

BASIC BIRD CARE

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March, 2018

Even though you may have a bird now, or have had a bird before, there is so much new in the field of avian medicine and behavior that you will want to update yourself on the many aspects of bird-keeping. There are many excellent websites for you to explore. Remember, *nothing can take the place of your avian veterinarian's guidance*. And you will need to use your own common sense, as there are areas in which even the veterinarians disagree, such as in feeding and reproduction. Educate yourself completely so you know what to look for as signs of illness, behavioral issues, and nutritional needs of your bird.

Be sure to take your bird in to a qualified avian veterinarian as soon as possible after you get him. All birds should be taken in at least once a year for an annual checkup. You will need to have a complete exam done, along with Gram's stains and any bloodwork the veterinarian deems necessary. It may be expensive, but it is well worth it to save the life of your new bird and your existing flock.

If you don't know an avian veterinarian, look in the files of The Science of Avian Health Facebook group. There is a listing in there of avian vets. I have placed an asterisk in front of names of vets I know to be excellent. You may also go into the website of the Assn. of Avian Veterinarians. Click on "Find a Vet" and put in the state only. This will bring up all the vets in your state. Then look at each one to make sure he/she is avian/exotic. Certification is good, but not as good as experience. Find out how long the vet has been in practice. Click on the name and more information will come up. Any vet can join, so you want to check each one out carefully. Go into the veterinarian's website and read his bio. There are several in Ohio who are well-qualified. Everyone has a website now, and some even have Facebook pages. These will tell you a great deal about his or her experience and practice. In Ohio, the following veterinarians are recommended: Dr. Bob Dahlhausen in southwest Ohio, Dr. Susan Orosz in northwest Ohio, and Dr. Jamie Lindstrom in northeast Ohio.

Websites

www.beautyofbirds.com—species-specific information and quality general information.

I have papers on this site. For links to my papers,

www.beautyofbirds.com/jeanninemiesle.html.

Facebook: "The Science of Avian Health." There are many papers in the Files. This is not a social group; it is dedicated solely to providing information that is science-based or comes from a veterinarian, veterinary textbooks, or experienced, trusted sources. There are several qualified avian veterinarians who have joined this group.

www.exoticpetvet.net/avian--Dr. Margaret Wissman, Florida, who writes for BirdsNways/Winged Wisdom

www.upatsix.com Large range of articles on many species, chat room

www.birdsnways.com—many articles on all subjects about birds/Winged Wisdom

www.peteducation.com-- Drs. Foster and Smith, excellent articles, a new medication description site

www.lafeber.com/pet-birds/ The Lafeber Company, which has good articles on it.

www.parrotparrot.com --great resource for small birds, good general info for all birds

www.forthebirdsdvm.com –good articles, advice and newsletter
www.santaclarapethospital.com --very good library on bird health and care
www.Parrotsparrotsparrots.com --toys, nutrition, articles
www.Parrottalk.com --articles, recipes, links
www.Exoticbirdhospital.com --good health articles
www.CockatielCottage.com—not just about cockatiels, general info about birds
www.petstation.com--a good source for owners new to birds, and a refresher for others, also a listing of clubs/organizations and excellent articles
www.Birds.cornell.edu--general information about birds and about wild birds also
www.Budgerigars.co.uk
www.Simplycockatiels.com
www.Mytoos.com—the downside of owning cockatoos; discourages purchasing cockatoos—many cockatoos are not like the picture they paint, especially the smaller ones. Still, it's good to know what you're getting into. When adopting a cockatoo, you have some history and know what the bird is like—a definite advantage. This stresses the long lives of the birds and commitments needed to care for these birds.

Magazines/books, all resources found on the internet

Avian Publications—books, DVD's
“Good Bird” Magazine/books/DVD's, Barbara Heidenreich, behavior modification, also on Facebook
Amazon Books and CD's—search “Avian Medicine”
Sally Blanchard—behaviorist

Avian textbooks and general books about bird care:

Basic Health and Disease in Birds, soft cover, Dr. Michael Cannon—offers valuable information on all aspects of bird care
The Complete Pet Bird Owner's Handbook, hardcover, Dr. Gary Gallerstein—all aspects of bird care, reference for all species
Parrotlopaedia, soft cover, Annette De Saulles and Neil Forbes, overview of psittacines, general care, nutrition, some anatomy/physiology, health and diseases (Amazon)
The Parrot in Health and Illness, An Owner's Guide, hard cover, Bonnie Munro Doane
Manual of Ornithology: Avian Structure and Function. Proctor and Lynch. Yale University Press.
Cockatiels (Magazine) put out by the BirdChannel.com/Bird Talk Magazine (Bow Tie Publications) New ones annually, available at PetSmart.

Societies/organizations

Association of Avian Veterinarians; “*Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery*.” is their publication. Very technical, geared to veterinary professionals, students and technicians; now including small mammals and reptiles. Expensive to join as Allied Professional.
American Federation of Aviculture—more general information, mostly about wild birds or birds kept in huge sanctuaries, many in S. America and Africa
Look for local bird clubs and internet sites and Facebook groups dealing with specific species. *Be careful about what you read on the internet and Facebook. Always ask your veterinarian before giving anything or doing anything to your bird.*

Toys, general information

Many places have toy parts you can buy and make your own. Be sure you get vegetable-tanned leather. Birds love wicker, too—always get it from a bird place, other wicker is treated with chemicals. Many veterinary websites now have articles that you can access to learn more about birds.

- My Safe Bird Store
- A Bird Toy
- Drs. Foster and Smith
- Bird Toy Outlet
- Todd Marcus, Thebirdstore.com
- The Perch Store
- Simply Cockatiels
- Barry Farms (seeds, grains and nuts, in Ohio)
- Sugarcreek Bird Farm in Bellbrook, Ohio—they have a store and online catalogue.
- Companion Parrot
- Birdie Boutique
- The Perch Factory (has larger orbiters)
- Birddogandcatfish.net
- Windy City Parrots
- Big Beaks
- Lafeber.com

Toys All birds need enrichment and toys to entertain themselves with. You'll know what your bird likes after a while. If at first he doesn't like something, put it away for a while and try it later.

For small birds, such as parakeets and cockatiels. They love to chew, so balsa toys are a big hit. You can get bulk balsa at hobby shops and places like Hobby Lobby®. You can also buy it bulk over the internet. Two good places are The Balsa Store and Specialized Balsa. Make sure it has not been treated.

For large birds, such as cockatoos and macaws. They also love to chew, and "white wood" or pine are good choices for toys you can make yourself. Check the internet for places which specialize in toys for the larger beaks. Make sure all wood has not been treated.

FOODS—Be sure everything you offer is human-grade.

NEVER GIVE GRIT—IT'S ONLY FOR BIRDS WHO EAT THEIR SEEDS WHOLE. Psittacines (birds in the parrot family) shell their seeds and should never have grit. See the paper in the files of "The Science of Avian Health" Facebook group on "Nutritional Requirements of Psittacines."

FEEDING THE SMALLER BIRD:

To feed smaller birds, such as parakeets and cockatiels, it is good to get a quality basic parakeet mix since it doesn't contain sunflower or safflower seeds, which are high in fat. Avoid mixes with finch or canary seed; parrots don't eat those seeds. Some seeds you might add are red and white proso millet and oat groats (from Drs. Foster and Smith®), buckwheat seed (from Whole Foods® or Barry Farms®), flax seed (from grocery or health food stores). Some birds like grains. Whole Foods and other organic food places have them and other things you can try. Whatever you do, don't get the food at places like Walmart or Target or similar big box stores, or from general pet stores. Their foods sit in warehouses for months and often get contaminated with fungal spores or animal droppings. Get it from bird shops which have a good turnover of seeds or through Drs. Foster and Smith®.

Small-to-medium sized birds enjoy spray millet. Some birds would live on this, so only provide a small section of per day. They also like the Kaytee® Parakeet Honey Treat sticks (Drs. Foster and Smith® has it at a good price). Avi-cakes® and Nutriberries® have excellent nutritional

value, also. Buy small quantities of foods and try them out. Many enjoy birdy breads. Recipes are in the files of “The Science of Avian Health” Facebook group and online.

Always provide a cuttle bone and a mineral block, quality vitamins such as Avi-Era® and a mineral supplement such as Missing Link®. Available from Drs. Foster and Smith® or on the internet. Sprinkle on food once or twice a week. Don’t overdo it, though; this can lead to illnesses caused by too much of a good thing.

Pellets are a good addition to a well-balanced diet. Everything in moderation. Offer the pellets and see if the bird tries them. Give him time. There are non-flavored/non-colored varieties, and Zupreem® fruit-flavored pellets. **Don’t withhold other foods from your bird thinking it will force him to eat them.** Birds don’t think like that. They’ll starve before they eat something they don’t like. Pellets should only comprise a small part of the bird’s diet. See the nutrition paper in the files of the Facebook group, The Science of Avian Health.

FEEDING THE LARGER BIRD— DAWN GRAHAM, CONTRIBUTOR

“Larger birds love whole, unroasted, unsalted nuts. Offer very few sunflower seeds unless they are sprouted or used as a treat. Sprouted sunflower seeds are an excellent way to teach a bird about different sprouts. Collard greens, beet greens, turnip greens, spinach, and mustard greens are all excellent forms of calcium and iron and easy to digest. (But be careful not to offer too much due to the possibility of iron storage disease JM.) Serve pellets separately so they always have food in their cages in case they spill their fresh foods. Cooked oats, barley, and steel cut oats are usually a favorite, along with dried berries. It is good to buy organic foods with no added sugar. Berries of any kind are great, even daily. Other fruits should be offered just a couple of times a week. Scrambled eggs are an excellent source of animal proteins, especially for pluckers.”

Larger birds love many people foods as well. Share your foods with the bird if they are appropriate. They like most vegetables, some fruits, pastas, potatoes, rice, tomato sauce. Just be careful with the calories. Our birds are mostly sedentary. See the nutrition paper in the files.

FOR ALL BIRDS:

Many birds, large and small, enjoy “chop”—a mix of chopped vegetables, fruits, and greens. Make small amounts up fresh daily or every other day. Large and small birds also enjoy scrambled eggs. You need not offer all of these foods every day. Offer a variety and alternate. Offer one new food at a time so you know what has been eaten and what he likes. Present new foods alongside foods he likes.

Cereals and breads

A mixture of dry cereals is good for them, and you can provide small amounts each day. Be sure to get only **sugar-free** cereals. Try different kinds and see what your bird likes. Most birds do not care for cooked cereals.

These are some you might use:

- Wheat, rice and corn Chex
- Wheat, corn, and rice flakes—Total® wheat cereal

Whole grain breads are good occasionally. Avoid soft white breads. Cut in small pieces.

Fruits

Most cockatiels are not overly fond of fruits, but some do like them, so try them. Larger birds love them. **DO NOT GIVE THE SEEDS, SKIN, OR PITS OF ANY FRUIT TO THE BIRD. THEY ARE TOXIC.** Some to try: apples, oranges, pears, plums, peaches, strawberries, blueberries. Offer them one at a time so you can tell if he eats it or not.

Vegetables:

Peas, corn (fresh or frozen, not canned), broccoli (raw or cooked), cauliflower (raw or cooked), carrots (fresh, raw or cooked), fresh green beans (cooked or frozen), baked beans (vegetarian and rinsed). Packages of mixed vegetables, and those made for soups or stews have a larger variety of veggies in them.

Meats: Many large birds, and even some small birds, will eat a small amount of roast beef, meatloaf. Chicken and turkey breast, and ham—even fish. Offer meats baked, broiled, or poached, not fried. Serve all foods in small pieces.

Greens: avoid iceberg lettuce unless it's the only greens the bird will eat.

Use the dark, leafy lettuce, spinach, kale, celery leaves and carrot top greens (two big favorites), Sprouts—you can sprout your own seeds for this or buy prepared sprouting containers with seeds already in it. (Watch for mold growth and discard when you see it. There are ways to grow them that will avert mold growth. See internet.) The dark greens are high in iron, so don't overfeed.

Carbohydrates: Birds love their carbs. Spaghetti (with a small amount of margarine or weak, plain tomato sauce—no onion or garlic or spices, please), linguini, any of the pastas, rice, noodles, potato (boiled and mashed with a little margarine and rice milk), baked white or sweet potato (the inside part, not the skin or stringy part, it's hard to digest), macaroni. No liquid dairy products like milk or yogurt. Solid dairy (cheese) is acceptable from time to time in small amounts. Use rice instead of cow's milk. Canola oil is good for cooking instead of margarine, but margarine occasionally is fine.

Dairy

No liquid dairy. No milk, yogurt, or soft cheeses. Hard cheeses may be given occasionally in small amounts. Birds cannot digest lactose. Use rice milk instead.

AVOID: (See www.birds.about.com and www.Beautyofbirds.com for explanations)

Chocolate, a poison to birds

Avocado

All fruit seeds and pits, contain cyanide, apple is the worst. Peel fruits.

Alcohol

Onions, garlic, anything in the onion family; lead to anemia and death

Tomato leaves and seeds. These are in the nightshade family, highly toxic. The meat of the tomato is fine

Mushrooms, a fungus, leads to liver failure

Salt—small amounts in the food is OK from time to time, but larger amounts lead to kidney failure

Caffeine—heads to cardiac malfunction and heart failure, no coffee, tea or energy drinks

Dried beans—contains hemagglutin, a toxic element (cooked are fine)

CAGES

Buy a roomy cage, and make sure the bar spacing is correct for the size of bird you have. It should be large enough for him to spread his wings without touching the bars of the cage. For small birds, bars should be no more than ½ inch or 5/8 inch apart. For large birds, 1-2 inches separation is adequate. For smaller birds, use coop cups and put them higher up in the cage.

The HQ® and California cages are well-built. Use powder-coated cages if possible. They clean up easily with just a moist paper towel. **Never use a scraper on any cage.** It will remove any finish. Just let the paper towel sit for a while and the grid will clean right up. Include toys, a cuttle bone, mineral block, millet piece, several toys, and of course quality food and water. Change toys often. If you have a flat-topped cage, cover it with a towel and it can be another play surface for toys and food.

PERCHES, ORBITERS AND SWINGS

DO NOT use plastic, dowel, textured, concrete, sandpaper-covered or any rough-surfaced or hard wood perches. The rough-textured perches do not keep nails dull since the nails never touch the perch. Instead, they cause arthritis and bumblefoot (foot sores), as well as ankle and leg problems. They are very hard on the joints. Replace them with the Booda® Comfy rope perches and natural branches, such as birch, grapewood, and manzanita. PetSmart® has its own brand of rope perches which are the same as the Booda. Hard perches can be covered with cohesive tape such as Vetrap or Kroger's Tender Tape. You want your birds on the softest perches possible. Same with swings and slippery perches.

Use a variety of sizes and textures of perches. Rope-covered swings and boings are real favorites for in and out of cages. There are many types of swings and perches that are rope-covered and easier on the feet and legs. Wood and any other types of swings may be covered with cohesive wrap.

Birds need at least 3 perches in a cage, and they should be of different sizes and textures. Do not place food under perches due to contamination. For smaller birds, place them in small cups high in the cage. They love the boings (spirals), ladders, climbing gyms, large orbiters, and different hanging perches for out-of-cage play time. They need to be out of the cage to fly and be active. They need stimulating toys and activities. Provide play areas throughout the house. Clear off counters, table-tops, furniture—anything they can play on—and put food, water, and toys on them. Large birds enjoy T-stands and large playgyms. Climbing ropes are a favorite; these are easily made with all-cotton rope.

SICK BIRDS

If your bird becomes ill, take it to the veterinarian immediately. Familiarize yourself with what birds look like when they are ill. Be financially prepared for the cost of the visit, the testing required, and medication needed, particularly if it is an emergency. It can easily cost between \$100 and \$200. Supportive care at home includes preparing an infirmary and giving medication. **Proper Bird care is not for the poor or financially faint-of-heart. Before you invest in another bird, be sure you can afford it.**

Preparing an infirmary for sick birds or home for arthritic birds:

For the small-to-medium sized bird, Use a large, high, cloth-covered bin, or you can use a plastic bin with the sides and floor lined with towels. You can add extra heat if needed. (It isn't always needed, especially if the house is warm.) Lay a heating pad (on low) on the bottom and

wrap the wire with a towel. Layer the bin with towels until the heat comes through just a little bit. (Remember, the bird isn't moving, so his body heat will intensify the pad's heat.) Hold your hand there for at least 15 seconds to make sure the heat isn't too hot. If it is, layer with more towels. You can place paper towels on the top for ease of cleaning, but I've found sick or arthritic birds prefer the softer cloth towels. To cover the top, use a piece of rust-proof screening, framed in wood, and lay towels around the outside, allowing the center to be open for air and light. You may need to place some heavy objects on the corners to prevent the bird from climbing out. If the bin has side openings, place towels in them to prevent him from climbing out. Place small crocks with his food and water in the bin, along with a millet spray and small toys. Be sure to give the bird extra love and attention, and if he feels up to it, a little playtime. **If you have more than that one bird, be meticulous about cleanliness—wash hands before and after contact with the sick bird, and keep the bird isolated from the other birds.**

Larger birds can be placed in a larger bin or kept in their cages. If kept in the cage, remove the perches and layer the bottom with towels, unless the bird chews on them. You may need to remove the grid so the bird is on the tray or bottom of the cage. These also can be layered with towels. You can also place a piece of cardboard over the bird's head to keep him from climbing up to perches if need be. It can be jammed against the bars or perches.

KEEP A FIRST-AID KIT

Keep important first-aid products handy by using a drawer, plastic storage container, anything that will keep everything in one place and handy. Put the following products in this container:

- ✚ Q-tips and cotton balls
- ✚ Triple antibiotic cream. Never used ointment on feathered areas.
- ✚ Domeboro antiseptic packets, available at most drug stores. Make up the liquid, one packet per 2 ½ cups of water. Freeze in small containers and remove as needed. This works well for skin areas that are bleeding or sore. Apply a small amount with a Q-tip or cotton ball. Allow to dry before putting anything else on it.
- ✚ Aloe Vera for Sensitive Skin from Walgreens. Mix a little with distilled water in a very small container. Apply with clean fingertip to sore areas of skin. Make sure the area is dry before applying.
- ✚ Quinsana anti-fungal powder, good for stopping bleeding on skin and feathered areas. Never use Quick Stop on skin and feathers. It burns the tissue.
- ✚ Quick Stop for bleeding nails or beak. If the beak is bleeding from an accident, get the bird to the avian vet immediately.
- ✚ Super Clot—for bleeding that will not stop. Very thick and messy, but it works
- ✚ Oral syringes. You will need these if the bird is getting medication by mouth. You can get 1 cc syringes over the internet for very little money. You can get 100 of them for only a few dollars. These are good for larger birds. Ask your vet to order .5 cc syringes for you. They come with needles so you'll have to remove them. You will need the Luer Lock syringes or you won't be able to remove the needle. They don't last but a few uses, so get a large amount.
- ✚ Emeraid Omnivore Critical Care Diet for birds, available through your avian vet. This comes in small, 100- gram packets, 300-gram tubs, and 400-gram packets and will keep 3 years in the freezer. You will make it up as needed for any sick or debilitated bird. When you need it, mix a very small amount with a little water in a small container. You want a somewhat thin liquid. It is to be discarded at the end of the day so you don't want to make up more than a teaspoon or two of it at a time. Larger birds might take it in a soft

food if they can keep it down. For example, you could make mashed potatoes up with the liquid.

- ✚ Optional: Gentamicin Sulfate Cream, by prescription and very expensive, but it works very well on sore skin, especially if the bird has a bacterial infection on his skin. (\$100 for 30-gram tube, \$50 for a 15 gram tube.
- ✚ Nail clippers or dremel tool for trimming nails. Beaks should only be trimmed by the veterinarian.
- ✚ Pliers for pulling blood feather on medium to larger birds. You can probably use the fingers for birds that are smaller. Be sure to secure the wing bone above the feather or tail pygostyle (place where the tail feathers come out) before you pull the feather. Hold the feather follicle with thumb and index finger for a minute to stop the bleeding and close the follicle.

MEDICATING YOUR BIRD

Prepare the oral syringes with medication, and wet a paper towel with warm water. With one hand, hold the bird in an appropriately sized towel against your chest (some birds don't need this step) and try to hold his head still. (Large birds may require two people to medicate them unless the bird is syringe-trained.) With the other hand, drop the medication into the left side of the beak, aiming down and to the right. If you aim too high, he could aspirate it up into the choana and choke or even die from getting the liquid in his head or lungs. Be prepared to waste some medicine if the bird is difficult to medicate. Clean off his beak and your hands with the wet towel so you don't get him sticky. Wash the syringes well after use and they can be used a few more times. Use a .5 cc oral syringe for smaller birds. (See First-Aid Kit information.) You can purchase them from your avian veterinarian. For the larger birds, you will need to use the 1 cc or larger syringe size. Stay calm and be soothing; comfort the bird afterward. Make it fun.

It's a good idea to syringe-train your bird before you have to medicate him. Use plain water, or a liquid he likes just to get him used to the syringe. Let him play with it as a toy, also, unless he can break it.

WING CLIPPING

Many people prefer the avian veterinarian or someone with experience to do these clips in the beginning. Eventually you will be able to do them yourself. Have the veterinarian demonstrate the technique and allow you to do it under his supervision. When clipping wings, do not do the straight cut across the feathers. These blunt edges encourage feather-chewing and are sharp on his body. Begin at the longest primaries and clip two feathers under the coverts (little feathers that cover the longer feathers) on both sides. Let him fly from the floor to see how well he does. If you need to, clip one more feather the same way on both sides. You do not want the bird to crash, but instead to coast down. See the video in the files on wing-clipping. Never use Quick-Stop® on the skin or other body tissues. Corn starch or Quinsana® (CVS) will stop bleeding on skin and feathers.

NAILS: DO NOT CUT TOO SHORT! The nails will bleed If the nails bleed, apply Quick-Stop.® This is only to be used on nails and beaks. Another products that works for severe bleeding is Super Clot®. This can be bought over the internet.

BROKEN FEATHERS

If your bird breaks a wing or tail blood feather, you will need to pull it. You can't wait until the veterinarian is available—birds bleed to death very quickly. The broken feather acts like a wick,

carrying the blood from the body. Run cool water over both sides of the wing area until you identify the broken feather or feathers. Stabilize the joint and bone above the break, and firmly hold the wing above the follicle of the broken feather between your fingers. Get a firm grip on the feather, covering the feather follicles. You may need a plyers for a small to medium-sized birds, and definitely for large birds. Pull smoothly and straight out. Larger birds will require a second person to help. Gently depress the follicle area on the top and bottom with thumb and forefinger for a little while. It should stop bleeding quickly. Cool water on the follicle also helps to stop the bleeding.

If feathers or other cuts do not stop bleeding, pack the area with cornstarch, Quinsana, or Super Clot, and take the bird immediately to the avian veterinarian.

TOXINS

Many house plants are toxic to birds. Go to “Beauty of Birds” and read the listing there

<http://beautyofbirds.com/toxicfoods.html>

Many household products are also toxic or harmful to birds.

<http://beautyofbirds.com/toxicities.html>

***EDUCATE YOURSELF—GET BOOKS, MAGAZINES, USE THE INTERNET—LEARN ALL YOU CAN.
At some point you will know enough to decide for yourself what is best for your bird.
Enjoy your beautiful bird! And thank you for allowing me to help you. For further assistance, you may reach me at Jmiesle@zoomtown.com.***