

Common Parrot Ailments

The best advice is to consult your vet if you think your parrot may be ill.

A sick parrot may be lethargic, its feathers may be ruffled or in poor condition, or there may be discharge from the eyes or nose.

Aspergillosis: Fungal disease affecting the respiratory tract. Its symptoms include lethargy, depression and emaciation. Seek veterinary attention urgently.

Diarrhoea: Diarrhoea in parrots can be due to inappropriate diet but can also be a sign of serious disease, some of which are transmissible to humans. If in any doubt consult a vet as soon as possible, especially if the diarrhoea is green, slimy and sticky. Dehydration can occur as a result of any diarrhoea so treatment should be sought as a matter of urgency.

External Parasites: Including mites and lice that may be visible on the bird or in the cage, especially on a cloth covering the cage. Symptoms include scaliness around the face, itching and poor feather condition. Consult a vet and clean the cage and all equipment thoroughly.

Psittacosis: Also known as Parrot Fever, this is a bacterial infection affecting a parrot's liver. It can also affect humans. Symptoms include eye and nasal discharge, weakness, stress and green-coloured droppings. Isolate the parrot from other birds and people and consult a vet.

Overgrown Nails and Beaks: These can be trimmed by a vet.

Parrot Facts

There are 328 species of birds that make up the family commonly known as parrots, consisting of cockatoos, lories, lovebirds, macaws, parakeets and budgerigars to name some of the groups. They are found in every colour of the spectrum and more.

Although in captivity parrots will mimic their owners and noises that they hear, they have never been known to do so in the wild. African grey parrots are one of the best mimics.

Life span:
Large species
can live up to
80 years

Maturity:
From 1 to 4
years in various
species

Weight:
From 65 grams
to more than
1.6kg (3.5lbs)

Incubation:
17 to 35 days
before
hatching

Fledging:
21 to 70 days
after hatching

Size:
From 9cm
(3.6in) up to
100cm(40in)

The Environmental Animal Sanctuary & Education (EASE) is a registered charity (no. 1089160) which promotes all aspects of the human/companion animal relationship. Our services include the provision of a Preparing for Pet Loss programme as well as education in animal welfare. For more information about our work, contact:

EASE
PO Box 292
Hatfield
Hertfordshire
AL9 6ZJ
Email: info@ease-animals.org.uk
Website: www.ease-animals.org.uk



**Environmental
Animal Sanctuary
and Education**

The EASE Guide to Caring for PARROTS



Supported by the BVA Animal Welfare Foundation. Committed to improving the welfare of all animals through veterinary science, education and debate.



Parrots make wonderful pets although they are very demanding, requiring a lot of space and attention. Some species are noisy, even aggressive, they can be very long-lived, and will probably require veterinary care from time to time. All these considerations must be taken into account before deciding to take on a parrot as a pet, as well as research into which species is going to be the best for your circumstances.

A Home for your Parrots

The primary consideration is the size and wingspan of the bird. It must have at the very least enough room to be able to stretch its wings fully, stand on its perch without the tail feathers touching the floor, and move around freely and play. The bird should be kept in an area that is frequented regularly by people, and that is well-ventilated but out of direct draughts, and with a good amount of natural light. Parrots also need long periods of uninterrupted darkness and quiet to be able to sleep; if they are in a room where the lights are on late, cover the cage with a thick cloth to keep it dark.

Parrots love to chew so their enclosure must be strong enough to stand up to this behaviour and be checked regularly to make sure it is intact. The best home for parrots is an aviary where they have room to fly around and exercise. If this is not possible the bird must have time out of the cage every day to be able to fly in a secure area that it cannot escape from.

Most parrots enjoy bathing and this also helps to keep their feathers in good condition. So offer them a bowl of water large enough for them to splash around in at least a couple of times a week. They will often be quite energetic when bathing and can make a bit of a mess, so be prepared for this. Lightly spraying the birds with water is also good for their feathers, particularly in cases of feather-pulling.

The cage should have several perches for the bird to hop around on, various toys and chewing material. Mirrors provide entertainment as do balls, which must be large enough so they cannot be swallowed by the parrot. Swings and bells will also help prevent the bird from becoming bored. The cage must be cleaned thoroughly at least once a week including scrubbing all perches and toys. The floor of the cage can be covered with newspaper, compressed paper litter or wood shavings to make cleaning it easier.



Food and Drink for your Parrots

Parrot pellets are available from pet shops and these can form the basis of your bird's diet. Pellets should be fresh, and it is best to buy them in sealed packs rather than as loose pellets from a large bin which can sometimes get old and musty. Pellets should be supplemented with fresh fruit and vegetables which must always be washed thoroughly first. Some birds will need to have their feeding regulated to prevent overeating, while others will happily help themselves to food which is made freely available. Food should be offered at least twice daily. It may be necessary to supplement water or feed with vitamin A as birds that pick out only certain seeds or grains can become deficient in vitamin A, which can lead to respiratory problems.

Parrots can be suspicious of changes in their diet so you should find out what they have been fed before taking home a new bird, and any changes should be made gradually.

Vegetables such as broccoli, corn, beans, carrots and sprouted seeds can be given, as well as small amounts of fruit such as orange, apple and grapes that have been washed thoroughly. All fresh food that is not eaten should be removed daily. Never feed avocado or foods high in fat, salt or oil. Parsley, iceberg lettuce and cabbage should also be avoided. Fresh, clean water must always be available in a bowl that will not be overturned, and this should be cleaned daily.



Handling your Parrots

It is very important that parrots are handled from a young age to accustom them to people and to tame them — being unable to handle a pet parrot can lead to major problems. Work slowly and patiently until the bird allows you to touch it all over without showing any fear. Introduce it to new places, things and people once it is happy to be picked up. In the absence of other birds you are taking on the role of its parents and showing it how to behave.

Don't let a young parrot chew on your fingers, even though it is only light nibbling, as when the bird grows older it will become harder as it tries to dominate, and a bite can inflict a serious wound.

It is worth reading about handling and training parrots as there is much to learn that is beyond the scope of this leaflet.

Parrots

Wild parrots are found in tropical forests around the world including those of South America, Africa, Australia, New Guinea and Asia. They have relatively short necks and large heads, and their feet have two toes pointing backwards and two pointing forwards which help to make them excellent climbers.

Most parrots nest in holes including in trees, rock cavities, termite mounds and ground tunnels, although a few exceptions build nests of sticks.



Parrot Behaviour

Parrots are very intelligent and complex animals that build strong bonds with their owners in the absence of companion birds. They need regular attention and mental stimulation to prevent them becoming bored and developing behavioural problems which can often be destructive. The early experiences of a baby bird will influence it for the rest of its life, and parrots need a lot of care and attention in these early days. Taking the time to correctly socialise a young parrot will pay off by avoiding behavioural problems later in life. Unless you have the time and patience to do this, it is often better to buy an older parrot that has been socialised and trained.

Screaming: Can be simply calling, imitation or, in some cases, physical illness. They may be trying to attract your attention for some reason. Try and find the cause for the bird making the noise.

Aggression: Parrots will naturally try to find their place in the flock and will try to dominate their owners, who should be prepared to work calmly and patiently to understand and build a compatible relationship with their parrot.

Self-mutilation: This is often caused by boredom so provide plenty of toys, perches and puzzles to prevent a parrot becoming under-stimulated, withdrawn and developing anti-social behaviour.

Chattering: Parrots will chatter away sometimes only when no one is in the room and others will chatter constantly — both of which are perfectly normal.