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## **All my published pet bird articles from 'ArticleBase'**

Here are all my published articles so far together in one place for your convenience.

Enjoy!

### **How to help keep your zebra finches alive in the aviary at night**

Posted: Nov 14, 2010

This is a common thing but there is a simple solution.

This might not refer to your own aviary but is a very common and easily made mistake.

Worry not though! I may be able to help.

You see, zebra finches and some other finch varieties of aviary birds cannot go for more than 8 hours without food. 'But they've always got plenty of food in the aviary!' you might be thinking.

My pet birds have plenty of food too, but that didn't stop them dying unexpectedly, until I discovered where I was going wrong.

Your finch will only eat if there is light for it to see what it's doing.

But during the winter months it's dark for about 14 to 15 hours at night. For your finches to go for 14 to 15 hours without food is like a death sentence to them, especially during winter when your zebra finches need to eat well to build up enough body fat to keep them warm.

Obviously the simplest solution is to install a light in your pet birds' aviary night shelter, but you must make sure to fit it so that your aviary birds cannot burn themselves on the heat from the bulb. You must be sure to separate your pet birds from contact with the hot light bulb. Easily done by either surrounding the bulb with wire mesh but leaving space between the bulb and the mesh so that neither your birds or the mesh can make contact with the bulb.

If you have a security area in your bird shed which is separated from your birds area by wire mesh then install the light in the security area away from your finches or other aviary birds. The light will still light up the pet birds' area because there is nothing to stop it.

Try not to make you light too bright though as this will only dazzle your aviary birds.

You need to switch the light on as it starts to get dark and you can then switch it off about 7 hours before sunrise, this way your zebra and other finches will only have to go for 7 hours without light so they can eat.

A timed dimmer switch fitted to your light that gradually gets brighter as the sun sets and darker as the sun rises, and so imitating the natural environment, is ideal but can prove to be quite expensive.

I find that a cheap electric timer that switches the light on or off at the right times is the ideal lo-cost solution.

To sum it up; give your aviary birds plenty of food and a night light till about midnight or 1am.

Since installing a light in my pet birds' aviary I have had no more casualties.

Try it, it just might work!

## **Worried about keeping you pet aviary birds warm enough during the cold winter nights?**

Posted: Jan 08, 2011

Here in the UK we have recently recorded some of the lowest outside temperatures in decades. This may leave a few outdoor aviary owners rather concerned about the welfare of their birds in these sub-zero conditions. Considering that popular pet aviary birds such as cockatiels, budgies, finches and many other parakeet or parrot species are classed as so called '*tropical*' species, it can be worrying when the temperature in the locality is minus 15 degrees, hardly '*tropical*' temperature then!

Well believe it or not, it's not such a low temperature that causes your birds harm, no, it's actually cold draughts or cold winds.

Thing about this for a moment; even with us humans when it's cold outside if the weather is still it's quite bearable, but if there's a cold wind or draught you feel freezing.

Well it's the same for your birds; if their night shelter is draught free they'll be fine!

I have a outdoor mixed aviary that is home to budgies, cockatiels, zebra finches, Bengalese finches, java sparrows, turquoise parakeets, and silver bills - who all coincidentally live together in reasonably peaceful harmony apart from just the occasional squabble.

I only have a small night shelter when compared to the size of the aviary, which is rather large. My night shelter is made from a standard 6' x 4' garden shed but the door is flush fitting (no draught), I have no form of artificial heating whatsoever (no electric heater etc.), but I have included a few basic simple D.I.Y. alterations to accommodate my birds:

The manufacturers window has been replaced by semi-clear Perspex, cut to size, flush fitting (no draughts), hinged with a simple catch so it can be easily opened and closed as required (during the day time this acts as their access to the large outdoor flight).

The whole of the interior walls and roof of the shed have had carpet underlay fitted to them to act as insulation.

This has then been boarded out with ply wood to tidy it up, stop my birds from chewing the underlay, and act as second defense from the weather (much like plaster board or double glazing with insulation between the two sheets).

Simple, easy precautions that will offer adequate protection for your birds at night.

However you must ensure that your birds have plenty of food and fresh water to see them through the night, especially in winter as they need to eat plenty to build up their fat reserves to help keep them warm; and of course fresh water is absolutely essential (but during freezing temperatures be sure to change the water frequently to prevent it freezing up, especially first thing in the morning and last thing in the evening).

Follow these simple procedures and you should have no temperature related problems with your birds whatsoever.

As I mentioned earlier in this article, in the UK we have recently had some of the lowest temperatures on record but so far I have had no bird casualties at all.

## **10 Bird keeping mistakes NOT to make**

Posted: Feb 16, 2011

Throughout the centuries mankind has learnt how to get it right by getting it wrong. Every species has since the dawn of life has learnt through its mistakes, and evolved in order to get it right and survive (with the exception of our old friends, the dinosaurs perhaps).

How often have you found yourself saying 'I'll not do that again!' Well it's the same with bird keeping (or keeping any pets for that matter). Over the 10 years or so that I have been keeping and breeding pet birds I have made many mistakes and learnt not to repeat my failures.

Keeping any type of animal is a long learning curve, you learn more as you go along.

I have put together this list to help you so that hopefully you will not make some of these mistakes yourself, giving you a head start along the bird keeping road.

10 bird keeping mistakes not to make:

1 Do not put new birds in with any others you may have as soon as you get them home! You don't know if your new bird might be carrying some illness or virus that could be easily passed to your other birds. For this reason I suggest a 'quarantine' period of at least 2 weeks to see if your new bird is OK. Keeping your most recent feathered buddy in a cage on it's own separated from your other birds is perhaps the best option.

2 Don't feed your new bird the wrong food! By this I mean you must find out what the previous owner has been feeding, then try and get the same food and introduce a different

type or brand of feed gradually over a period of time, gradually increasing the food you want to give while decreasing the previous food. Sudden changes in diet can play havoc with a bird's digestive system.

3 Do not let your guests torment your bird or birds in any way! Children especially are particularly efficient at this, but so are some adults. On the same vein you must not torment your bird yourself either. Loud noises - especially sudden ones, prodding your bird, shouting, and generally annoying your feathered pet can rapidly turn your beautiful, loving, tame bird into an annoying and aggressive monster that nobody likes.

4 Don't give your birds water straight from the tap - or faucet to our US friends! Mains supplied water contains some chemicals - used by the water company to supposedly keep your water safe - that could harm your bird. Clean, fresh rain water is best, but failing that if you use mains water then boil it and then allow it to cool before giving it to your birds, that way most toxins will be destroyed during the boiling process.

5 Do not feed your bird the same boring old food continuously! Basically, the proprietary food or seed mix you give to your bird is fine as it's staple diet, and so you should always have some available for your bird; but would you want to eat the same boring old stuff all the time? Didn't think so; well it's the same with your bird; staple food is fine but your pet bird requires some variety to his or her diet. Fresh vegetables, fresh fruit and nuts are an excellent extra food or for a special treat, preferably for both reasons. *Please look out for my next article in the directory to find out what foods are safe and unsafe for your birds.*

6 Don't force your bird to live it's whole life alone in an empty cage! Most birds that are commonly kept as pets are not solitary by nature and often live as part of a large flock, they enjoy company. Hook bills - such as parrots, budgies, cockatiels, and many other parrot and parakeet species - will soon get bored and depressed on their own, so if keeping just one be sure to interact with it and provide some toys to keep your pet bird occupied. Some other species - such as finches for example - although they may be part of a flock in the wild, don't have a lot of interest in toys - except perhaps the odd tunnel, hole or box to investigate - but they also like company. Again you need to interact with them a little, but the best advice I can give is to keep 2 or more of these energetic little critters together, this way then can amuse each other. Society (Bengalese) finches hate to be alone and will always be found huddled together or playing closely (It's so cute to see them huddled).

7 Do not allow your bird's water to go stagnant! This can make them very ill. Change the water at least every day, sometimes more often. Even if fresh water was only given today as soon as it starts to look a little murky you need to change it. Be sure to wash out the water container thoroughly with clean water at each change.

8 Don't allow your birds cage, aviary and fitting to get excessively soiled! When things start to look messy, get cleaning! Bird droppings and other soiled items harbor germs, give everything a good wash (with a very weak disinfectant solution if necessary, but be sure to rinse thoroughly). Clean out the cage or aviary, get rid of sand, shavings or whatever else is covering the base and replace with clean and new. Wash perches, toys, food and water containers; and wipe down the bars of the cage, or the walls and mesh of the aviary. Cages should be cleaned and changed at least once every week; aviaries can go a little longer but still need doing regularly - at least once a month is a good start.

9 Do not over-exhaust you pet birds! Just like us, your bird will need time to chill out and relax. Too much activity or too much heat (*although many originate from tropical countries, during the hottest part of the day they tend to like a siesta in the shade somewhere*) can cause exhaustion, and an over-exhausted bird is as good as dead. Yes, they need to be active, but they need some R & R too. For this reason if you find your birds are actively breeding for example try not to allow them to raise more than 2 clutches of chicks per year, in the Autumn (Fall) remove their nest boxes in order to stop them or they will be continuously exhausted - this is especially apparent in an exposed outdoor aviary, as your birds need to build up their fat reserves to see them through the winter, but if they have young all their efforts will be focused on raising their young rather than looking after themselves.

10 Don't buy or acquire adult birds and expect them to be tame! Taming a bird begins when they are still young and have only just left the nest. For them to become tame they need to be nurtured and handled every day. If you get an adult bird that is tame it's a bonus, but don't expect it!

## **A brief outline of alternative foods to give to your pet & aviary birds**

Posted: Feb 18, 2011

*I have a large open air mixed aviary at the bottom of my garden which is home to lots of budgies and finches (Bengalese (society) finches and zebra finches), a few cockatiels, a pair of turquoisine grass parakeets, some java sparrows (java finches), a couple of Eastern (golden mantle) rosellas, and a few kakarikis, who all live together in reasonable harmony (the large flight helps to reduce squabbles as they have room to get out of each others way) and they also share the flight area with - you'll love this - a rabbit; yes I have an open rabbit hutch in the bottom of my aviary flight and my rabbit gets the run of the flight - nothing new, I've been doing this for years. The rabbit and the birds have got used to this set up and never bother each other; I've even known them to share food.*

I discovered this one day a while ago when I took dandelion leaves and carrots into the flight to give as a treat for the rabbit, and within minutes I noticed some of my birds coming to the floor and helping my rabbit to eat her treats. I've since been giving dandelion leaves and carrots not only to the rabbit but to my birds also, they love 'em!

The basic rule is if you can eat it then most likely your birds can also, with a few exceptions of course, common sense should prevail when feeding *other* foods to your birds. Avoid meat, fatty stuff, food full of preservatives, sugary food etc.; remember common sense, healthy is best; but if unsure about anything then don't give it to them or talk to an avian vet or avian nutritionist.

### ***Avoid these:***

Alcohol, Apple seeds, Apricot pits, Asparagus, Avocado (entire plant and fruit)

Avoid anything high in salt, sugar, and fat content.

Beans (any uncooked), Butter

Caffeine, Carbonated beverages, Cherry pits, Chocolate, Cigarette tobacco

Dairy Products (birds are lactose intolerant - cleaned/cooked eggs and yogurt are fine)

Fatty foods, Food Dyes, Fruit Pits, Fruit Rinds

Garlic,

Houseplants (most are toxic, not all)

Lettuce

Mayonnaise products, Mushrooms, Marijuana (hemp),

Nectarine pits, Nuts (brazil nuts, almonds, imported nuts that have been polished/dyed)

Old Seeds, Olives, Onions (raw or cooked)

Peach pits, Pear pits, Plum pits, Raw Meats, Raw Peanuts, Rhubarb (contains oxalic acid, as does spinach)

Salty/Sugary Foods, Seeds of: Pears, Oranges, Papaya, Grapefruit, Grapes, Apples & some Melons, Sugar (too much is a bad thing, best kind is natural sugars), Sulphites (found in dried fruits and veggies to help preserve them-only from health food store)

Tobacco, Tomato plant

Uncooked Rice, Unwashed Fruits or Vegetables

***Give these veggies:***

Acorn or Butternut Squash , Artichoke

Basil, Beans (cooked only), Beet & Turnip Greens, Beetroot, Bell Peppers, Bok Choy,

Broccoli, Broccoli Rabe, Brussels Sprouts

Cabbage, Cactus Leaf, Carrot Tops, Carrots, Cauliflower, Celery stalks, Chayote Squash,

Chickweed, Chinese Cabbage, Collard Greens, Cooked Red Potatoes, Cooked Sweet

Potatoes, Corn, Cucumber

Dandelion Greens

Edomame, Eggplant (fruit only), Endive, Escarole

Fennel

Green Beans

Hot Peppers

Jicama

Kale, Kohlrabi

Lettuce

Mustard Greens

Okra

Parsley, Peas, Potato (cooked), Pumpkin (and seeds)

Radicchio, Radish Red Beet (fresh), Radishes, Red or Green Pepper, Romaine or other dark leafy lettuce

Snow Peas, Spaghetti Squash, Spinach, Sprouts, Squash, Sugar Snap Peas, Sweet Potato,

Swiss Chard

Tofu, Tomatoes, Turnip Greens

Watercress

Yams

Zucchini (courgette, marrow)

***Give these fruits:***

Apples (cored), Apricot

Banana - (only served fresh), Berries (Strawberries, Raspberries, Blackberries, Blueberries),

Blackcurrant, Blood orange

Cactus Pear (peeled), Cantaloupe melon, Cherry, Cranberries

Dried dates

Figs (fresh)

Gooseberries, Grapefruit (seeded), Grapes (with seeds), Guava

Honeydew melon  
Kiwi (peeled)  
Lychee (Litchi)  
Mandarin, Mangos (pitted), Melons  
Nectarines  
Oranges (seeded)  
Papaya, Peaches (pitted), Pears (cored), Pineapple, Plums (pitted), Pomegranate  
Quince  
Red Currants  
Star Fruit  
Tangerines (seeded)  
Watermelon (no seeds), Winter Squash  
Yams, Yellow Plum

***Other safe foods:***

Cooked grains, Cooked legumes

Grains, Breads, and Muffins:

Graham crackers, Mandel bread (soaked), Matzoh, Mini bagels, Oatmeal, Pastas, Rice cakes, Rice Chex, Rice Krispies, Sweetened corn cereals, Sweetened oat cereals, Toasted bread, Unsalted crackers, Unsalted, unbuttered popcorn, Wheat cereals, Whole-wheat or multigrain bread, Zwieback toast, soaked, Whole Grain Breads, Whole Wheat Pasta, Lentils, Sprouted Mung, Sprouting Peas - *can also be sprouted*:  
Amaranth, Brown Rice, Buckwheat, Hullless Barley, Millet, Quinoa, Spelt or Kamut, Teff, Whole Oats, Wild Rice, Corn Bread, Hulled seeds  
Millet spray, Monkey biscuits

Hard-boiled eggs, Peanut butter sandwiches rolled in millet, Scrambled eggs, Sprouted seeds

**Please note that this list is by no means conclusive, but it will give you a good start - there's plenty of variety there to keep your bird or birds happy even if you never bother with anything else. There are many other foods and plants that are safe to give to your birds, and also many that are not safe. The best advice I can give is; IF IN DOUBT, LEAVE IT OUT! We don't want to make our birds ill through our incompetence or lack of knowledge now do we?**

**Remember; for the best advice talk to an avian nutritionist or avian vet.**

## **Choosing your new small pet bird or birds, a few things to consider**

Posted: Feb 26, 2011

During my 10 years experience I have only dealt with small pet birds so unfortunately for some my knowledge is restricted to these only.

Firstly you must decide what type of bird you would like and if it would be suitable to your circumstances, then you need to be sure you have a home set up for your new feathered friend before you bring it home.

Below is a brief but hopefully informative list of the most popular small pet birds and the ups and downs of their upkeep:

### ***Budgie***

From the parrot family and originally from Australia the budgie is often called 'parakeet' or 'long-tailed parakeet', the budgerigar is without a doubt the most popular pet bird in the Western world and with good reason; small enough to handle, easy to tame, inexpensive, a startling array of different colours, can be kept on its own, very friendly (if tame), a chatterer, minimum requirement to keep in good health, easy to breed (if you want to), usually mixes well with other small birds (budgies and other species). Ideal in a cage or aviary.

However budgies can inflict a nasty wound if they bite you whilst handling (rarely a problem if they're tame, but they can draw blood if they sink their beak in), they can also be rather destructive (they love to chew), and budgerigars can be very territorial during breeding (especially if kept with other birds).

In the wild budgies live in large flocks and so need plenty of interaction to save them from becoming bored. They therefore need to be kept busy with lots of toys and your attention, or alternatively kept with another of their kind, so as they can interact with each other.

### ***Cockatiel***

Another Australian bird often called 'tiel' for short, these small parrots are also very popular as pets, due to their calm nature and unique character. A little bigger than the budgie so more space is required (a bigger cage for example), the cockatiel also lives in large flocks in the wild so again interaction and toys are a must.

They can be kept on their own or in pairs or small groups, and easy to keep. Ideal as a cage or aviary bird, and because of their calm nature the cockatiel will normally mix well with other small birds of a different species (cockatiels are often kept in the same aviary as budgerigars and finches with rarely any problems). They can learn to mimic other sounds with patience and determination, and are easy to tame.

However they can also inflict a rather nasty wound if they choose to bite (probably a worse injury than the budgie due to their larger beaks, but again not usually a problem when tame). Ideally if you want to breed your cockatiels they need to be on their own as a breeding pair with no other birds. These birds can also be very destructive due to their desire to have a chew at almost anything, but they are easily startled (so no sudden loud noises or sudden bright lights please!).

### ***Finches***

Somewhat smaller than budgerigars and cockatiels, and not part of the parrot family, the most popular types of finch are again very popular for good reason: very easy to keep, good natured, small and compact, extremely active, cute, prolific breeders, usually low priced, little

space required for good upkeep (the perfect pet bird for apartments, flats and small living areas).

There are many types of finch available on the pet bird market but the most popular are: zebra finch, society finch (Bengalese finch), gouldian finch, java finch (java sparrow), the java being the largest of the four just mentioned (slightly smaller than the budgie).

All of these can be accommodated in a cage or aviary and also usually mix well with other species (I keep budgerigars, cockatiels, zebra finches, Bengalese finches, and jvas together in a large outdoor aviary and very rarely have any problems).

As for the initial cost of these little characters the zebra finches usually come out the least expensive (from £3 to £8 each, often with a good deal for a pair), next would be the society finches (from £5 to £10 each, again with a better deal for a pair), then the jvas (£8 to £15 each, buy two for a better price), and the gouldian finches coming out on top (the cheapest I've seen these is about £20 each right up to £60 - sometimes more - but a deal on more than one can usually be arranged). The reason for the bigger price for the gouldians is because of their great colouring and rarity, a desirable bird that people will often pay handsomely for.

However finches do not always take readily to handling and must be kept in groups of 2 or more.

At least due to their small size a bite is not likely to bother you a great deal.

### ***Others***

There are many other types of birds available but the price is usually higher as they are not as common.

Many other types of parakeets however are still rather popular - ring neck parakeet, grass parakeet (bourke, turquoise, elegant, alexandrine), kakariki (New-Zealand parakeet), rosella to name but a few.

The upkeep however for all small pet birds is basically the same.

Always remember to shop around for the best deal and if possible buy your new bird or birds from a breeder, or hobbyist rather than a pet shop.

### ***A note on accommodation for your new pet bird.***

Most small pet birds will live happily in an aviary, and this is the nearest they are likely to get to their natural environment, but in an aviary your birds will become semi-wild and may not take very well to handling or one on one interaction.

Caged birds however are a different matter, and can often be tame and friendly towards us humans. Make sure that if you plan to keep your bird or birds in a cage then go for the biggest you can afford (within reason of course, no good putting zebra finches in a large wide barred parrot cage); your bird needs to be able to stretch its wings to their fullest extent and still have some room left.

Most pet birds - especially parrot type species - will spend more time climbing than flying, even in an aviary.

## **Make sure you get the accommodation right for your new pet bird**

Posted: Feb 28, 2011

### ***Cage or aviary.***

This mainly depends on the space you have available and whether or not you want to keep just one pet bird or a number of them. All small pet birds will be happy in either, however you must be sure that your new friend has enough space to be given relative freedom. You wouldn't want to live your entire life in the closet would you? Neither would your pet bird! Space is required to move about and not be cramped.

If going for a cage you need to go for the biggest one you can comfortably afford, but be sure it's secure so your bird cannot escape, the cage bars need to be close enough together for the same reason. Go for metal, not wood, with a plastic base for easy cleaning.

Furnish your cage with perches of varying thickness and set some at an angle rather than perfectly horizontal, some horizontal, some angled, and even some almost upright would be perfect. The different thicknesses and angles will encourage your bird to exercise and possible save it from a foot cramp. If you can only have one of each of the above that will be fine but a few more is better, don't overdo it though and leave room for your pet bird to move freely. On the subject of perches; natural wood is the best option, but be sure it is hygienically clean, give it a scrub if you need to.

As a general rule finches need company and parrot type species (budgie, cockatiel etc.) need toys, so incorporate this in your cage; keep finches in pairs or more, and parrot type in pairs or alone with plenty of toys.

Parrot type species love to chew so be certain to assure that anything in the cage is safe.

Your bird needs to have a minimum of enough space to fully spread its wings and height is better than width as most cage birds will climb rather than fly.

If however you have enough space for an aviary then this is by far a better choice as it is the closest your pet bird will get to its natural environment. Lots of room to fly, climb, rummage and explore; plus if kept with others then the opportunity to get away from the others when things get too much.

A group of birds, even of different species, can be kept together in an aviary with enough room for all, but be sure to check the compatibility with other species. As an example lovebirds ought to be kept with birds of their own species as they will become territorial and aggressive towards others. Budgies however can live happily with other birds of a similar size (except lovebirds) or finches, as long as they have room to get out of each others way if they choose.

If introducing your new bird to an aviary colony you must first keep it in quarantine for a few weeks before letting it loose in the aviary with the others, this is to ensure that any issues with

your new bird can be addressed before release. A decent sized cage as mentioned above will be fine, or a small aviary separate from the others.

Aviaries, like cages come in many shapes and sizes; shop around for the best deal or better still, build your own (the essentials to building your own aviary will be covered in my next article).

Again make sure that the aviary is well furnished with safe branches, perches, shelter, toys (if required) etc. with no escape routes.

Your aviary can be indoors (in a shed or outbuilding, or in the home) or outdoors (on the garden for example), and don't worry about the comfort and warmth of an outdoor aviary as most popular small pet birds are very hardy.

## **The basic requirements for a suitable aviary for your pet birds**

Posted: Mar 05, 2011

Aviaries come in all shapes and sizes, shop around for the best deal; some are for indoor use and some are for outdoor use but all have basically the same qualities, with few exceptions. An outdoor aviary will need some kind of shelter for your birds to roost at night and help protect themselves from extremes in the weather, and it will also need to be rodent proof.

The type of aviary you go for will depend on the space you have, the visual impact of the aviary, the birds you want to keep, and of course the cost, however another reasonably priced alternative is to build your own.

Either way make sure your aviary is sited correctly.

An indoor aviary (or flight) should be located away from sources of heating (such as radiators) and out of constant direct sunlight for the same reason, you do not want your birds to become over heated leading to exhaustion. Also if using non-stick kitchenware keep your aviary away from the kitchen, the fumes given off by non-stick cookware whilst in use are very toxic to your birds, and can cause serious health issues or even death in some cases. Try and site your indoor aviary preferably off the floor away from other household pets.

An outdoor aviary on the other hand is usually a preferable choice for most people. It should if possible be set on a solid concrete or slab (flag stone) base, this will prevent rats from burrowing into your pet birds accommodation and stealing their food, their eggs, and sometimes young chicks. Solid foundations and a few rows of brick or concrete block work will stop rats from chewing through wood in contact with the ground in order to get in, if this is not possible then I recommend fastening aviary mesh on the outside of any ground contact wood as this will go a long way to prevent them from chewing through.

All exposed areas should be covered with a suitable sized aviary mesh to of course stop your pet birds from escaping; even the smallest hole will undoubtedly be found by your inquisitive birds.

A mainly wooden and mesh aviary should be constructed with natural new bird safe wood and welded mesh. If you decide to paint the woodwork of your aviary be sure to use a good

quality exterior animal safe (pet safe) wood preservative, there are many quality propriety brands available.

Some sort of security entrance is a must, an area you can get into and shut yourself in that's separate from the bird area. This is so you can get into the aviary without allowing your birds to escape as you enter. Basically a human area and a bird area, separated by a door of some type (mesh is fine). Go into the human area and close and fasten the door behind you then you can open the bird area to go in and do whatever is required without your pet birds escaping to the outside, because I assure you they will if given the opportunity. If any of your birds do escape however the chances are they will return; with the possible exception of juveniles your birds are not stupid and know instinctively where home is, and food and shelter etc. Look out for them returning, catch them and then return them into the aviary. If that fails then it is wise to report them missing to the relevant authority.

An assortment of perches is a must for your outdoor flight. Natural wood branches of varying thickness and angles are best, allowing your pet birds to perch and climb, and keeping as close to natural as possible.

Your outdoor aviary should also have a shelter for your birds to roost at night (often called a night shelter) and to allow them to escape the weather (equip it with varying perches for roosting). Put your feeding and water containers in this shelter so your birds will learn where to go to be fed, this will also help if you want to close them in there at night - it can be rather annoying trying to catch your birds in the evening to get them in, or to chase them in - if their food and water is there they will go in of their own accord.

Also a type of bird bath in your aviary containing fresh water is also an advantage, this can either be outside in the flight or inside in the shelter (I have mine on the outside) as almost all birds like an occasional bath.

You can if you choose have a solid rather than mesh top on your aviary - or part of it - to give your birds some extra shelter; however this is not absolutely necessary as long as you have a night shelter; in fact most birds actually enjoy an occasional rain shower.

No artificial heating is required as most birds are very hardy, but be sure your night shelter is free from draughts as this can cause problems, especially during the winter.

Finches will need some kind of artificial lighting on longer nights; because they are smaller and very active birds they will eat more often, but only if it's light, try not to allow them to go longer than 8 hours without light as they will need to build up their fat reserves to see them through the cold nights, a simple battery or mains powered light will suffice as long as they can't actually make contact with the hot bulb and burn themselves (switch it off about 7 hours before dawn or fit a timer to do it automatically).

Check your aviary thoroughly each day for any signs of weakness or wear and tear, and rectify any problems before they become a serious issue.

## **How to be sure that your pet birds are compatible with each other**

Posted: Mar 05, 2011

Of course common sense should go a long way, make a mental note of the size of your different birds and their characteristics. Do they look and act as if they will be fine sharing?

As a general rule birds of a similar size will be fine with each other as long as they have enough space in the aviary to get out of the way should the going get tough. The larger or most prolific of your birds are likely to be the bullies, and will occasionally pick on smaller or less prolific species. For example, in my current mixed aviary I have budgies (lots of them), zebra & Bengalese (society) finches (quite a few), cockatiels and java sparrows (not many though), and a very small number of grass parakeets, but my budgies - although not the biggest birds there - are undoubtedly in charge, purely because they are the most numerous. It's just a pecking order and never results in any injuries.

When I first started out I kept lovebirds in an outdoor aviary but wanted a mixed aviary; however I learnt that because of their territorial nature lovebirds rarely got along with other species. I promptly sold my lovebirds to a private bird keeper and bought a few budgies (they were the easiest to get hold of at the time). Before long I had built a much bigger aviary which housed budgies, cockatiels, turquoisine grass parakeets, rosa bourkes, kakarikis and golden mantle rosellas (Eastern rosellas). They all got along fine and I wanted more, especially more rosellas but learn that different rosella species just didn't get on and would fight to the death. Hasten to add, as I had no desire to build more aviaries I opted for not getting more rosellas.

The basic rules to remember are that most pet birds of a similar size will be fine, but be sure NOT to introduce new birds of the same species as you already have to your mixed aviary during the breeding season, the competition will undoubtedly cause serious problems and can often result in the death of some chicks, and the destruction of some eggs (more details in my bird breeding article out soon). It's always best to observe your birds carefully and deal with any issues accordingly, or you could ask an avian expert for more advice. Be sure to have plenty of food containers about your aviary (less competition for each one), and have an aviary with a few hiding places that's big enough for them to get away from each other.

## **Giving your pet birds the right food for health and vitality**

Posted: Mar 05, 2011

There are loads of different choices however and you could easily become overwhelmed by the choice available, try not to go for the least expensive as it rarely meets the right balance, but also don't go for the most expensive as the excessive price is rarely justified to meet your birds requirements. Somewhere in the middle is best.

Make your choice and then stick to it and buy the same mix of the same brand every time, a sudden change in the staple diet of your pet bird will likely cause digestive and health difficulties, if you must use a different mix then it is imperative that you introduce it gradually - half old half new to start and then gradually decrease the amount of the old brand and replace with the new; so don't allow your previous mix to run out before purchasing the new type.

If you keep a number of birds in a mixed flight or aviary then you might think that you need to purchase different types of seed mix for your different birds. Wrong! This will prove rather expensive and very unjustified. The chances are your birds will try and eat whatever you give

them. Look at the content and product information on the seed packaging, it should tell you exactly what's in there.

For example; budgie mix contains mainly white *millet* and *canary seed*, - canary mix contains mainly *canary seed*, rapeseed, hemp seed and niger seed, - foreign finch mix contains *canary seed*, Australian panicum and white *millet*, - parakeet mix contains white *millet*, sunflower seed, *canary seed*, red *millet*, buckwheat, safflower seed and oats, - cockatiel mix contains *canary seed*, red *millet*, safflower seed, sunflower seed, hemp seed, white *millet*, oats, and paddy rice - so looking at the above then a proprietary cockatiel mix will suit all. Notice how canary seed is used in all and millet in all but one, these are staple foods for your bird. However finches and budgies tend often not to bother with sunflower seed but your other parakeets and cockatiels will eat it. So why go to the expense of different seed mixes when one will do?

If you have lots of birds it's also better value to buy in bulk, you can save a fortune this way rather than buying small amounts at a time. Contact your local pet or animal feeds supplier, and purchase your bird seed mix by the sack load, and if you can't or don't want to fetch it most will deliver it for you.

I have been feeding my birds this way for years and never had any problems, even when breeding.

I advise you to give an assortment of alternative foods, such as fresh fruit and vegetables, to add variety to your birds' diet and help with their health (this is covered in more detail in a separate article). Green vegetables and fresh tree fruit (avoid the pips or seeds) are good for your birds and easily obtained. Most vine fruits are also OK, plus melon, tomato, bread, unsweetened biscuits. Your birds will also love chickweed, dandelion leaves, and carrots. But see my other article 'A brief outline of alternative foods to give to your pet & aviary birds' for more information.

## **A guide about the best and probably easiest way to tame your new pet bird**

Posted: Mar 12, 2011

A lot of patience is needed on your part to achieve this, and the taming process needs to begin whilst the bird is still young and has not yet learned to be afraid of people. It can be done with an adult bird but is usually much more of a challenge.

Some bird breeds however do tend to be a little more difficult to tame (finches for example), they'll sit on your hand or finger ok but would often rather get away from you, and are less likely to take food offerings (unfortunately I don't know why that is so) but my findings are based on my own personal experience with these birds so if you've had better luck or you get better look with this then good for you! (Please let me know how you've managed it, I'd love to learn where I'm going wrong). Most parrot-like species (budgies, cockatiels etc) however are a different matter and will readily take to hand taming as long as this is approached in the correct manner.

Remember that whilst trying to tame your pet bird sudden movements or loud noises are a no no, you don't want to frighten the poor thing, talk softly, move slowly and don't shout at your bird, even if it does misbehave.

Whilst your bird is still very young, has only very recently flown the nest, and has not yet gained enough confidence to fly away is the best time to start the taming process.

Take your bird in hand or use your finger or hand as a perch and allow your bird to step onto it. Talk softly to your bird all the time as you are doing this; tell him or her what a good boy or girl they are for example. Give your bird time to get used to this and gradually move your hand around the cage and hopefully your bird will stay put. Offer some food stuffs and if your bird takes them it's a sign that at the moment it is putting its trust in you. After a while, say 5 minutes, return it to its normal perch and then leave it there and talk to it again from the outside of its enclosure for a minute or two, your bird will need to learn to trust the sound of your voice. Say goodbye then go away and leave your pet bird to its own devices for a few hours.

Do this several times a day, every day, until you feel it is confident enough to stay with you outside its cage. Your birds' cage is its home and is the place where your bird feels at its safest, so if you try to take your bird out of its cage it may just jump off your hand or finger back into its safe place. Be persistent but be patient also, remember your bird has already learned to put its trust in you and it will only be a matter of time before it feels safe enough for you to remove it from its home. Learn what your birds' favourite food treat is and use it as a prize for being good (much like taming or training any animal). Again you must interact and try these methods regularly throughout each day, but don't overdo it, your bird will need to rest awhile between its taming sessions.

Soon you and your bird will have enough confidence in each other to allow you to perhaps walk about your home with your bird on your shoulder for example (*pieces of eight*), or your bird will follow you about. Eventually it will look forward to its daily human interaction and so will you.

Remember to be sure that if removing your bird from its cage not to give it any means to escape outside; close windows, doors and curtains, turn off the ceiling fan (don't want chopped bird do we), and try and restrict your taming to one room that your pet bird cannot escape from. Eventually you may be able to allow your bird the run of the house but you must still be sure to not leave any escape routes.

Be sure to do some bird taming every day; don't put it off, because if you miss your sessions then after a while your bird will lose its trust in you.

Be persistent and confident and do these things very regularly and sooner or later your pet bird will be fully confident with you and not nervous.

## **Other potential problems and dangers your indoor pet bird may encounter and how to deal with them**

Posted: Mar 12, 2011

Birds kept in a cage or flight indoors will rarely cause you any unexpected problems, the greatest risk is from others of your household; pets, children, appliances etc.

You must make sure that your bird is not bothered by the cat, dog, ferret or any other pet you happen to have. Cats probably cause the greatest danger for obvious reasons; I once heard a story about someone who had a pet budgie in a cage suspended from the ceiling, and their cat managed to get up onto some nearby furniture and jump onto the cage bringing it crashing to the floor. The cage burst open and the shocked budgie escaped to be promptly caught and eaten by the cat. So be warned!

Do not under any circumstances take anything for granted, your other pets may be fine with the bird whilst you are around but it could be a different matter when you're not there. The same applies to the dog; a close relative of mine once had a cockatiel but their dog caught it in mid flight and promptly enjoyed the poor bird as a tasty snack.

Children also should be taught not to frighten or annoy your bird, and to have respect for it. Boisterous and noisy kids are certainly not your birds favourite human, but kind, quiet, gentle kids can have lots of fun with your bird, and your bird can have lots of fun with them. A careless child can break bones in your little birds body with a single touch, "But Daddy I was only petting Mr. Beaky!"

Do you see my point?

The fumes produced whilst using non-stick cookware are very toxic to any pet bird, so keep your birds well away from the kitchen; A report in 'Cage & Aviary Bird' newspaper (excellent reading material, highly recommended) a year or so ago reported about how very many birds died whilst in the supposedly safe haven of a bird show. Apparently staff at the venue had been using some non-stick cookware, and some of the birds were located too close to this source of toxic fumes (or the ventilation wasn't adequate enough), and this was found to be the cause of the fatalities.

Certainly do not let your bird fly about and explore in the kitchen; birds are very inquisitive and if not paying attention you could end up with roast, fried or boiled budgie, frozen cockatiel, a finch in the whites only wash cycle, blended parakeet, bird droppings in your freshly prepared meal; enough of that, I'm sure you get the message!

Of course if you let your bird out of its cage to explore in the house you must be sure to close windows and doors, also close curtains or blinds - your bird may think it a route to outside and go crashing into the window glass, sometimes with disastrous results. Remove any fragile or valuable ornaments as birds love to test gravity with these. Switch off the ceiling fan, I'm sure shredded bird would be rather upsetting and very messy. Make sure you have no exposed light bulbs, not only can they easily be smashed but a bulb that has been switched on a while can become very hot indeed and could easily burn your bird, so be sure to have them shaded. Of course be sure NOT to use the vacuum cleaner whilst your bird is loose, small birds such as finches could easily be sucked into the pipe and a vacuum can also cause serious damage to any bird, regardless of its size.

Remember to save the DIY and decorating to when your bird is safely tucked away in its cage or flight, all paints will cause severe damage if it happens to get onto your bird, even wallpaper paste can cause problems, and that lump behind the wallpaper??? Plus the damage

you could cause with a jig-saw, circular saw, power drill, steamer, doesn't bear thinking about, the list is endless.

'I wouldn't be that careless!' you might think, but you'd be surprised how many people are oblivious to such things.

So much for there not being much danger to your bird indoors, but birds in an outdoor aviary are exposed to even more dangers but I'll cover those briefly in my next article.

## **Other potential problems and dangers your outdoor aviary birds may encounter and how to deal with them**

Posted: Mar 12, 2011

The most obvious dangers would appear to be extremes in the weather conditions, but most pet aviary birds are more hardy than you would expect from a 'tropical' bird. For example - as mentioned in one of my earlier articles - sub-zero temperatures are not a great threat as long as your birds are well fed, away from draughts, and dry; although your birds will be quite fond of a rain shower occasionally. Hot sticky weather again is not too much of a threat as long as your birds can get out of the sun into some shade and have a plentiful supply of fresh clean water. You will find that many birds do actually like to have a snooze in the day, especially if it's hot; a kind of bird 'siesta'.

Quite a large threat for your birds is their own expert flair for escapology. 'Houdini' would be a fitting name for almost any small pet bird as they are most efficient at getting free from only the slightest weakness to the aviary construction or through your own ignorance. Don't allow this to happen; check your aviary every day for signs of weakness and repair it accordingly, plus be sure to have some type of double-door security entrance to save them from busting out as you are trying to enter.

As your birds are in an unprotected and often mixed species environment the risk of them picking up any illnesses is much increased, as is the risk from ill health from any contagious diseases your other birds may have or be carrying. Keep a close eye on them, get to know all your birds and you will soon notice if there's anything wrong. If you find an ill bird you must remove it from the others and quarantine it whilst you deal with the issue and keep a close look out for any of your other birds showing similar symptoms.

A large and possibly fatal risk to the birds in the outdoor aviary comes in the form of predators.

Cats, birds of prey, and other predators such as foxes, snakes, stoats, weasels or any predatory animal pose the greatest risk to your outdoor aviary birds, but having said that I once had two cats who were always around the outdoor aviary and were actually a massive help; once they realized that they could not get to my birds they unwittingly became the birds' ever present protectors. They would climb onto the top of the aviary (cats like their wild cousins like to get high up) and would dare any other animal, birds of prey for example, to come anywhere near, of course nothing ever got close enough.

For your birds in the aviary predators can at the very least frighten them as they stalk and pounce, and a frightened bird can easily injure itself, and if a predator can actually get at your

birds the results of course could be fatal. Also common sense should tell you not to take your pet snake in there for example.

Birds of prey also pose a massive risk, sparrow hawks are probably the most notorious here in the UK as they hunt birds by nature (but sparrows are not the only birds on the menu). Other birds of prey such as owls, kestrels etc. also pose a risk, if they think your birds are easy prey they will keep trying to get them.

One of the most effective ways to protect your birds from these predators is to adopt an aviary construction method known as 'double-mesh', this means that aviary mesh is attached to both sides of any framework; yes you will use twice as much mesh when you build or protect your aviary but it will certainly prove to be worthwhile; this will help prevent any predators from coming into contact with your birds and causing damage with claws etc. I once had a beautiful pair of yellow turquoise grass parakeets, but a visit to my aviary (which co-incidentally was only single-meshed at the time) one day from a sparrow hawk left my turquoise hen with a large gash to the chest from the talon of the sparrow hawk, sadly her injury was too substantial and resulted in her untimely death. Hasten to add I learnt my lesson and promptly went out and double-meshed my aviary.

Another potential but often less fatal hazard is brought about by the presence of rodents.

Squirrels, mice, rats etc. will most certainly attempt to get into your aviary to get at the bountiful food contained within. With their large incisors most rodents will think nothing of gnawing through wooden framework to gain access, and if the wood gets damp or wet regularly its strength is weakened, making it all the more easier for rodents to get through.

With this in mind any wood that is in constant contact with the ground will rot more quickly, and rats especially will happily chew away at ground level as it's much easier for them than chewing at height. They are also rather efficient at digging through soil to gain entry from below.

To help prevent this it is best to have a solid concrete or slab (flagstone) base, concrete foundations (to stop them digging) and a brick, stone or concrete block wall at least 12 inch (30 cm) high at ground level with the remainder of the aviary attached to the top.

Also mice can get through a smaller hole than even your smallest birds, so don't give them the chance.

Rodents are unlikely to cause any physical damage to your birds but they will steal food and leave behind unhygienic droppings. Rats especially will also take eggs and young chicks as a high protein meal.

The above is by no means conclusive and there are many more potential hazards to be aware of so you will need to be very diligent.

## **The absolute basics to successfully breed four different types of the most popular pet birds. Part 1**

Posted: Mar 12, 2011

Sexing your birds can sometimes be a bit hit and miss as not all have obvious differences between the two sexes. Adult male (cock) budgies will have a blue cere (the small flesh-like part above their beak (looks like nostrils) whereas the adult female (hen) budgie has a brown or tan-like cere, all juvenile budgies will have a pale blue cere until fully fledged. Bengalese (society) finches are very difficult to sex and best left to an avian professional (or you could just take your chances with a few and hope some pair up); the only really obvious trait is that a male will sing whereas a female will not (again not strictly true as hen birds can sometimes turn out a few pleasant notes, but the cock bird is much more efficient with his vocal chords). Normal zebra finches are generally easier to sex as the cock bird will have red or orange cheeks whereas the hen bird will not. As for cockatiels; well to be honest with you, I haven't got a clue and just have to take my chances, an avian professional will be more able to help. With many other breeds, especially the many types of parakeets (small parrots) the male is often more brightly coloured than the female, but not in every case.

Firstly any birds you wish to breed should be in good health as raising chicks can be an exhaustive task and unfit birds would be unable to achieve it successfully.

Secondly your birds are going to require some sort of nest box, loads are available at very reasonable prices (or you could make your own), more info below.

Also you will have to ensure that there will be sufficient heat for your birds to breed and raise chicks, not excessive heat but enough for them to be comfortable.

Plus your birds will need a good regular supply of various foods to help them keep up their strength and feed their offspring.

Finally, certain nesting materials will be required for your birds to use.

So lets start at the beginning shall we; keep an eye on your birds to make sure that they display no signs of ill health or weakness. Of course the birds you hope to breed will have to be fully fledged and adult, this should go without saying. If you only have an opposite sex pair in a cage or small aviary don't assume that they will want to breed, some just don't fancy each other or are not ready. If however you have a large communal (or mixed) aviary your chances of breeding success will be much improved. Unless you plan to breed for the show bench (this requires much more attention) then you should allow your birds to choose their own mates. Most of the commonest birds kept as pets are monogamous by nature, which means they will pair for life and the same pair will mate year after year, there are exceptions of course but as a general rule monogamy is in where your pet birds are concerned. You will notice a paired couple in your mixed aviary as they will follow each other around and stick together, and an act known as 'billing' will occur often between the pair. Billing can be described as kissing, your birds will effectively 'kiss' each other with their bills (beaks), imitating the act of feeding each other (which of course they will actually do once nesting takes place).

## **The absolute basics to successfully breed four different types of the most popular pet birds. Part 2**

Posted: Mar 12, 2011

I suggest two clutches of young will be fine, certainly no more than three; your birds will need a good long rest before starting again the following season.

If you house your birds in an exposed and unheated aviary then be sure to remove nest boxes during the winter months to hopefully prevent your birds from breeding, the young chicks are most likely not to survive freezing temperatures. So in these circumstances only allow your birds to breed during the warmer months from Spring to Autumn (Fall) when there is less risk from frost, and try to only permit them to raise two clutches of young as they themselves need to build up their fat reserves and get ready for winter.

Even out of the breeding season you may find eggs that have been laid for example; in food containers, on the floor of the cage or aviary, on feeding platforms etc, you must remove these unwanted eggs and dispose of them correctly, and only allow your birds to breed when you want them to. This may seem a little harsh but it isn't and your birds will not hold a grudge against you for it.

In their natural environment zebra and Bengalese finches will build an open nest in the canopy of trees, whereas parrot-like species (parakeets, budgies, cockatiels) will build their nests in hollow tree trunks. If you can simulate these conditions then you're part way there. If you have the space, such as a large aviary then put out more nest boxes than is actually required and allow your birds to choose their own, then once chosen you should remove any unused ones. Some birds however, after raising one clutch may prefer to raise the next clutch in another nest box so offer them this option. Place all your boxes high up at the same height, birds prefer to be as high as possible to nest.

Ready-made nest boxes are widely available in pet shops, feed suppliers, garden centres etc. Shop around for the best deal or get some crafts person to make them for you. I pay on average £2 for a finch nest box, £3 for a budgie nest box, £5 or more for a cockatiel/parakeet nest box. Prices vary considerably from lowest prices similar to those mentioned up to much more. Please note that parakeet and budgie nest boxes are more suitable if the base has a conclave area to stop the eggs rolling about. Of course you could make your own but the cost wouldn't be any less than buying ready-made once you've took account of the price of materials and time it takes to make. If however you fancy a bit of D.I.Y. then use good quality untreated exterior plywood (min 6mm thick) or good quality untreated timber. Glue all your pieces together with strong non-toxic glue and staple or tack them together also for added strength.

Use the dimensions given below as a guide:

**Cockatiel/parakeet;** upright box with conclave & removable or hinged lid for inspection. Approx 12 inch (30 cm) high, 8-9 inch (20-22.5 cm) wide, 8-9 inch (20-22.5 cm) deep, with a round entrance hole approx 2-2½ inch (5-6.25cm) diameter on the front and close to the top, with a perch on the outside below the hole. I also recommend attaching some aviary mesh on the inside front of the nest box below the entrance hole for your bird to use as a 'ladder' rather than falling or jumping onto eggs or chicks that may be in the bottom.

**Budgie;** horizontal nest boxes of approx 9 inch (22.5 cm) long, 6 inch (15 cm) wide, 6 inch (15 cm) deep, with a conclave part on the base, and a round entrance hole of approximately 2 inch (5 cm) diameter on the front top corner with a perch below are the most popular but a

vertical nest box of similar dimensions also works well. Attach aviary mesh below entrance on inside as a ladder if going for a vertical box.

**Zebra/Bengalese finch;** the requirements are the same, 5 inch (12.5 cm) in all dimensions works well with the front smaller in height by 1-1½ inch (2.5-3.75 cm) to leave an entrance opening on the top front, a perch below the entrance can be added but is not actually necessary. Alternatively these types of finches will often take to an open or semi-open small wicker basket.

The above dimensions are by no means set in stone and all sizes are approximate, some deviation either way is normally fine.

Your nest box will need cleaning out regularly when in use and I always discard my used nest boxes at the end of each breeding season and start the next with new.

Whilst they are nesting feed your birds their normal diet, but also a little more fresh foods than normal, they need to keep up their strength and feed their young. A supplementary egg food (available from all good pet stuffs suppliers) also helps but I have often successfully bred my birds without it, some just ignore it. Finches whilst breeding may also benefit from some live food such as mealworms etc. Ask your supplier. Make sure that food is always available to your birds, especially during breeding when they will undoubtedly use more than normal.

## **The absolute basics to successfully breed four different types of the most popular pet birds. Part 3**

Posted: Mar 17, 2011

I neglected to include a description of nesting materials to use in my previous article - sorry for that - so I will mention them here before we continue:

Suitable nesting material to provide for your pet birds should include a few or the following materials at the very least: hay, straw, thin natural wood twigs, short lengths of soft natural string (approx 2 inch - 50 mm long), shredded paper, feathers, fine down, clean fur (similar texture to cotton wool), wood shavings; put the materials in the cage or aviary, and not in the nest box. Let your birds choose their own nesting materials and build their nest; this is a much more suitable option than building the nest for them as some birds, especially budgies, will turf out any items present in their chosen nest box - this is because in the wild they nest in hollow tree trunks or logs which have often been used by other birds or animals previously and natural instinct will prompt them to remove anything that could be harmful before they begin to nest.

If you find eggs have been laid in the cage or aviary (on the floor, in food containers, on feed platforms etc.) then you will know that your birds are ready to breed. Giving them what they need to achieve this was covered briefly in my previous articles, but once your birds have laid their eggs - in the right place this time hopefully - a few simple rules will apply.

Always where possible try to provide more nest boxes than are actually required (if a single pair in a cage provide two boxes to start with) and allow your birds to inspect and choose

their own box. Unfortunately budgie hens will sometimes bicker and squabble over their selection of nest boxes but this rarely leads to any serious injury, eventually all will settle.

In most situations zebra and Bengalese (society) finches will lay between 2 and 7 eggs (but have been known to lay more in captivity), and both parents will take turns sitting, and feeding the young once hatched. Eggs will usually hatch within 14 to 16 days so please be patient. Young will begin to venture out within about three or four weeks of hatching, and will look full grown in about three months. They are mature enough to breed themselves from about 8 months onwards.

Usually your budgie hen will lay 4 to 8 eggs on alternate days (1 egg every 2 days) - whilst laying your female budgerigars cere will become a crusty brown colour. The eggs will be incubated by the hen for about 18 to 21 days before they are ready to hatch. During incubation and whilst raising chicks the female budgie will only leave the nest on rare occasion to go to the toilet - so to speak - and for an occasional stretch; during this time she will be fed almost exclusively by her mate. The chicks will fledge at about 5 weeks and become weaned around week later. Maturity is reached from about 4 months but I would suggest not allowing them to breed until the following season.

Cockatiels will lay 4 to 8 eggs that will take about 21 days to hatch. Unlike the budgie, both parents will incubate eggs and feed chicks. The young will become weaned from about 11 weeks. Cockatiels reach maturity at about 1 year of age, but wouldn't recommend breeding them until they are a little older (2 years or more).

With all the above birds be sure not to disturb nesting pairs unless absolutely necessary, however you should check your nest boxes every day to keep an eye on progress and to conduct any cleaning tasks, and if you find any dead chicks (unfortunately this does happen occasionally) you must remove them immediately and dispose of them in a thoughtful manner.

## **Why society or Bengalese finches are an excellent addition to your pet bird aviary**

Posted: Mar 20, 2011

No-one knows for certain how the Bengalese finch originated. It is certainly not a natural breed and was the result of cross-breeding, nobody is quite certain which wild finches the Bengalese is descended from; but is thought to be a munia and some other type of finch.

It certainly doesn't matter, as the Bengalese (society) finches have great character and are an excellent choice for any small bird aviary, whether mixed or single species; and of course perfect cage birds. Very peaceful, the society finch will cause no trouble whatsoever for your other birds; I have these charming little characters sharing a large mixed outdoor aviary with cockatiels, budgerigars, zebra finches, turquoisine grass parakeets, and Java sparrows. Very hardy creatures, society finches will withstand the coldest winter nights as long as they are kept dry and free from draughts, and get the chance to fill up their stomachs before the light dims.

A basic foreign finch seed mix will do them fine, with a little fresh food given to them occasionally, and of course clean fresh water. These delightful little birds however are not big

on fancy colouring, with some describing their appearance as rather dull, but what they lack in decoration they certainly make up for in character; plus they are so easy to look after that they are also a charming little starter bird for anyone interested in keeping pet birds. I would advise however to refrain from keeping just one, much better to keep at least two together or even more, they love company and would be rather depressed without it; They are not called 'society' finch for nothing because the more you have the more satisfied and interesting they become. They are also quite easy to get hold of for little expense.

Like many finches they are normally very active but you will also find that the Bengalese finches in your aviary will always flock and stick together regardless of what other birds you have with them. Watch them as they roost and you will no doubt find them all huddled together, a charming 'oh isn't that cute' sensation will overcome all who view them like this. I've even found them huddled up together with one or more of my budgies, that's how friendly these finches are.

The calm, peaceful and friendly characteristics of the society finch don't stop there either. They are frequently used in aviculture as 'foster parents' for other species as they are often used to raise and nurture chicks belonging to other small birds, a kind of 'parent outsourcing', a trait for which the Bengalese (society) finch is well known in bird keeping circles.

So if it is easy to keep, friendly, peaceful, small, entertaining, low cost or many other attributes then some Bengalese or society finches are the way to go. I certainly wouldn't be without some.

Ease of upkeep factor: 10 out of 10

Friendly factor: 10 out of 10

Peace factor: 10 out of 10

Cute factor: 10 out of 10

Low cost factor: 10 out of 10

Pretty factor: 4 out of 10, sorry but you can't have it all!

Go and get some, you won't regret it!

## **Popular pet bird species for your consideration**

Posted: Apr 02, 2011

### 1. Cockatiels.

Cockatiels are members of the parrot family known for their singing and whistling abilities who originate from Australia. Having a small to medium built makes them easier to care for. They are known to be quite entertaining and delightful, giving you endless fun. Although they can learn how to talk, they often prefer to whistle. Cockatiels do tend to mimic sounds they hear. Imitating sounds like the dog barking or the telephone ringing is not uncommon

with this species. Cockatiels come in various color combinations and have a life expectancy of up to 20 years.

## 2. Lovebirds.

Again with a life expectancy of about 20 years, lovebirds are amongst the smallest members of the parrots family. Most owners will not trade these for larger birds as they have personality as well as intelligence. At around six inches long, these beautiful birds are one of the smallest parrots, beautiful to look at, undemanding and quiet makes lovebirds ideal for people who live in apartments.

## 3. Parakeets.

Another bird from the parrot family and, like the cockatiel, originating from Australia. Often called the long-tailed parakeet (also known as the budgerigar) is the perfect pet bird for kids, especially as a first child's pet. Available in many pretty colors they only require a small amount of space. Budgerigars are small and intelligent and will often whistle as well as sing. With a lifespan of up to 14 years, these little birds are undoubtedly the most popular pet birds of them all.

## 4. Canaries and finches.

Not from the parrot family, canaries and finches are known as waxbills or softbills. They are relatively small birds - about 5 inches or smaller - and will require less space because of this. Canaries can be kept on their own but finches thrive in small flocks. As these types of birds do not care much about the attention that they get from humans they make perfect companions for those who cannot afford to allot lots of time in engaging their birds in activities. If cared for and treated well they can live for up to 10 years.

## 5. African Greys.

Quite a large bird from the parrot family they are an ideal lifetime companion because they can live for up to 70 years. They are the most intelligent of all pet birds, and can even learn around 2,000 words if trained well. Smart but very demanding, the African Grey Parrot will get bored and lonely if you do not take time to engage it in stimulating activities. If however the opposite is the case your efforts will surely be rewarded as these birds are very affectionate in nature.

So choose from the above list when you want to get a new pet bird. Make sure that you will enjoy their presence, whilst being able to give them what they require.

## **What you need to know about health and hygiene with regard to your pet and aviary birds**

Posted: Apr 11, 2011

Decent hygiene is the biggest contributor to ensuring a fit and healthy bird or flock, whereas poor hygiene is the most common cause of poor health within your avian community. Of course you may unknowingly acquire a bird that is not in peak form and whose health still deteriorates regardless of what you do; I'm sorry! But in this situation there's nothing you can

do, best to accept your loss and try again, but hopefully and with a little luck you will never encounter this type of situation in your bird keeping pursuits.

The first thing to do if you have a number of birds and want to introduce more to your menagerie is to keep your new bird in quarantine for a few weeks, that is to keep it separated from your other birds so as you can monitor it and deal with any health or other issues before introducing your new cage or aviary mate to the rest of the group. This will prevent any infectious illnesses being passed on to your other birds. This is very important and should never be overlooked even if your new feathered friend appears fine when first acquired!

Get to know your pet bird or birds, keep a close eye on them, interact with them and watch them regularly. This way if any of your birds have a change of character or appear down then you will instinctively know that you may have a problem.

I am not a vet, just an enthusiastic bird keeper and as such I am unable to give you detailed lists of avian illnesses or how to deal with them, always best to consult an avian vet if you are worried. OK, I know that vet bills are often quite extortionate so I would advise to take out some type of pet insurance to help cover the costs, there are plenty of good pet bird insurance deals available, try the local pet shop, the vet, or do an online search for a good deal.

If you are observant enough you will soon spot any bad signs but to help the signs of ill health in most pet birds are the same:

- your bird plucks its feathers
- it loses its appetite and eats less than normally
- bare spots appear in the plumage
- discharge flows from the nostrils
- the plumage of your bird starts to look dull or ruffled
- the eyes appear slit rather than round
- changes in the birds' droppings occurs
- sneezing occurs more than just occasionally
- the bird screeches more than normally or in a new way
- your bird sleeps more than normally

If any of the above changes are noticed in your bird then a potential health problem is likely to occur, if not occurred already.

As mentioned earlier, a good hygiene routine will help enormously to prevent health problems. We're not talking 'clinically clean' here, just basic hygiene:

### **Daily**

check food and if required replace with fresh

change water and replace with fresh, thoroughly clean water dish at every change

remove any uneaten fresh food and dispose of in the correct manner

### **Weekly**

clean out the cage or aviary fully

scrub all perches and furniture in cage or aviary

thoroughly clean all food and water dishes and fill with fresh

wipe clean bars of cages, inner sides and inner top of aviary

thoroughly clean cage base, sweep debris off aviary floor and mop with weak disinfectant solution, rinse and allow to dry before permitting your birds in

### **Always**

make sure all foods given are clean and safe, use same regime as if preparing food for yourself

wash your hands before handling bird food and before handling your bird

again wash hands thoroughly after handling your bird

Try not to use any detergents or disinfectants when cleaning your birds things unless they are safe for animal use, check the packaging or buy specialist animal safe products from the pet shop (but these can prove to be rather expensive). You can alternatively use a very weak solution of disinfectant or detergent when cleaning your bird things but you must then rinse them with fresh clean water and allow them to dry completely before returning them to your bird accommodation.

If it looks dirty then clean it; if it looks clean then clean it anyway just to be sure!

## **How to give your pet aviary birds the right start for the breeding season**

Posted: May 23, 2011

I intentionally avoid putting out nest boxes until May at the earliest because, although we have recently recorded the hottest April on record here in the UK this is not always the case, there is normally a risk of frost right until the end of May. This is the same reason why it is unadvisable to plant out your summer bedding plants until the end of May or early June, the possible risk of frost can cause serious damage.

Your birds eggs are likely to be OK as your birds will incubate them themselves, but young chicks in a cold frosty environment is a recipe for disaster.

The size and type of nest box required depends solely on the species of bird you intend to occupy it:

Cockatiels will require an upright box with a removable or hinged lid or flap for inspection and cleaning. The nest box should be approximately 12 inch (30 cm) high, 8-9 inch (20-22.5 cm) wide, 8-9 inch (20-22.5 cm) deep, with a round entrance placed high up about 2-2½ inch (5-6.25 cm) in diameter; remember to have a perch of some sort mounted just beneath the

entrance hole. It is advisable to attach some aviary mesh on the inside of the nest box below the entrance hole, this will help as a ladder rather than the parent bird jumping onto the eggs or chicks; but they don't have such a thing in the wild so it's not absolutely necessary.

Budgerigars (budgies, parakeets) will require a box of about 9 inch (22.5 cm) long, 6 inch (15 cm) wide, 6 inch (15 cm) deep with an entrance hole approximately 2 inch (5 cm) in diameter on the front top corner. An upright nest box of similar dimensions also works well but the horizontal types seem to be the most popular. Again you will need a removable lid or a door for inspection and cleaning purposes, a perch below the entrance hole, and if using an upright nest box some wire mesh on the inside below the entrance hole will help for the same reason as the cockatiel box above, but again not essential.

Small finches such as zebra and Bengalese (society) will need a nest box that is approximately 5 inch (12.5 cm) in all dimensions with the front slightly smaller in height by about 1-1½ inch (2.5-3.75 cm) to leave an entrance opening at the top front, you can have a perch below the entrance if you like but it's not needed. Finches will also often take to a small semi-open wicker basket.

Before putting out your nest boxes you must inspect each one carefully for any signs of wear or rot, and if necessary repair or replace them. Also make sure your nest boxes are hygienically clean, so give them a scrub if needed with a mild disinfectant solution, then rinse them thoroughly and allow them to dry completely before using them.

Place your nest boxes as high up as possible, after all birds usually nest in trees so like to nest high up. Be sure to fix all your nest boxes at the same height otherwise your birds will squabble over the highest placement. If you have a mixed aviary make sure you do not mix different types of nest boxes in the same place. By this I mean split your aviary into areas, no barriers required, an area for cockatiel boxes, a separate area for budgerigar boxes, and a separate area for finch boxes or baskets. If you have nest boxes for different species in too close a proximity this may result in territorial disputes between different species and can result in destroyed eggs, or chicks getting attacked.

Unless you are breeding for the show bench, for which a totally different approach is required, it is best to let your birds choose their own mates and nesting boxes.

Whilst they are breeding and raising young you must be certain to supply your birds with a constant food and fresh water source, after all they will need all the energy they can get. Also try not to let your birds raise more than 2 clutches per year, 3 at the most as once they have finished they will need to build up their energy and fat reserves to get through winter, so be sure to remove the nest boxes in the autumn (fall) when they have done.

Good luck!

## **Pet birds - The impact of domestic demand on the natural habitats of exotic and foreign birds**

Posted: May 30, 2011

Bird keeping is a very popular pass-time throughout the world. However the demand for exotic or foreign birds in the past and mankind's increasing intrusion has had a dramatic

effect on wild stocks and their natural habitats. Fortunately new laws are being introduced throughout the world in an attempt to maintain the ecosystem and put back what has been taken.

Some time ago many wild birds were captured from wild sources to be kept in captivity with the intention of breeding for the pet, zoo and show bird markets. This unfortunately led to many wild bird species being brought to near extinction. Fortunately nowadays this activity is carefully monitored and policed around the globe which has gone some way to restoring wild stocks. Unfortunately many species are still endangered - to a critical extent in some cases - so careful policing and monitoring methods will need to be ongoing for many decades yet to come - some possibly permanently. However mankind is now beginning to notice the damage done to wild animals, native plant life and natural habitats and is constantly striving to pay back what has been taken so, with optimism, things can only get better for our wildlife, however this will undoubtedly prove to be a very long task. Only with dedication and determination will this ever be achieved.

Many countries now ban the import of domestic livestock and many others impose a strict regime with regard to the matter. This is of course an absolutely necessary precaution to help achieve the desired results. This does of course mean that many previously easily available exotic or foreign pets now have to be bred in the country to meet the demand in the market. This coupled with inflation, has ultimately had an impact on the availability and cost associated with each species; *they're not as cheap as they used to be!* However many exotic or foreign pet birds are readily available for the right price with the most popular breeds being the least costly.

Many people keep birds as pets and many new enthusiasts are appearing all the time so the market is by no means saturated and there is still much demand. This assures that breeding conditions are being improved continuously with new technology being incorporated to improve the chances of success. Also many private breeders are making use of the demand to help fund the cost of their bird keeping ventures. Mass breeding is still going on but fortunately new regimes are often being incorporated to improve the living conditions of birds in captivity, sometimes brought on by the influence of animal rights activity, but this is a good thing and can only help.

To summarize almost anyone with a desire to keep exotic or foreign birds for whatever reason can find many to choose from and some at little cost. Almost every pet shop in the civilized world will have a stock of pet bird related foods and equipment. Bird keeping is proving to be a desirable pass-time with a massive market to meet demand.

## **Pet birds - The popularity of native Australian birds in aviculture**

Posted: Jun 01, 2011

Lots of popular pet bird species originate from Australia, most of the well-known pet birds are native to this country but not all of them. Many are from the Americas, Africa, and Asia, but the most popular by far and through the sheer numbers in captivity are the Australian species, which range from small finches, right through the range to large parrots.

Famous breeds like the budgerigar (known as parakeet in some countries), cockatiel, zebra finch, lorikeet, and the cockatoo all became available throughout the world via importation from Australia.

When our ancestors first discovered the Australian continent they found many types of animals that were unique to this part of the globe, such as the now infamous 'duck-billed platypus' and the 'echidna' (egg laying mammals! How strange must that have been?); marsupials such as the 'kangaroo', 'wallaby', 'koala' and many new and unique bird species; many of which were very brightly coloured. So they desired specimens of these birds to take home, and in doing so boosted the fondness of exotic pet bird keeping.

Starting with the smaller breeds; Australian finches that are popular as pets include the 'star finch', 'gouldian finch' and the well known and readily available at a low price 'zebra finch'. However there are many more.

Small to medium sized parrot-like species from Australia include the most popular small pet bird of all, the 'budgerigar' (or 'parakeet'). The almost as popular 'cockatiel' is also an Australian native, plus no end of other well known pet birds. The list is almost endless: 'lories' and 'lorikeets' (several types of these), parakeets such as 'turquoise', 'bourke', 'splendid' 'elegant' and 'red-rumped' to name a few, there's loads more. The medium sized 'eclectus parrot' also hails from this part of the world.

The 'rosellas' are also medium parrot from Australia and about 6 different varieties are used as pets; 'Eastern', 'Northern', 'Western', 'crimson', 'green', and 'pale-headed'. All are unique and different in their own way but are closely related. Rosella are known for their strikingly rich colouring, making them a very desirable pet.

Finally the big daddy of Australian pet birds, the 'cockatoo'. There are about 20 different species of cockatoo but not all are popular as pets, and believe it or not the famous 'cockatiel' mentioned earlier is a member of this bird family but of course nowhere near as large as some of its cockatoo cousins. All birds in the cockatoo family are distinguishable by the crest of feathers on the top of the head.

Many breeds of Australian birds live in massive flocks in the wild. The sight of hundreds of budgerigars, cockatiels, finches or lorikeets flocking together is an awe-inspiring sight, and very noisy.

To summarize there is a massive range of Australian birds available as pets all over the world. Many are very colourful, easy to keep, very hardy and all have unique and sometimes entertaining characteristics. The least costly of exotic pet birds are also native Aussies. Is it any wonder that these pet birds are so popular?

## **Essential facts about lorikeets and their suitability as pet birds**

Posted: Jun 09, 2011

Unlike many other breeds of parrot the lories and lorikeets are especially adapted to live on a pollen, nectar and fruit diet. A brush like tip to the tongue, long narrow beak and special digestive enzymes are what makes them unique from other parrot type bird species. Small to

medium sized and often brightly coloured there are several species from Australia, which all have similar requirements.

There are over 50 species of lorries and lorikeets in areas and countries nearby but only about 7 from Australia itself: 'musk lorikeet', 'little lorikeet', 'rainbow lorikeet', 'varied lorikeet', 'scaly-breasted lorikeet', 'red-collared lorikeet', and 'purple-crowned lorikeet'. I will mention each briefly with pet potential information.

**Musk Lorikeet.** *Glossopsitta concinna*.

(green keet, red-eared lorikeet) Weighing in at about 60 grams with a length of approximately 22 cm (9 inch).

The musk lorikeet relies on mainly native flowering shrubs and trees for food and can cause some problems in commercial orchards. In the wild the musk lorikeet inhabits coastal woodlands and eucalyptus forests, often in large flocks of several hundred.

Very rare as pets in America and Europe but makes a delightful pet in Australia but still not very popular due to government regulations that require a licence to keep native birds.

**Little Lorikeet.** *Glossopsitta pusilla*.

(red-faced lorikeet, green parakeet) Approximately 40-45 grams and about 15 cm (6 inch) long.

Like others in the family the little lorikeet eats mainly fruit, pollen and nectar but prefers to be high in the canopy of trees. In the wild the little lorikeet inhabits East Australian forests, coastal heath and open woodland, and is very sociable often forming large flocks.

Not kept as a pet in its native Australia and a very rare pet in Europe and America.

**Rainbow Lorikeet.** *Trichoglossus haematodus Malaccans*.

(blue mountain lorikeet, green collar lorikeet, bluey, swainson's loris) 125 grams approximately with a length of about 30 cm (12 inch).

Around flowering trees and sometimes in the company of scaly-breasted lorikeets, the rainbow lorikeet may congregate in noisy flocks of several hundred to roost and eat.

The rainbow lorikeet is very popular as a pet bird in its native Australia and also quite popular in Europe and America. A pet one can be a good source of amusement as they are always playing, and a young bird can become tame quite quickly.

**Varied Lorikeet.** *Psitteuteles versicolor*.

About 55 grams and average 19 cm (7.5 inch) long.

In the wild the varied lorikeet is mainly found in large flocks in melaleuca and eucalyptus woodlands in the tropical lowlands of Australia.

Virtually unknown as a pet in America and Europe and very rarely a pet in Australia with just a few in captivity.

**Scaly-breasted Lorikeet.** *Trichoglossus chlorolepidotus.*

(green and gold lorikeet, greenie) About 75-80 grams and about 23 cm (9.5 inch) in length.

Although common in urban areas where it makes use of nectar rich garden plants, in its natural habitat the scaly-breasted lorikeet will form large flocks, often in the company of rainbow lorikeets. These flocks will travel from tree to tree in the open forested areas of its native land.

A quiet pet bird which is also playful and affectionate and can be taught to talk really well. This makes it a popular species of pet bird in Europe, America and its native Australia.

**Red-collared Lorikeet.** *Trichoglossus haematodus rubritorquis.*

Approximately 125 grams in weight with a length of about 30 cm (12 inch).

Unlike most of the other species of lorikeet the red-collared lorikeet prefers to abide as a pair or in a small flock. These move around often due to their food source, the eucalyptus flower being a favourite food so they tend to inhabit the open eucalyptus forests most of the time.

Although good pet birds they are kept in low numbers because of availability and price.

**Purple-crowned Lorikeet.** *Glossopsitta porphyrocephala.*

(blue-crowned lorikeet, purple-capped parakeet) About 45 grams and around 16 cm (6 inch) long.

Will form large flocks where food source is plentiful, including urban gardens and orchards. Their natural habitat in the West is in forest areas, whereas in the East they tend to go for coastal heath, mallee and open woodland areas.

Not very often kept as pets anywhere, but a little more popular as aviary birds.

All the above are kept in varying numbers in aviaries around Australia and the Western world, although some are not as popular as pets or companion birds.

If kept in an aviary a suspended mesh floor is best for ease of cleaning - just hose it down - due to the nature of the droppings, a solid floor aviary will require continuous cleaning.

Due to their special dietary requirements they can prove to be difficult to give the right foods. Although the bigger species will eat seed, this should not be their main food but is suitable as an extra to their correct diet consisting mainly of pollen, nectar and fruit. And of course any nectar bearing flowers will be most welcome.

**Pet birds from Australian - Introducing the delightful grass parakeets**

Posted: Jul 02, 2011

Australian grass parakeets are popular as pets or aviary birds due to their colourful markings, small size and placid nature. About the same size as budgerigars; they do however command a premium price by comparison but are well within the reach of most enthusiasts. There are about 6 popular species of grass parakeet used in aviculture.

All the species of Australian grass parakeets are closely related to the budgerigar but unique in their own separate ways. When kept as domestic birds they have very similar requirements to budgerigars; same type and size of nest box, same or similar type of food etc. so their requirements are easily met.

Originating from the grasslands of their native land as the name suggests, these are beautiful little parrots in a good variety of colours; often the iridescence of their plumage makes them even more attractive to the bird keeper. Also their calm and placid nature is an added attraction along with the fact that they are not prone to annoying squawking and often emit nothing more than a just audible chirp, making them ideal in flats or apartments where a quiet pet is beneficial.

Grass parakeets are readily available on the market but due to their desirable characteristics and appearance you will find that demand often outstrips supply. So don't expect to pay less than £30 each and often more; not a bad price really but quite steep when compared to their nearest pet neighbours, the budgerigars which can often be picked up for £10 or even less.

The most common species as pets are the bourke (bourke's parakeet), scarlet-chested (splendid), turquoisine, elegant parakeet, rock parrot, blue-winged parakeet, and the red-rump. Search for any of these in a good online image search and you will notice immediately why they are so desirable to bird keepers.

#### **Bourke** *Neopsephotus Bourkii*

It is claimed that of all the grass parakeets these are the easiest to keep in captivity, as they are very undemanding. They originate from central and south-western Australia and are approximately 7.5 inch 19 cm long. Bourke's parakeets are considered by some to be rather dull due to their brown colour but they do have a pink front and blue on the wings, there are some brightly coloured mutations however such as the rosy bourke, and all have a calm and charming nature.

#### **Elegant** *Neophema elegans*

Native to southern Australia the elegant grass parakeets are olive-yellow in colour with a blue band across the forehead and along the edge of the wings and are about 8.75 inch 22 cm long. Very popular as captive birds with many keepers throughout the globe.

#### **Red rump** *Psephotus haematonotus*

Originating from southeast Australia and found in flocks or pairs in open country, also frequenting suburban gardens and parks but avoiding the wetter heavily timbered areas and coastal regions. A medium sized parrot of about 25 - 28 cm 9.75 - 11 inches and emerald

green in colour with yellow underparts, the actual red-rump only applies to the male of the species.

### **Blue-winged** *Neophema chrysostoma*

A migratory species that breeds in Tasmania but sees the winter out in southeast Australia, found in flocks of up to 2000 before migration but usually in pairs during the breeding season. These little parrots are about 20 - 22 cm 8 - 8.5 inches and mainly olive green with a blue band to the forehead and edge of wings and yellow belly (very similar markings to the elegant but the blue banding is less profound).

### **Splendid** *Neophema splendida*

Also commonly known as the scarlet-chested parakeet and often confused with the turquoise due to similar markings. About 7.5 to 8 inches 19 - 20 cm in length. As their name implies these have a scarlet chest but also a yellow belly and underside, bright blue (often iridescent) head and wing edges and a deep green back and rump. Considered by some to be the most beautiful of the grass parakeet species and so making them very popular in captivity. Native to western new south Wales and interior western Australia.

### **Turquoise** *Neophema pulchella*

Once common throughout eastern Australia but now mainly found in the north eastern areas. Approximately 20 cm 8 inch long. Also a desirable and popular pet due to its calm and placid nature (a trait that seems common in all grass parakeets) and it's wonderful iridescent turquoise colouring to the crown, face and edges of wings, green back, often orange-yellow chest and red belly.

## **Pet Birds - How to Make Good Use of Everyday Things to Give Your Pet Birds Variety**

Posted: Jul 10, 2011

To give your pet birds variety to enhance their lives you can make good use of everyday stuff that you find in your own environment. Some household items and human foods can help your birds to live a more interesting life. What's more, watching your pet birds when their curiosity gets the better of them and they decide to investigate the new intrusion into their environment can be a rather entertaining experience. Many everyday things can help your pet birds to live a more natural existence.

They are very curious individuals by nature so anything you give them will undoubtedly be investigated thoroughly once your pet birds are aware of its existence. With this in mind you must be certain that anything you give to them will not cause any harm.

Also you will find that many so called 'human' foods can be eaten by your birds as long as you determine beforehand what is good or bad for them. This coupled with everyday stuff you find lying around in your home or your local area can be incorporated into their lives to add variety for them and sometimes entertainment for yourself.

For example my birds love toast, so if I am having toast for breakfast (or any other meal for that matter) I often also do a slice especially for my aviary birds. However I do have a lot of them in my aviary so one slice of toast soon gets eaten up quickly, but if you have just one pet bird or just a few then a little bit of toast from your own meal or snack would be more suitable. Of course it will do no harm as it is mainly composed of wheat flour and little else.

Of course this is not the only 'human' food they can eat; your birds can eat many everyday foods as long as the food will be suitable for their digestive systems and general health. Try them with carrots, my parrot type birds (budgerigars and cockatiels) love them, however the finches are not that interested but do love almost any type of seed or fruit (sesame seed and melon for example).

However you should not give them coffee, chocolate, meat or any food with a high fat content. Common sense should play a big part in deciding what to give them, if it's not very good for you it certainly will not be good for your pet birds. If you are unsure what foods they can or cannot eat then it is advisable to consult the internet or an avian professional beforehand.

On the other matter I would advise you not to go out and pay a lot of money for toys for your birds as this can considerably increase the cost of their upkeep. However many things in your everyday life can and will be used to keep your birds entertained and encourage them to be more active.

For example a basic swing made up from a piece of scrap timber and a bit of rope will be an adequate alternative to a shop bought swing. Your pet birds will not know the difference and as long as you give the materials a good scrub down (no detergents please) first and they contain no paints or varnishes they will be fine.

Any old bits of twigs, broken plastic children's toys (as long as they're safe, no small bits to fall off etc.), and just about anything else you can think of will be suitable for your birds to play with as long as they are cleaned thoroughly first and are safe. Pet birds, especially parrot type species, love to chew so be sure that anything they do chew will cause them no harm, and could save a fortune in the long run.

As always, if you are unsure then the advice of an avian professional should be sought.

In summary you should feed your birds a wide variety of different foods which will help their health, and offer a variety of other stimulants to enhance their lifestyles.

## **Pet Birds - How to Maintain a Clean and Healthy Environment for Your Nest Boxes and Fledglings**

Posted: Jul 10, 2011

Maintaining a clean and healthy environment when trying to breed your pet birds is very important to assure your young birds grow and fledge successfully. Your young birds will live out the weeks of their first development entirely within their nest boxes and so an effective cleaning regime is a must to ensure good development.

Over the course of time until they fledge and leave the confines and security of their nest box nursery your young pet birds will obviously do everything within that nest box, including going to the toilet. This itself is the main cause of contamination within the nest box confines.

Bird faeces will, if not cleaned up, dry out to form a hard crust that is very difficult to remove with any degree of success. This can and undoubtedly will cause health issues with regards to your pet birds offspring, so it is imperative that you keep up a good cleaning regime within this environment.

You must check your nest boxes regularly and inspect them accordingly. How often you do this is down to you but I feel that a check once every two days is a good ratio, this will make sure that disturbance is kept down to a minimum whilst still maintaining a high degree of maintenance.

Firstly you should check any young birds and satisfy yourself that they are growing well and building their strength. Most popular pet birds require minimal maintenance to keep them fit and healthy. However a big problem with young birds in nest boxes is the amount of faeces that gets stuck in their claws and feet, and dries up into a crust on the internal surfaces of the box.

To clean the interior of the nest box you should if possible remove it from its normal position (I suggest when first putting out your nest boxes you fit them in a way that allows easy removal for inspection and cleaning purposes), remove the young from within and place them somewhere safe (I use a cardboard box) so you can get in and clean.

If your box has a removable concave insert (recommended) then remove this and scrape off any dried faeces with a suitable DIY scraper (a wallpaper scraper is ideal), then put it to soak in warm water (no detergents please) for a few minutes to loosen what's left. In the meantime scrape any dried faeces of the interior surfaces and then give them a good scrub with warm water (again no detergents) and a scrubbing brush or scourer, then shake off any excess water and dry with absorbent kitchen towel.

Now remove the concave insert from soak and scrub that also, and again shake off any excess and dry with absorbent kitchen roll then return it to the nest box when dry. I use absorbent kitchen towel as I think it is the most effective way to soak up any dampness.

Now it's the chicks turn; to remove any dried faeces from their feet and claws you should try to soak each foot and claw individually in luke warm or tepid clean and detergent free water. Hold the chick in your hand with one foot inserted into the water, try not to get any other part of the chick wet, only its foot; soak for a minute or two - soaking in water will help to dampen and loosen any faeces that has become attached to the foot - then carefully ease the now moistened faeces from the foot and claw.

Be very careful and gentle when doing this so as not to harm or injure the young pet bird; although they are generally tough and resilient applying too much force or pressure will injure them.

Pat the now clean foot and claws with absorbent kitchen towel to dry.

Next you need to repeat the process with the other foot and then with any other chicks until all of them are done and then return them to the nest box before returning it to its normal place.

Be sure to do only one clutch and one nest box at a time so as not to get your young birds mixed up.

In summary, maintaining a clean and healthy environment like this will most certainly help ensure your breeding success.

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