

Birds come in hundreds of species, only some of which are suitable for being kept in captivity. When deciding to acquire a bird, you need to choose one that will thrive in the conditions you are able to offer.

Birds, like all animals, deserve at least the **minimum** standard of care outlined in the **5 freedoms**

- 1. Freedom from hunger and thirst**
- 2. Freedom from discomfort**
- 3. Freedom from pain, injury and disease**
- 4. Freedom to express normal behaviour**
- 5. Freedom from fear and distress**

Purchasing a bird

Do some research beforehand on the species, only buy from a reputable dealer, and **avoid impulse buys**.

Aspects to take into consideration include:

- The size of your home
- If you have children (some birds are more child-friendly, such as the canary, the budgerigar, and various finches.)
- **Expenses:** consider that large cages and toys are required for parrots.
- Birds need attention on a daily basis: do you have the necessary **time** and commitment?
- What are your bird's **specific needs**?

Housing

Buy the biggest cage you can afford, considering that your bird needs to be able to stretch its wings fully and fly from perch to perch. Birds must be kept in a draught-free and well ventilated area, out of reach of predators such as cats. Access to sunshine and fresh air should be allowed. Ideal perches are made of fruit tree branches, which – with their varying thickness - help exercise the feet and keep claws naturally trim. Cage accessories include food bowls, water bottle, hides, nest boxes, and a variety of toys. Line the cage bottom with newspaper, to be changed daily. A thorough clean of cage and accessories should be carried out weekly.



Nutrition

Diet depends not only on the species but also on the life stage and physiological requirements. Many smaller caged birds are happy with a specific seed mix available

from your local pet store. Some birds like a mix of seed, fruit and **grit** to aid digestion. **Cuttlefish bones** should be provided for beak health and as a source of calcium and an **iodine block**, which is rich in minerals. Water feeders that clip to the outside of the cages are easy to clean and refill everyday.

Ailments

Prevention is the best course of action: keeping the cage and accessories clean and regularly disinfected; providing the right amount and type of food and fresh water; and inspecting the bird's eyes, feathers, beak, and droppings on a regular basis will help keep your bird healthy. First symptoms of illness can be fluffed up feathers and lethargy, maybe lack of appetite and/or loose, green or foul smelling stools. If you spot any of these symptoms immediately contact your vet or bird breeder, who may be able to help.

Diseases such as flu can be passed between humans and birds. *Psittacosis* is a bird disease which can be fatal for humans.

Toys

A range of toys are available for caged birds, including **balls**, **mirrors** (which may help enliven a lonely bird) and **swings**. Bird **baths** are a must for budgies and especially canaries as they like to wash themselves.

Exercise

Birds should not be bound to their cage for

their entire time and some indoor **flying** time (maybe 1 or 2 hours a day if possible) is highly recommended. Parrots are highly intelligent and need constant mental stimulation, so a variety of safe toys should be made available.

Training

You can train birds from the parakeet family to come to your call or hand. Only the male of the bird's species (e.g. budgerigar, parrots, etc.) usually can be trained; if you have more than one bird they will not talk, as they will bond more with each other instead. Patience and routine are needed for training your birds; it may take quite a while to get the idea of what you want from them.

Neutering

Bird neutering is a difficult and time consuming task for the vet and should only be considered in extreme cases for larger birds such as African Grey parrots, mainly for aggression. Consider, however, that it may not solve the problem, while behavioural modification programs may be a better and long lasting solution.

Holidays

Ideally, you should ask a trusted person – with a good understanding of your bird's needs – to look after your bird while you are away. Some smaller breeds such as Zebra Finches, Canaries, etc. may be ok if left on

their own for up to two days as long as they are in a safe environment and food and water are topped up before you go. Most, however, need daily care. Keep in mind that there are **no boarding places for birds in Ireland**, so a pet sitter may be your only option.

Birds and Children

Children should be introduced carefully to birds, the younger the bird the better. Birds are not suitable pets for small children.

Birds and other pets

Birds and small carnivores such as cats and ferrets are usually incompatible, a cat will usually try to reach inside the cage endangering and distressing the bird, and possibly overturning the cage. Large parrots are often aggressive towards cats.

Some dogs can learn to accept birds, however a small bird flying across a room may be a temptation for a dog to catch.

Some small animals, such as guinea pigs, may be able to live in the same enclosure as small birds; however, a careful watch needs to be kept for aggression or fear in either direction, particularly if nesting occurs, as the bird may be inclined to steal hair or fur and to become aggressive.



Caring for your BIRD



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