



## **Medium Sized Bird Husbandry**

Medium sized birds, such as Conures, African Grey Parrots, Goffin Cockatoos, and Amazon Parrots, make wonderful pets. These are very intelligent birds that, when properly cared for, can provide decades of loving companionship. In captivity, birds of this size can live anywhere from 35-50 years. Cockatoos are sexually dimorphic, meaning the males and females look different than one another. Males have a black or dark brown iris, and females have a light brown or red iris.

### **Housing**

The bigger the cage, the happier and healthier your bird will be. Depending on your bird the cage should be a minimum of 36x36x36 inches with vertical bars made of a non-toxic material. You should provide several perches of variable thicknesses for your bird. Position perches so they are not above food or water bowls to avoid contamination. Do not use sandpaper perches as they can be very irritating to a bird's feet. Paper towel or newspaper works very well as a liner for the bottom of the cage.

You should provide frequent baths for your bird. Birds enjoy bathing themselves, and it is important to help them maintain proper personal hygiene. Some birds prefer misting, or even going into the shower. It is important that you try multiple options to find what works best for your bird.

Birds are very sensitive to a wide array of toxins; it is for this reason that the cage should not be in a room anywhere near the kitchen. Chemicals from non-stick pans, self-cleaning ovens and other kitchen items are potentially lethal to birds. You should never use a scented candle or an aerosolized, anti-odor spray (Glade, Febreze etc.) either, as these are also highly toxic.

At night you should cover your bird's cage with a light proof material. This will give them a sense of safety at night, as well as make them quieter and more docile. It is important to note that some birds can have night-frights and may do better with a small night light.

Due to the level of these birds' intelligence, they will need a variety of toys in their cage to stay mentally stimulated. Ladders, bells, foraging materials, and wooden block toys will work great for entertaining your bird. Toys should be rotated every 3-7 days to keep your bird from getting bored with its toys. Giving your bird pieces of cardboard to destroy is an inexpensive way to keep them entertained as well. Be careful with hammocks and other fabric or string toys. Once they become frayed, your bird can become entangled and possibly injured in the strings.

These birds are extremely social and require a large amount of interaction with their owners daily. To prevent flying injuries, when taking them out of the cage be sure all ceiling fans are

turned off, and windows are closed and covered. Pet birds can also be injured by dogs or cats, so your bird should be very closely monitored with all other pets in the home. It may be best to avoid contact between other pets and your bird all together. You should also take care to unplug any electronic devices so that in the event your bird chews on a cord, it will not be electrocuted. Having a large perch of some kind in the room will make your bird feel more secure while playing outside the cage. When your bird is outside of the cage it should be closely supervised to prevent damage to property or injury to the bird.

### **Feeding**

The ideal diet for these birds should be about 80% pelleted food, 15% fruits and vegetables, and 5% seeds or treats. A high seed diet should be avoided due to their high fat content, which can lead to a wide variety of health problems including cardiovascular and liver disease. Some vegetables that are safe to give your bird include: radishes, turnips, mustard and dandelion greens, kale, cooked sweet potato, parsley, peas, green beans, peppers, cauliflower, broccoli, collard greens, corn and cucumbers. Acceptable fruits include apples, berries, kiwis, mangos, cantaloupe, honeydew, bananas, pears, and grapefruit. All fruits and vegetables should be thoroughly washed, and any seeds or pits removed before giving it to your bird. Avoid avocado and citrus fruits and seeds. Fresh water should be provided daily.

Some tips for switching your bird to a pelleted diet:

- Offer only pellets for a portion of the day. Birds can be picky and may refuse new food options when first offered. By allowing your bird to try only the pellets for a portion of the day, allows your bird time to adjust while still making sure they are eating what they are used to.
- Wet the pellets down. Sometimes making the pellets into a sort of damp mush, may make it more appealing for your bird to try initially. Eventually you can transition into completely dry.
- Offer in a smoothie. You can blend the pellets into a mixture of veggies and fruits to mask the pellets. Sometimes if you were to try your own version of the smoothie (without the pellets) at the same time, it may make your bird more willing to try this new food.

Brands of pellets we recommend:

- Mazuri
- Zupreem
- Lafeber
- Roudybush
- Harrison's

### **Cleaning**

Maintaining a clean environment for your bird is of utmost importance. The cleaner the cage is, the healthier the birds tend to be. Newspaper, paper towel, or a combination of both makes the best substrate for your bird for that very reason. They are absorbent of any waste and are very easy to add or remove to the cage. This bedding should be changed daily to prevent any

buildup of waste. The cage should be fully cleaned regularly with a commercially available bird cage cleaner or a very dilute bleach solution. Ensure the cage, perches, dishes and toys are thoroughly scrubbed, rinsed and allowed to dry completely before your bird is allowed contact.

### **Enrichment**

While keeping birds as pets can be a very rewarding experience, larger birds need extra enrichment in their lives in order to really thrive. Birds are very social animals and spend a lot of time in the wild socializing with other birds, preening, vocalizing, flying, and foraging for food. When placed in captivity, these normal behaviors cannot be accomplished in the same way. Here are some suggestions to enhance the quality of life of your captive bird companion.

- **Foraging!** : There are a ton of foraging toys available for purchase, or you can make your own. In the wild, birds spend roughly 80% of their time foraging for food. When we simply place their food in a bowl in front of them, it discourages their natural instincts to work for their food. Start by having your bird search for something very high value and ideally move toward eventually having your bird forage for all food items.
- **Appropriate Interactions:** - It is important to note that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to interact with your pet bird.
  - **Inappropriate:** Avoid cuddling or stroking the back of your bird and try to keep physical contact to only the top of the head. This kind of inappropriate contact stimulates the bird reproductively/hormonally and can lead to behavior issues and physical ailments later in life.
  - **Appropriate:** Instead, try training your bird with positive reinforcement techniques. You can even use clicker training for these tricks! Try teaching flying from one area to another area on demand, moving toys, talking, etc to strengthen your bond with your bird.
    - When training, be consistent – this includes all household members
- **Allow your bird to be a bird:** Consider allowing your bird to keep its full wings for flight. Just make sure to ensure your home is a safe space for flying (i.e. turn off ceiling fans, close windows and blinds). Flying is what birds are meant to do, and it has physical benefits as well. This helps expend energy as well as decreases chance of heart disease and increases cardiovascular health.

Consider the above lifestyle choices to ensure your feathered friend has a long, happy, healthy life.