel like. You don’t want to overfeed your baby and stretch this skin.

The crop, some avian specialists have said, should be filled until it feels much like a soft water balloon. In other words, it should have some “give” to it. It shouldn’t be taut or hard. If it’s too hard then you’re in danger of stretching it.

Emptying “The Crop”
This natural bag should also be allowed to empty completely at least once every 24 hours mostly because of its location, the crop empties from top to bottom. If you continue to put fresh food on in the bag without emptying the other, older food, the last food in will be the first food out. And that means that the old food may stay in the bag too long, resulting in a situation called “sour crop.”

In a nutshell what this means is that the food has spoiled. Inherently, we all know that’s only going to spell disaster for your bird.

It’s vital, in hand-feeding that the temperature of the food is approximately 104 to 105 degrees. While you can have some variation in this, you don’t want to give your parrot food that is cooler than 100 degrees or warmer than 110. Anything warmer than that can actually burn the crop membrane, which is really quite delicate. And anything cooler than 100 degrees won’t be able to leave the crop itself when the time comes.

And since we’re talking about a baby parrot, you’ll want to keep him as warm as possible, just like you’d want to keep your baby warm. But the baby parrot needs to be kept warm not only because he’s not fully feathered yet. But more than that, if the baby isn’t warm enough, he won’t be able to move the food out of the crop very efficiently.

Another essential ingredient in hand-feeding is the humidity level. Baby birds need lots of fluid. If not enough fluid is present, then the food in the crop is too dry to be pushed through into the esophagus with ease.

**Sour Crop Explained**

This condition, though, has a few other causes than just food sitting in the bird’s natural storage bag too long. You already understand that a sour crop basically indicates that the food here has gone sour or spoiled.

But a bacterial infection may also cause sour crop. In many instances, the yeast organism, Candida, normally always present in small amounts, grows out of control. This causes an infection of the crop, resulting in a spoilage of its contents.

Another possibility is a bacterial infection that begins in the spoiled food itself. In either of these cases, your baby parrot needs to visit her doctor. He’ll flush the crop and put her on medication.

In some instances, parrots experience what’s known as “crop stasis.” This term describes a condition in which the food simply refuses to move out of the crop. It just sits there. This condition, indeed, is very serious. It means your bird has no source of food and may actually die of starvation if the situation isn’t taken care of.

Crop stasis may be caused by an infection that is located anywhere in the digestive tract which has literally blocked the digestion of food. This means the food has actually backed up to the location of the crop and has no place to go.
As the baby ages, the less likely he is to experience any of these problems. And of course those food temperature requirements are less important. If you’re not hand feeding the baby, the solid food and water that weaned babies eat is not warmed. That only means that you need to keep the babies as warm as possible. Fully feathered babies usually can be moved to a cage that has no supplemental heat and manage just fine.

For the most part, successful hand-feeding occurs without a hitch. In fact, the process is so smooth, you’re really unaware of what’s really occurring within the system of your little baby. Before you know it, the baby is eating on his own.

The one type of parrot that appears to experience more crop problems than any other species is the cockatiel. These birds seem to be especially prone to Candida infections.

**Biting the Hand That Feeds . . .**

One of the hazards of hand-feeding your baby is that she may begin to bite you. Even the most experienced of hand feeders, with an extremely well-placed hand may experience an occasional nip.

Most commonly, your parrot bites when he’s being removed from a familiar perch, the inside of his cage or from the top of the cage. Don’t be too concerned, because this situation can be easily remedied with an improved technique. This experience will also diminish as you practice the “step-up” practice in territory that may be unfamiliar to your baby.

If you’ve already experience occasional nipping, you’ll want to make sure that you keep good eye contact with your bird. Off the hand on which he’ll be stepping, and have it offered from below him.

Just as the “prompt hand” approaches, present the object that he isn’t familiar with to the bird, but keep it out of his reach. Now you can give the “step up” command (with the other hand. Follow this with, “Be a good bird.”

You just need to make certain that the object you’re using as the “distraction device” in this situation isn’t scaring the bird. It can’t be too large – which would frighten the bird off his perch – or too small – which would not serve your purpose. But also remember, not to use any toxic material, like a lead or a painted object.

**Unintended Messages**

Parrots, believe it or not, are masters of reading body language. In fact, they respond to body language better than verbal speech. And some of us are just not as good as others as responding verbally without moving our heads.
Unintended body language can easily send your bird unintended messages. If you’re feeding your bird while unintentionally waving your hands about or moving your head without any reason, your bird may be confused. Or this behavior may just be sending some contradictory messages to your friend.

If your bird is shy, she may react negatively to your head nodding. If your bird is overstimulated or poorly socialized, she may attack someone who punctuates her speech with many head movements.

If the bird, however, is already bonded with humans and properly socialized, head movements should pose no problems for him. In fact, he may even respond positively to head movement.
Welcome to the wonderful world of parrot parenting! As you and your parrot bond, you’re probably learning more about his habits and preferences than you ever thought possible. The experience of being a parrot parent is an eye opening experience.

And even though right about no you think you know just about everything you could possibly want to about your new friend, we have some unknown terrain to travel. If you’re ready, you’re about to learn more on the sleeping habits of birds as well as some other major health issues.

A parrot, believe it or not, probably needs more hours of sleep every night than you. It’s a fact a parrot needs it on a more consistent basis than what we need. We can go a day or two on five or six hours of sleep. In fact, for some of us, that’s all we need. For others, we can exist during the weekdays on little sleep, if we get more than enough sleep on the weekend. And a full night’s sleep for us is considered eight hours.

For a parrot, though, a full night of rested sleep is a minimum of 10 hours and ideally 12. And this is a requirement. That’s because the natural habitat of these birds is 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of night.
If a parrot doesn’t get the sleep he needs, he can develop any number of problems. He can even become aggressive.

**The Health Of Your Parrot**

Normally, parrots are quite healthy animals. Taking the precautions we’ve already mentioned, which including keeping your new friend out of drafts, away from fumes from both the kitchen and aerosol sprays as well as feeding him a well balanced diet keeps him healthy.

There are times, though, that your new companion may be faced with some health issues; some of them, indeed, may be serious. You can usually keep many of these conditions from becoming major issues simply by paying strict attention to your bird and his habits.

One of the most obvious signs that your bird may be feeling a bit under the weather is if he is unexplainably sitting in areas of his cage that he normally tries to avoid. Perhaps he’s messier with his food than usual. This very well could be an indication that he’s not feeling well. He may also decide to sit in a different stance. This too should alert you that something might be right.

**The Wrong Foot**

If you’ve never owned a parrot before this may sound a little strange. But it’s true nonetheless. A healthy bird rests on one foot. (The exception to this is the young parrot. He needs to use both feet to keep his balance.) If your parrot is sitting on both of his feet or closing one or both of his eyes, he probably isn’t feeling his best.

You can also tell quite a bit about a bird’s health from his appearance. A bird’s plumage should just look healthy. The coloring should be bright, the appearance should be smooth. Additionally, he should be able to keep himself clean. There should be no dirt hanging for his feet or his beak.

If you have any doubts about the general overall health of your bird, take him into your veterinarian. It’s better to catch any health conditions in its early stages than before the problem becomes larger. And if there is no problem, then you’ve gained some peace of mind in the process.

If you can’t get in to see your vet immediately, one of the steps you can take to help ease a potential health crisis is to place your bird in a warm draft-free environment. A room that has a temperature from any where from 86 to 88 degrees would make him feel like he was right back in the tropics of South America. But also keep in mind that these birds can’t stand to be confined in small areas. So if you can find a larger room—like an attic or shed – it would suit him just fine.
THE ULTIMATE GUIDE TO PARROTS

You already know that you don’t want your bird sitting in a draft. That isn’t at all healthy for him. And you also want to keep in mind that your bird is a tropical bird. Warm weather is his friend.

The Thirsty Bird

Higher room temperatures though may increase your parrot’s thirst. He’ll naturally want to drink more. And this is just what you want if you need to add soluble antibiotics to his water. Of course, you don’t want to do this without the advice and consultation of your veterinarian.

These medications may stimulate the glands of your bird, improving his immune system. You’ll notice within a few days that the shine in his feathers has returned.

In order to keep your parrot healthy, you’ll want to try to check his perch with some regularity various types of bacteria and insects. Parasites, believe it or not, are very often the cause of avian illness.

You may want to make weekly evaluations of the bird himself, but be careful not to cause him too much disruption doing this. During breeding season, you’ll want to make this examination a little less frequently – once every two week is find during this time.

You can also gauge the health of your new parrot by his weight. If his chest bone sticks out, separate him from the other birds if you have any others. Similarly, if he gains so much weight that he has difficulty moving about, he may have some health issues. Again, it would be a good idea to separate him from the rest of your birds.

Judging A Bird By His Droppings

Indeed, as much as the idea may not appeal to you, it’s still one of the most accurate ways of judging your bird’s health. If your bird has watery droppings or if they’re an abnormal color this is an indication that your parrot may have a health problem.

Your pet parrot has a cavity called a cloaca. Located at the end of the intestines, this organ actually empties into this cavity. The cloaca is the only cavity for all of your pet’s waste products as well as sperm and eggs.

The urine mixes with the solid excretions in this cavity. So your parrot’s feces will never appear to be completely hard and dry. But on the other hand feces with that look unusually thin and watery are a sign of ill health.

Because that old adage absolutely doesn’t apply to birds. Never withhold food from your parrot because you believe he’s too ill to eat. In fact, the opposite is try. When he’s ill try to get your parrot to eat anything. Entice him with all his favorite foods if you have to.
The digestive tract of a bird is unique in the animal kingdom. Knowing how it works is crucial to being a good parrot parent. If it appears that your parrot needs to eat almost constantly, your observation is right on the mark. A parrot is in danger of starving if he doesn’t eat for more than a day. In fact, your new parrot pet can’t go without food for more than 35 to 35 hours. And this is if he’s healthy. If he’s sick food is even more crucial to his well being.

You can identify if your bird ill, believe it or not, simply by checking his cloacal. You can easily check the status of his cloacal merely by looking at the lower portion of a female bird’s body. If it appears swollen, then she’s is very likely suffering from a condition called egg binding. This requires immediate veterinarian care. Don’t hesitate to call your vet and explain the situation so you can get a quick appointment.

If the feathers around this area are soiled or if diarrhea is present, then your pet may have a serious illness. This situation also calls for immediate veterinarian care.

After the Vet

Once your bird has visited the vet, don’t return him immediately to his former location. He needs some recuperation time. He has after all become accustomed to living in a higher temperature than he normally does. Bringing him back to a cooler temperature may shock his system.

Instead, place him back into the room where the temperature was more tropical. Gradually lower the temperature of the room over several days to a week. Once the temperature reaches the what the rest of the house is – especially the area where his cage is located – then still don’t be in a rush to return him. Allow him to stay in his “sick room” for several more days.

When you do move him back to his cage, choose a warm sunny day rather than a wet and chilly one.

Grooming Needs

Ask any breeder. He’ll tell you it’s essential to allow a baby parrot to fly before you bring him home. But he’ll also explain that trimming his wings are necessary to protect him from the unfamiliar terrain of his new home.

It’s not that you don’t want your parrot to fly. You really only desire to limit his “flight plan.” His flying habits may soon become a safety issue inside the house if some action isn’t taken. Serious, sometimes even fatal accidents befall parrots who are allowed to roam the house indiscriminately.

But, that’s not the only reason to trim the feathers of your parrot. Veterinarians as well as various behavioral consultants recognize that companion parrots not only live longer,
but they experience far fewer accidents when their wing feathers are trimmed. Most parrot parents discover that trimming the feathers twice a year provides this protection.

Wing feathers grow out only after they’re shed. It may seem obvious, but trimming features should be performed symmetrically. In this way, you help your parrot retain his balance.

**Limiting – Not Preventing Flight**

If you’re going to perform this grooming activity yourself, you’ll want to use the least invasive method possible. Remember that your goal isn’t to prevent flight, simply to limit flight.

In addition, only the primary feathers are modified. These are the ones that enable your bird to gain altitude. Any other feathers on your friend are there mainly for protection, maneuverability or to help him brake. (It could be disastrous to clip those braking feathers!)

Keep in mind, that once you’ve trimmed your friend’s feathers, he shouldn’t be taken outdoors without either wearing a harness or being placed in a cage.

You’ll probably want to initially have your bird’s feathers trimmed by a professional. But soon you’ll learn how to perform this activity yourself. Avian experts agree that the trimming of feathers should actually be tailored to your bird’s unique personality and temperament. As you develop that bond with your bird, and you learn more about his feather configuration, you’ll be more than qualified to do this job.

In the beginning, though, you’ll undoubtedly take your friend to your veterinarian or find a high-quality professional groomer who excels at trimming. You’ll want to let the individual know exactly what you want before he begins to trim.

Typically, the first trim for a young parrot affects only half of his first three feathers from the outside as they are seen from the top. This prevents your friend from running into windows.

But you’ll discover that as your friend matures, he’ll gain not only muscle tone, but balance and a level of expertise at flying. Because of these acquired qualities, he may need up to five feathers trimmed.

If you’re worried about this – and many individuals who aren’t familiar with parents usually are – you needn’t be. A quality trim grows out. And it isn’t as if you’re taking away his ability to fly altogether.

A word of caution, though, is in order at this point. You want to be careful not to trim too many feathers too short. You certainly don’t want them trimmed shorter than your bird’s covert. This is the layer of feathers which protect their bases. If clipped too short
the feathers may not grow out the way they should. In fact, your bird may actually lose his ability to regrow these feathers completely.

You may encounter that occasional veterinarian or groomer who insists that the wing feathers be trimmed below the covert. If he insists, either don’t use him, or limit his trimming to a maximum of four outside flight feathers. The fewer the cut feathers, the easier it is for your friend to regrow them.

Toenails

Your baby parrot needs his sharp toenails, no doubt about it. This is just about his sole mechanism to keep him from falling while he’s maturing. Once your parrot reaches adulthood, though, it’s a different story. His toenails should not raise the ball under the end of his toe up off a flat surface. If this occurs, it’s time for a trim.

If you decide to perform this grooming activity yourself, you can use the smallest pair of human nail clippers you can find if you have a small bird. If your pet parrot is a large bird, well, you need larger equipment - like a cordless Dremel.

This sounds a tad intimidating, but the Dremel is made specifically for this purpose. It’s not like you’re taking an industrial strength sander on your bird’s toes.

It really is an ideal tool for its purpose. The Dremel's grinding stone produces heat, which cauterizes your parrot’s blood supply. This, of course, minimizes the risk of bleeding. If on the off chance your parrot does experience bleeding during this period, then it can be easily stopped with the use of styptic powder.

Beak

Now that I’ve traumatized you by suggesting you use a “grinding stone” on your beloved friend, I’ll move on to the maintenance of his beak. You’ll be relieved to know that for the most part, this is one area of your friend’s body that doesn’t really need your attention.

In fact, about the only time, your parrot’s beak would need attention is if it should be deformed. And these situations are very rare. Your friend’s beak by the way is very sensitive. Any trimming, if it’s even necessary, should always be performed by a professional groomer or a veterinarian.

Recovering A Lost Parrot

I know you were careful. But still it does occasionally happen. To the best of us, in fact.

Try as you might, there comes the time, every so often if you own a pet that he gets lost. And even the best-intentioned parrot parent may discover that his precious Polly is
lost. Instead of wasting time beating yourself over the situation, take action quickly to find her. It might not easy, but then how hard can it be

A large Macaw is not exactly indigenous to many areas of the world. If a large, brightly colored bird flying around may attract some attention.

Initially, you’ll start the search for your pet parrot right in your own neighborhood. Let your neighbors know— and especially the neighbor’s children — that your parrot has escaped. Let everyone know what your bird looks like. If you have a photo of him, allow them to view this. When you go searching, take along one of his favorite toys or even a treat he likes. Make some sounds that he would recognize as well.

Place your parrot’s cage outside so that if he flies past he can easily see it. You may find this difficult to believe but your parrot is scared. He’s not used to being out in the open. But even more so he’s not used to those particular surroundings, either. And he may even be too frightened to call out for you. But, he can recognize his home and his toys.

If you have more than one bird bring out the bird outside, but be sure to keep him in his cage. (The last thing you need at this point is two lost birds.) Perhaps the presence of his friend will be familiar to him to coax him to come home.

It certainly appears that you have this parrot parenting thing down pretty well know, don’t you? Are you ready to take your relationship with your bird to the next level? It’s time to train your parrot proper behavior, to perform a few cute little tricks, but we’ll also show you how to get him to start talking.
What? I can’t hear you over the squawking. What are you saying? Do I know of a good parrot training? Indeed, I think you’re definitely in need of some help. Don’t let your bird’s behavior get totally out of control before you decide that you need some help. To be honest, by that time, it’s really too late to help.

Indeed, what’s needed is a consistent training program as early as possible.

With some basic training, just about any unwanted behaviors can be addressed – or better yet avoided! The most important element in any training program is patience on your part. If you’re edgy or rushed, then you don’t want to train your parrot at this point.

You need to find a time of the day when you can actually devote quality time to the event. You also need to be relaxed. Remember that parrots are great readers of body language. If you’re tense or irritable your friend just isn’t going to learn very well.

**Before you Train**

Even before you begin to train your bird, you need to learn your bird’s body language. After all, he’s an expert at reading yours! And if this puzzles you, it really shouldn’t. Body language is your bird’s primary line of communications with you.

To effectively train your parrot, you need to be able to tell when he’s frightened or distressed by your actions. A parrot who exhibits either of these emotions just isn’t capable of learning what you’re teaching him. If he’s not busy worrying about your next move, he’ll be preoccupied with defending himself from your possible next move.
If you discover that your parrot is in this emotional state when you’re training him, you can give him a treat to see if he settles down at all. If not, then halt the session. Whatever you do, don’t force your parrot to do something that he’s not willing to do.

**Reading Your Parrot’s Body Language**

Look into your parrot’s eyes. Beautiful, aren’t they? Look a little more closely though and you’ll notice that, unlike you and me, your parrot can control the size of his iris. This is the portion of the eye that gives him his eye color. And he’ll change the size of his iris if he’s angry, frightened or feeling aggressive. This is called “flashing” or “pinning.”

Understanding this gives you an indication of your friend’s mood. Take time to note this action and place it into the context of the activity you and he are participating in. If eye pinning or flashing occurs while you’re training, you may want to end the session or try to ease his fear or anger.

**Vocalizing**

Yes, I know that your parrot is a natural-born vocalizer to begin with. But, the type of sounds your bird makes can go a long way to telling you exactly what he’s feeling.

**Singing, whistling, talking.** These sounds are signs of a healthy and content parrot. You may have a bird who is a natural entertainer and this is his way of putting on a show.

**Chattering.** Your bird may chatter – you’ll know the sound when you hear it. Whether it’s loud or soft, it can signal one of two things. Either your friend is content or he’s beginning to learn to talk. If he’s chattering rather loudly, though, consider the fact that he’s attempting to get your attention. If you notice that he chatters in the evening before going to sleep, he’s trying to connect with other flock members.

**Purring.** And you thought only cats purr. This may be called purring, it’s really nothing like what your cat does. The purr of a parrot is similar to a growl. But don’t let this fool you, because like a cat’s purr, it too is a sign of contentment. Then again – as complex as your parrot is – it may actually be a signal that he’s annoyed with something. To read this vocalization properly, then, you need to take it in the context of the entire environment he’s in at the moment.

**Tongue clicking.** Your parrot at times may click his tongue against his beak. Don’t be concerned about this. Usually, he does this just to entertain himself. But he also may be asking you to pet him or to pick him up.

**Growling.** This is a form of aggressive vocalization and not all birds do this. But, if yours does, then you need to immediately take a good, hard look at her surroundings.
Remove anything that you think may be bothering her. But just a word of caution, don’t try to pick your parrot up at this point or even touch him. Treat him as you would a growling dog. They definitely don’t want any part of you at this point.

Wings

Yes, in addition to flight, your parrot uses his wings as a way to communicate as well. Your friend may display his emotions in three distinct ways: Flapping, flipping or drooping.

If your parrot is flapping his wings or flying in place, he’s actually exercising, trying to get your attention, or just being happy. Birds also may use their wings simply to stretch or as a built in fan – to cool themselves.

Your friend may perform wing flipping for several different reasons. Perhaps he’s angry or in pain. He may also just be fluffing his feathers in order to get them to lay properly. If he’s performing this activity while hunching over and bobbing his head (I’m sure you’ve seen this in some birds), it means he wants to be fed.

The drooping of wings indicates normally that your friend isn’t feeling well. This is especially true if your bird is a little older. If, however, your friend has recently taken a bath, she may droop her wings to allow them to dry.

If, however, your friend is a youngster she just may be learning how to fold and tuck in her wings. Often, the wings droop during their attempts at mastering this skill.

Reading Your Parrot’s Feathers

One may not have thought of this, but a parrot performs body language even with her feathers. If your bird has ruffled his feathers, he may have done this during the preening process. This action helps to remove dirt and feather dust. In addition it helps to return their feathers to the proper position.

Your bird may also ruffle his feathers to relieve pent up tension, or even to keep warm. But don’t overlook the fact that ruffled or fluffed feathers could also mean a sign of illness.

The Crest Position

This position is actually fairly common to cockatoos and cockatiels who have a large expressive crest. If your bird is relaxed, his crest is held back with just the tip tilted upwards. If your bird is excited to see you or in getting a new toy, she may lift her crest.
But then again, if the crest is lifted extremely high, this could be an indication of either fear or excitement. You need to approach your bird carefully until you can decide his emotion.

If the crest is flat, then your bird is either alarmed or feeling aggressive. This is especially true if, he displays this while crouching and hissing.

If your bird quivers his feathers, this could indicate that he’s frightened or excited. The quivering is also a natural part of his breeding behavior as well.

**Reading Your Parrot's Tail Feathers**

Oh, yes, your parrot uses his tail just as your dog or cat does. Movements in this body part can yield some clues about how he’s feeling.

Tail wagging. Look at Polly. Isn’t it cute, she’s wagging her tail. But the question you now have is: Does it mean the same thing as when Fido does it. As a matter of fact, it does.

When your parrot wags his tail, he’s really is telling you he’s happy to see you. But then again, as with all parrot body language, tail wagging can have several meaning. And one of the meanings is that he’s preparing to defecate. So those are your two choices of interpretation!

Another sign of overall happiness is tail flipping. Your bird does this when he’s glad to see you, plays with his favorite toy or when he gets a treat.

**Tail Movement May Signal Respiratory Distress**

How can you tell if your bird has exercised and is trying to catch his breath? Instead of looking for heavy breathing as we do when we overdo it, look to the tail. If his tail is bobbing, then he may be trying to recover from some strenuous exercise. If you for certain that your parrot hasn’t been performing any exercise that may have taxed her, then she may be in respiratory distress. You should have her visit a veterinarian for this.

A signal of your strength and vitality, fanning of the tail feathers is a clear sign of aggression or anger on the part of your bird.

Not used as often as other parts of your bird’s body, even a bird’s legs and feet give you some indication of her emotions and sate of health.

When your parrot taps his feet, he’s not trying out for some Broadway musical. He’s actually gaining dominance over his perceived territory. He feels that someone or something is threatening it.
Some parrots develop what’s called “weak legs.” They simply don’t want to stand or perch. Though this may look worrisome, don’t be too overly concerned. This occurs most often after you’ve handled your friend. This is only his way of resting. But don’t ignore it either. Hold him for a little while longer and once he’s felt he’s been given his due amount of attention, then he’ll become strong enough to perch again.

Is your bird doing an impersonation of a bat by hanging upside down? Believe it or not, there’s absolutely nothing wrong with him. In fact, everything is going very well. Some species of parrot hang upside down as a part of the behavior. Read it as a sign that he’s happy and content with his home.

And now your parrot thinks he’s a chicken, you say? He’s busily scratching at the bottom of the cage. This is actually normal. Many parrots forage on the ground for food, and in fact as we mentioned earlier, it’s actually a socialization mechanism.

So Tell Me About The Beak and Head

Obviously your parrot’s beak is used not only to groom himself, but also help him crack open nuts and seeds. He also uses it to build a nest. In addition it can be a very useful weapon. But beyond that, it’s also part of his way to tell you various things about himself, if you’re willing to read the signs and know what to look for.

If your parrot is grinding his beak it’s usually a sign of contentment. You’ll hear this sound normally as he’s dozing off to sleep at night. You’ll know it the moment you hear it because it sounds like the beak is sliding from one side to another or one portion of the beak over another.

Click. Click. Click. Do you hear that? If your friend clicks his beak, it can indicate several things. First, if she does this only once, then pins her eyes (enlarges her iris), she merely greeting you or acknowledging something.

If she performs several clicks in a row this is a clear warning that something is wrong. Under no circumstances should you handle her at this point. Beak clicking is most often confined to the Cockatoo and Cockatiel species.

When your parrot wipes her beak on a perch, the floor or sides of the cage or elsewhere, it could mean that she has incredibly good table manners or she’s marking her territory. This display is how she cleans her beak after meals. But it’s also an indication that she’s marking her territory.

Birds don’t just bite for the fun of it. There’s always a reason why birds bite. And if you carefully examine your parrot’s environment, you’re bound to discover the reason. It could be that your friend feels that her territory is threatened for whatever reason.
But more importantly is to notice the “pre-bite” movements, so you can avoid being the object of the bite. A bird preparing to bite crouches and hisses before he takes any action.

So your parrot seems to be chewing everything. Well, parrots do enjoy to chew. And yours may be doing this for any number of reasons. He’s probably just entertaining himself. Just make sure you have plenty of toys (that won’t injure him) available.

Regurgitation: The Ultimate Parrot Compliment

Now I’m sure the first time this happened you may have been a little taken aback – perhaps even horrified. However, you need to praise your friend when he does this. The regurgitating of his food. If you don’t know what regurgitation is, it’s the expelling of your parrot’s food from his mouth, esophagus, and crop.

You’ll know it’s coming because your friend pins her eyes, bobs her head and stretches her neck before she regurgitates.

And do you know what this means? She is showing you the highest amount of affection she has. This is the same method she would use to feed her children. It’s also an action that mating pairs perform for each other. Whatever you do, please, don’t act horrified.

Has your bird tried to grab your mouth yet? Hopefully she has. Sounds a little strange. This is called “mouthing” and it’s actually a method of play that parrots use with each other. They grab each other’s beaks and wrestle and joust with them.

Sit up straight. That’s what your mom always told you. Your mother knew that your posture spoke volumes about you as a person. And so the posture of your parrot can speak volumes about how he’s feeling as well.

If your bird is relaxed, then you’ll notice that she holds her head at attention. This indicates she’s happy and content. If she holds this position rigidly, though, she’s really trying to show you just where her territory is.

Bowling for Parrots

Bowling is the term for when a parrot crouches, holds her head tipped down toward you accompanied by head bobbing. She’s actually asking to be petted or scratched.

If she assumes this position with a relaxed posed and raised wing – minus the head bobbing – she wants attention from you or a potential mate.

But, if she crouches with her head down, her eyes pinned and flaring tail feathers, you need to read this body language differently. This is especially true if her tail feathers are flared, her feathers are ruffled and her body is rigidly held while at the same time, she’s weaving from side to side. All this combined is a definite sign of aggression.
Accentuate The Positive

Positive reinforcement is, without a doubt, the most effective method of training your bird. But, don’t limit your use of positive reinforcement just to the times when your parrot seems distressed. This form of training is actually incredibly effective.

Besides that, the concept is deceptively simple. When your parrot performs an activity you want to encourage, you simply reward him with some type of treat. At the same time you’re rewarding him with a treat, praise him. He’ll get the picture much quicker than you can imagine.

When your parrot behaves in a way you would rather discourage, you don’t yell, scream or even punish him (trust me, none of those three would do absolutely no good), you ignore the behavior.

Your parrot wants nothing more than your attention. If his actions produce your attention, he really doesn’t care if his behavior is bad or good.

Eventually, you’ll be able to substitute just the praise and won’t to need “treat” him for every good behavior.

No Marathon Training Sessions

Sure, your parrot is smart. But, his attention span isn’t very long. If you decide to conduct a marathon training session, it’ll soon prove counterproductive on you. The most effective – and indeed the quickest – way to train a parrot is by carrying out short sessions. Schedule them frequently and make them a regular habit.

Repetition: The Key To Good Training

While repetition is indeed the key to good training, it needs to go hand in hand with another habit as well: Consistency. This is especially true when you’re training your parrot to talk. Let’s say for example that you want to teach your parrot to say “mmm, food.” Then you not only use repetition, but consistency. Every time you feed him you tell him this phrase. Soon you’re your parrot associates these words with getting food. The next thing you know, he’s repeating them when he’s hungry.

When you say these words to your parrot, be enthusiastic. Say them a little louder than your normal conversational tone. When you teach him other words, say them throughout the day to him.

Just as you watch your language around young children, you really do need to watch what you say around your parrot. While you think you may be teaching your parrot, “Polly wants a cracker,” he may also be learning other, less desirable, words from you or other family members.
Where To Start

If you’re not quite sure exactly how to start your parrot’s training program, consider the game “peek-a-boo.” It’s not only good training for your new friend; it’s effective training for you as well. Never played peek a boo with a parrot. Well, you’re in for a real treat.

This is a great starter activity in which both you and your friend can create a safe environment for your interaction. You’ll need to get a bath towel for this training session.

Your parrot will especially appreciate this because he is a “cavity nester.” This means that he spends a great deal of time surrounded by objects – in the wild this would be tree branches – peeking out from under them. Carefully lay the towel over your parrot. Be patient, because he’ll eventually peek out. And when he does peek out, you say **peek a boo!**

Don’t be afraid to alternative who gets covered by the towel. Place the towel over your head. When you look out from it, you say **peek a boo!**

Both you and your friend will enjoy this game immensely. But more than that this is a wonderful bonding exercise! This game most certainly can set the mood and the foundation for some very productive training.

Window Training

This is more a tool to safeguard your parrot than to train him to speak or react to your commands. The goal is to keep your new friend from flying into the windows. Without a doubt, this can have disastrous consequences for him. Take your parrot to every window throughout the house. Touch his beak into the glass. Don’t do this just once, but several times throughout a day. Soon, your parrot understands that even though they’re transparent, there really is something there.

The Scream

You may have already discovered, if you’ve ever owned a parrot or have known a friend who has owned one, that the screaming or squawking can be rather irritating. If you think that it just naturally comes with the territory of owning such a bird, well, you’re wrong.

Indeed, you can train your bird not to scream – at least to keep the noise down to a minimum. Of course, you must realize that your parrot is a “born talker.” Given the type of tongue he has and the highly developed larynx, it’s inevitable that he’ll make some type of noise. He loves nothing better than to “vocalize” his feelings. His talking or squawking is his means of communication, from warning his brethren of danger to celebrating the rising and setting of the sun everyday.
Vocalization and “singing” are just parts of his normal behavior pattern. The incessant squawking or screaming are not signs of normal behavior. And this is what needs to be dealt with. And you can deal with it. It’s not a hopeless situation to be endured for the life of your bird. Usually a parrot screams excessively because of perceived stress. Your job – and granted, this is the more difficult aspect – is to decide what’s causing your parrot’s stress.

It could be just about anything from a nutritional deficiency to the loss or the addition of a family member, loneliness, boredom, fear, lack of sleep and even jealousy. Think of anything that may cause you undue stress and it can probably affect your parrot as well.

Your first stopgap measure, of course, is to stop or at least minimize the screaming. Start with attending to his immediate environment. Ensure that at a minimum all of his needs are met. Then you can at the very least eliminate this as a possible cause. Next, you’ll want to give him plenty of attention and a little more time on your part. Ensure that he has enough toys to play with so you can cross off the “boredom” cause.

While you’re doing all of this keep a small notebook of his screaming episodes. See if you can find some common denominator that connects all of them. If you can detect some pattern, some rhyme or reason, to them, then you can begin to tackle the problem.

**What If My Parrot Is Lonely?**

If you’ve decided after all of this that your parrot is lonely, then you know the solution - spend more time with him. Spend extra time with him. In fact, for the first few days you’ve discovered this, don’t leave his side. Allay his loneliness this way. The same solution fits if you’ve discovered that his screaming is caused by fear.

Is your bird tired? Perhaps moving it to quieter quarters at dusk will help him get a more restful sleep. Keep in mind that your parrot requires 12 hours of sleep at night. He sleeps from sunset to sunrise. He can’t be up with the family every night watching television.

Then again, you may discover that the screaming occurs for a variety of reasons. It may not be something that can easily be fixed in a short time. But, with some effort and investigation on your part, it indeed can be remedied.

**Teaching Your Parrot To Talk**
We’ve just touched on this earlier in this chapter mentioning that consistency and repetition are keys to success. Here’s a little more detailed outline to help you guide you through the process.

Just remember that not all parrot developed the ability to speak. But if you’re patient, you’ll discover whether your beloved friend can speak. At the very least, you can rest assured that the two of you develop a special “language” of your own.

First, don’t expect your friend to talk in words that contain many syllables – not at the beginning at least. Keep your training to one syllable words, two at the most. Designate one person in your household to teach him words. If everyone is talking at him, he’ll get confused. He won’t understand that you’re trying to get him to repeat the lessons.

Only have your little guy learn one word at a time. Never inundate him with several. If you want to teach him the word “food” that’s great. Wait until he learns this one before you move on to another.

You’ll want to repeat the word over and over for him. Every time you see him, say this word. Some parrot parents even tape the specific word in order that it may repeated the maximum number of times. The parrot then can hear it throughout the day.

That’s basically all you need to know. Deceptively simple, now isn’t it? But it’s not an easy or short process. This may take a long time, like a couple of month’s worth of long time. If there were a magic formula to this, I’d offer it to you, but there isn’t. It’s just a matter of consistent repetition. And if you think about it, training and teaching anybody anything always does boil down to those two attributes: consistency and repetition.

I’ll provide you with one more clue on successfully teaching your bird to talk. And that’s by talking to him throughout the day just like he were a little person. Don’t ignore him as you go about your day. Tell him good morning when you wake up, good night in the evening.

When you go off to work in the morning, tell him you’re going to work. Tell him the time you’ll return. When you get home from work, talk to him about your day. Be sure to ask him about his day too.

Don’t be shy or feel foolish about any of this. If you do this, combined with the word you want him to learn, he’ll be learning so much from you. For one thing, he’ll get a good feeling for what communication is ultimate like between the two of you. He’ll also be familiar with the words.

And who knows? Parrots are very smart animals. In addition to the specific words you’re teaching him, he just may learn some others (hopefully good words!) along the way.
Conclusion

If this book has only been able to provide you with a brief view of the joys of parrot parenthood, then it’s done its job. As you can plainly see, raising a parrot is more like raising a child than owning a pet.

If you choose a parrot as a baby, you and he experience a bond that is not unlike that of a mother and child. You’ll not only be the proud owner of a beautiful parrot, but you’ll experience a bonding on a far greater level than with an “ordinary” pet.

You two will eventually learn how to communicate – even if your friend doesn’t learn how to speak entirely. He’ll read your body language; you’ll read his. And before you know it you’ll become nearly inseparable.

The key to successfully adopting and raising a parrot is making that lifelong commitment. And it’s not just a commitment for the lifetime of your new friend. It may very well be a lifetime commitment on your part as well, given the longevity of parrots – especially the larger ones.

Once you discover, from the many varieties of parrots available to you, which you would like, you’ll find that the other key elements of raising a parrot – from preparing your household to bring him home, to feeding him a proper diet and even training him – all fall into place. Why? Because each and every one of these actions, you’ll learn, is performed from love.

Remember, though, that successfully raising your parrot to be a great pet takes time, effort and dedication. The element that most surprises new parrot owners is the range
of human-like emotions your parrot has. And perhaps this is why the bond between parrot and person is so strong. Because we can bond with these animals at a very human level.

Hopefully, you'll take the information you've learned from this book to develop that bond. That's not to say that your relationship with your new friend won't be without its bumps in the road – every relationship has some tough times. But knowing that you've made a life-long commitment can help you overcome any tough times.

I envy the journey you're about to embark upon. It's an exciting new world when you add any type of parrot to your household. And when you make the decision slowly and wisely, and you know deep in your heart it's the right one, it makes taking the first step all the more thrilling.

A new amazing world of parrots is about to open up to you and your family. You may decide that this is the only parrot you'll ever raise, or you'll provide him with a friend, or you may decide to breed these astonishing birds. Whatever you decide, however far you go in the parrot world, I'm confident you're off to a great start.
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