



# Milwood Animal Clinic

5942 Lovers Lane · Portage, MI · 49002

Phone (269) 342-9865

Fax (269) 342-6830

[www.MilwoodAnimalClinic.com](http://www.MilwoodAnimalClinic.com)



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## ESSENTIALS FOR BIRDS

### Enclosure

- ~ As far as cage size is concerned, the roomier the better! Provide plenty of perches and toys to keep our bird from becoming anxious and bored.
  - ~ Newspaper or Butcher Paper is recommended as a cage substrate.
- ~ Avoid corn cob, sawdust or other beddings that retain moisture and can lead to bacterial contamination.

### General Health

- ~ Avoid allowing your bird to chew on objects that might contain the metals Zinc and Lead. These are toxic to birds! They are commonly found in many objects around the house (such as nuts, bolts, screws, nails, old lead based paints, wire cages and even the chains attached to some toys designed for birds!)
- ~ Bathe your bird with a light mist of just water every day, and give it one good shower or bath every week!
- ~ Avoid allowing your bird access to anything that contains Teflon (including foods cooked in Teflon pots and pans). Teflon is toxic to birds!
  - ~ Birds thrive on routine!
- ~ Exposure to a UV light source for 8 hours a day helps improve vitamin absorption and generally makes your bird feel better!

### Diet

- ~ A formulated pelleted diet (such as Harrison's or Roudybush) should make up approximately 80-90% of your bird's diet.
  - ~ Avoid seeds entirely.
- ~ A variety of healthy table foods (vegetables) can provide added nutrients and variety to your bird's diet.
  - ~ Avoid avocados, which are toxic to birds!

### Cleaning Supplies

- ~ Use a mild detergent (like dish soap) first to remove droppings.
- ~ Bleach and water for disinfecting (1part bleach: 10 parts water).

## Tips for a Healthy and Happy Parrot

The following topics are important, but frequently overlooked, areas in parrot care which contribute greatly to the happiness and health of these birds. Parrots need environments which can come as close to their natural habitat as possible while allowing them to be members of our families. Behaviors such as screaming, biting and feather picking can many times have their origins in deficiencies in one or more of these areas. These deficiencies can lead to poor nutrition, boredom and anxiety.

### DIET:

Diet is a very important factor in the care of your parrot. While seedbased diets are commonly found in pet stores and are easy to feed, they do not provide much nutrition and can be direct causes of vitamin deficiencies. This can lead to many illnesses and problem behaviors. Birds in the wild do not eat seeds. They eat a wide variety of leaves, plant material, fruits, vegetables, etc.



Pelleted foods are an important part of a parrot's diet and are essential for proper nutrition as it is difficult to provide a complete balanced diet in any other way. Pellets should comprise at least 80-90% of the bird's diet. The remaining 10-20% should be vegetables and the occasional fruits. Dark green leafy vegetables are the most nutritious vegetables. These are similar to what a bird would eat in the rainforest the darker, the better, as they will contain more nutrients and vitamins. Bulk vegetables, such as broccoli, peppers, carrots, squash, and beans can also be fed. Avocados, however, are toxic to birds. Fruits should be only a small portion of table food fed and tropical fruits are best. Keep citrus fruits to a minimum. They tend to be too acidic. If your bird is reluctant to try new foods, try smearing peanut butter, almond paste, etc., on the new food. Warming in the microwave can make it more appealing also.

Please see the handout "Converting Your Bird To Pellets" to learn the appropriate way to convert your bird from seeds to pellets.

We carry and recommend Harrison's Bird foods. This premium diet is available in numerous varieties to satisfy the varying life stages of your pet. It is available in mashed, fine, or coarse grind. Please ask your veterinarian to recommend an appropriate diet based on your pet's needs.



### TOYS:

Toys are VERY important for parrots. Parrots need a minimum of 1115 toys in their cages. This provides a wide variety to choose from and will reduce boredom and anxiety. One way to accomplish this is to hang a number of toys next to each other on the back of the cage and provide a perch by the toys to sit on while playing with them (a rope perch with a little slack in it so there is more work involved with using the toys). This leaves room in the cage for the bird's other activities while allowing plenty of toy choices. The toys should be rotated every 710 days so that the birds do not become too bored (birds can be thought of as 3 year old children in this regard). There are 4 types of toys. Each bird should have a few of each kind.

1. Puzzle toys: these usually consist of a food treat hidden in a toy and the bird has to work to obtain it. It should take the bird longer than 10 minutes to accomplish the puzzle. This will give him good mental stimulation.

2. Chewing toys: Parrots have a strong instinct to chew. If they do not have anything to chew, they many times opt to chew on themselves. These can consist of various branches, woven products designed to be chewed, etc. If using branches, make sure the wood is safe to chew. The bird should have a constant supply of these chewable items.

3. Solid toys: these consist of hard plastic, longlasting toys that the birds can chew, etc., but are not easily destroyed. These should last for several months or longer.

4. Physical activity toys: examples of these are rope swings (hemtype are best), ladders, etc.

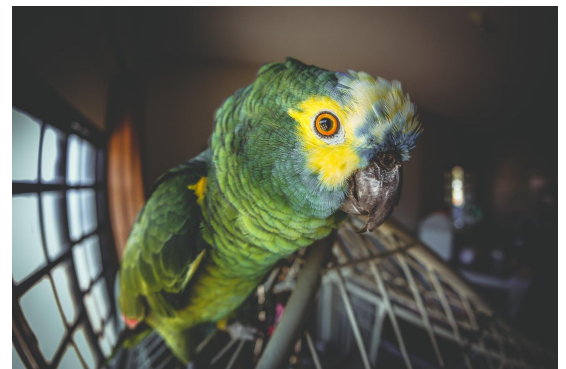
New toys, especially for the more timid birds, can be introduced by first placing the toy across the room on a table within the bird's sightline. It is then gradually moved closer to the cage each day. It can help to have the owner handle the toy so the bird sees that it is not dangerous. Then hang it low on the outside of the cage. Gradually let it get higher. Finally move it into the cage, keeping it low initially and then moving it to where you want it. The bird should now be so curious that it cannot wait to play with the toy.

#### CAGE:

Cage size is important. Remember that the bird will spend the majority of its time in the cage and there needs to be enough room to move around, spread the wings, etc., without the worry of damaging wing or tail feathers. The more room the better.

This will help prevent anxiety and boredom. You can also provide a variety of perches (use varying lengths and widths to provide a variety of textures and sizes) and toys more easily with a larger cage. Parrots should be out of their cage at least 2

hours a day. They should not, however, have free roam of the house. This can open them to various dangers plus it allows them to believe they can do whatever they want, whenever they want. This can lead to biting, especially if they do not wish to go back into the cage when you want them to. Keeping a regular routine each day of inthecage time and outofthecage time will create a less anxious, better adjusted bird (see the section on regular routines).



#### BATHING:

Every parrot should be bathed. In the rainforest, there is constant moisture and high humidity. Parrots are designed to live in that environment. They should have a light misting every day and a good heavy shower once a week. This helps clean away the dead skin, dander, etc. Lack of bathing is a frequent cause of grooming problems. The humidity in the home can be increased in one of three ways: use of a humidifier (left on 12 hours a day), an open area of water (like a large aquarium in the same room as the bird) or a table top fountain. The fountain is nice as it provides humidity and also is an auditory and visual stimulus for the bird. It can be put on a timer when owners are away and give the bird something nice to look forward too.

#### SLEEP:

Many birds do not get enough sleep. They need 10-11 hours of sleep a night (this is how long night lasts in the jungle). "Naps" taken during the day do not count because birds do not fully sleep during daylight hours (in the wild, they could be eaten...these instincts are still very strong

in our birds). If the bird's cage is in a room where there is a lot of activity, merely covering the cage will not provide a good sleeping environment. The best solution is to have a separate "sleeping" cage in a separate room. This cage can be smaller than the normal "daily" cage and needs to have a bowl of water and pellets in it. The bird is then put in this cage when it is time sleep.

#### ROUTINE:

Parrots thrive with routine. They like to know what to expect in their day...this will greatly reduce stress. This can be accomplished with the use of timers on the lights, water fountain, television (cartoons in the afternoon are great fun for many birds). The sleeping cage helps with this as well.

#### LIGHTING:

A full spectrum/UV light is needed for birds. The UV light makes the birds feel better (just like you do when you've been out in the sun). It helps improve vitamin absorption (especially calcium calcium deficiency can be a cause of feather picking). This light should be provided for about 8 hours a day. These lights can be purchased at pet stores and should be in the form of a tubetype light (the bulb forms are inadequate). They may be marketed as reptile lights. Avoid having your bird in front of windows. While this may seem a good thing (light, something to watch), you cannot control what is outside. If they see a cat, stranger, dog, etc., the stress of dealing with these "predators" is many times too much for them to handle. It is better to provide other means of entertainment within the home (as discussed previously).

#### SMOKING:

Secondhand smoke can adversely affect many birds so no smoking at all is the best option. If this is not possible, be sure to wash your hands, clothes, etc., before handling your bird. Nicotinetransfer (from your finger, etc., to the bird) can lead to feather picking and other problems.

#### BEING ON TOP OF CAGES AND ON SHOULDERS:

This is a big nono. Birds, unless extremely well trained, should not be allowed to sit on top of their cages or on your shoulders. For a parrot, being "on top" means being the boss or at least being your equal. This will increase biting behavior and can be a great source of anxiety to a bird that is not ready for this responsibility (being the boss means having the responsibility of watching out for the flock, watching for predators, etc.). If, while sitting on your shoulder, your bird sees a perceived threat, they may bite at you (as a warning) and many people have been injured in this way. You will have a better, healthier relationship with your parrot if he knows that you are the boss in all situations.

#### OTHER CONTROL ISSUES:

1. Playing "stepup": this is an important training "game" you play with your bird. See "The Companion Guide to Parrot Behavior" for a good description on how to do this. This should be performed daily when the bird is taken out of the cage.
2. Wing Trims: this is not only important for safety reasons (flying into doors, ceiling fans, etc.) but also for control. You do not have control over the bird if they know they can fly away. These topics cover the more common areas which, if not addressed properly, can lead to behaviors which are undesirable and unhealthy for your parrot.



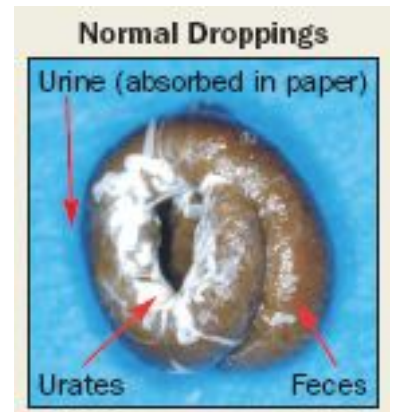
## HEALTH:

### How to Evaluate Your Bird's Droppings

Clean white paper or other smooth surfaces can be used to collect the droppings.

The normal appearance of the feces is usually soft and brown when the bird is eating a formulated diet but may be abnormally dry and black, yellow or green with a seed diet. The normally clear urine may be increased in amount due to excess consumption of fruits and vegetables. Normal urates are creamy white waste from the kidneys and are often suspended in the liquid urine or are "wrapped around" the feces. Any color change in the

urates is abnormal. A sick bird may show a change in the volume, color, consistency or frequency of droppings. Feces from egg-laying females, baby birds on hand-feeding formulas and the first void of the morning may be larger than normal, and urine output may increase when the bird is nervous or ill.



The bird's weight (in grams), body condition, attitude and droppings should be monitored carefully on a daily basis in small and medium birds and at least twice a week in large birds.

### Converting Your Bird To Pellets One Day at a Time

1. Take all food (but not water) away for 12 hours (overnight).
2. The next morning, put **only the pellets** in the bird's usual food bowl for 1 hour. Then take the pellets out and **replace with the bird's seeds** (or his usual food). Leave the seeds in the bowl for the rest of the day.
3. Take away all food again overnight.
4. The next morning, put the pellets in the bird's usual food bowl for 2 hours. Then replace the pellets with the bird's seeds again.
5. Repeat the process, adding 1 hour each morning, until the bird has pellets in its bowl the entire day except for the last few minutes of the evening.
6. After several days of having only a few minutes to eat seeds each day, cut back to offering seeds for a few minutes every other day.
7. Once you are sure the bird is eating the pellets well, you can cut out seeds completely.

\*Make sure your bird's attitude remains the same during the conversion process. If it's activity and/or vocalization diminish, it could be a sign that it is not eating enough.

\*\* Always watch your bird's stool output to make sure the volume remains the same as it was before you started the conversion process. If you see a dramatic drop in stool volume, it is a sign that the bird is not eating enough.

## 10 Quick Tips for Conversion to Harrison's Bird Foods

Birds converting from any other diet should be fed Harrison's High Potency™ Formula for a period of at least 6-8 months unless otherwise directed by your veterinarian.



1. Use AVIx Bird Builder® 2-3 weeks prior to diet a change. The iodine and trace minerals provided by Builder may stimulate a healthy appetite, resulting in the bird's willingness to try something new. Stop using Builder once the bird is fully converted.
2. Change the bird's environment. Try moving your bird to a new enclosure, such as a box, aquarium or even a new cage. Remove all the toys, perches and bowls and offer High Potency™ on a solid surface of the floor.
3. Use a mirror or white paper. Sprinkling food over a mirror or sheet of white paper placed on the bottom of the enclosure works especially well for budgies. A bird old enough to be socialized may eat to compete with the "rival" bird in the mirror. A white paper background may draw attention to the food particles.
4. Slowly "wean" your bird from seeds. In the evening, offer seeds from the food bowl for only 1 hour. Then, remove the seeds and replace with High Potency.™ The next day, give your bird seeds for only 30 minutes in the morning and evening. The third day, reduce the time to only 15 minutes twice a day. And finally, offer only High Potency™ on the fourth day. Watch the bird's droppings.
5. Feed your bird at mealtime. Place the food on a plate, move it around with your finger or a spoon and pretend to eat it in front of your bird.
6. Offer Power Treats, Pepper Lifetime Coarse™ or Adult Lifetime Mash.™ Birds love the taste of Power Treats™ and Pepper Lifetime Coarse.™ These foods can be crushed for smaller birds. Adult Lifetime Mash™ also has an appealing taste to help your bird try a new food.
7. Use a converted bird as a role model. House your bird near another that's already eating Harrison's Bird Foods, or use a "trainer bird" in the same cage as a role model for eating.
8. Heat or moisten the food. Heat the High Potency™ slightly or moisten it with a small amount of fruit juice or AVIx Sunshine Factor.®
9. Schedule a supervised diet change with your veterinarian. Some birds do not recognize Harrison's as food, and placing the bird in a clinic where monitoring can be done will help keep your bird healthy through the conversion.
10. If the conversion steps don't work the first time, you can feed the familiar food for a short time and then try again. The effort is worthwhile for the long term health of your bird.

## Nutritious Dark Leafy Greens

These vegetables are excellent food sources for many small animals including herbivorous and omnivorous reptiles, birds, rabbits, guinea pigs, and other herbivorous mammals.

### Feed the following greens in abundance:

Arugula  
Basil  
Cilantro  
Clover (no pesticides or herbicides)  
Dill leaves  
Endive\*  
Escarole  
Mint  
Peppermint leaves  
Radicchio  
Raspberry leaves  
Red or Green Leaf Lettuce  
Romaine lettuce (no iceberg or light colored leaf lettuce)\*  
Dandelion greens and flowers (no pesticides or herbicides)\*  
Watercress\*  
Wheat grass

### The following greens should be fed less often and in smaller amounts:

Alfalfa, radish & clover sprouts^  
Beet greens (tops)^\*  
Bok Choy†  
Brussels sprouts^†  
Carrot tops^\*  
Collard greens†^\*  
Kale†\*  
Mustard greens†^\*  
Parsley^\*  
Radish tops^  
Swiss Chard^  
Spinach †^\*  
Turnip Greens†^

\* Contains high amounts of Vitamin A, which is good for skin health

^ Contains high amounts of oxalates & may cause health problems if fed often. Use sparingly.

† Contains high amounts of goitrogens & may cause health problems if fed often. Use sparingly.

## SAFE PLANT AND WOOD RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BIRDS

KAYTEE  
TECHNICAL FOCUS

Pet bird owners are often concerned about their birds eating houseplants. However, confirmed cases of plant toxicities in birds are quite rare. The following list of “safe plants” was compiled from several sources (*Bird Talk*, *Bird USA*, *Clinical Avian Medicine and Surgery*, *Feeding Your Pet Bird*, *The Parrot in Health and Illness*, *Northwest Ohio Exotic Bird Club Newsletter*.) The basis for these reports is primarily anecdotal. It should be noted that the general health of a bird may greatly affect its ability to handle ingested plants. The fertilizers used on the surface of house plant soils pose a greater threat than the house plants themselves.

### Safe Plants and Woods:

Acacia	Comfrey	Manzanita	Rose
African Violet	Coralberry Corn Plant	Marigolds	Rubber Tree
Aloe	Cotoneaster Firethorn	Monkey Plant	Sassafras
American Bittersweet	Crabapple	Mother-in-law Tonge	Schefflera (umbrella)
Apple	Cycads	Mulberry	Sensitive Plant
Autumn Olive	Dandelion	Nasturtium	Silk Oak
Baby Tears	Dogwood	Natal Plum	Singapore Holly
Bamboo	Donkey Tail	Norfolk Island Plum	Snowberry
Barberry	Dracaena varieties	Parsley	Spider Plant
Bayberry	Elderberry	Pepperomia	Spruce (black, Horway, red, white)
Beech (American & European)	Ferns (asparagus, bird's nest, Boston, maidenhair)	Palms (areca, date, fan, lady parlour, howeia, kentia, Phoenix, sago, natal)	Strawberry Guava
Begonia	Figs (creeping, rubber, fiddle leaf, laurel leaf, weeping)		Swedish Ivy
Bladdernut	Gardenia	Petunia	Thistle
Blueberry	Grape Ivy	Pittosporum	Verburnum
Bougainvillea	Grape Vine	Pothos	Wandering Jew
Ceriman	Hen & Chickens	Prayer Plant	Wax Plant
Chickweed	Huckleberry	Purple Passion (velvet nettle)	White Clover
Christmas Cactus	Jade Plant	Pyracantha	White Poplar
Cissus (kangaroo vine)	Kalachoe	Rice Plants	Willow
Coffee Coleus	Magnolia	Raspberry	Zebra Plant



The following plants are documented either through clinical or experimental reports to cause toxic effects in some pet birds. (Dumonceaux, G. and G. Harrison, "Toxins." Avian Medicine: Principles and Application, Ritchie, Harrison and Harrison, Eds, Wingers Publishing, Inc., 1994, p. 1041)

**Plants & Woods Proven Poisonous:**

Amanita mushrooms  
Autumn crocus  
Avocado  
Black Locust  
Castor bean  
Clematis  
Crown Vetch  
Dieffenbachia  
Foxglove  
Kalanchoe species  
Kalmia species  
Lilies  
Lily of the Valley  
Lupine  
Oleander  
Palms - Cycad, Sago, & Zamia  
Poinsettia  
Philodendron  
Rhododendron  
Rhubarb (leaves only)  
Yew - Japanese, America, English, & Western

**Orally irritating plants:**

Peace lilies  
Calla lily  
Philodendron  
Dumb Cane  
Mother in Law plant  
Pothos