Basic Care Sheet: Bird

Getting the right bird starts with gathering information on the different species. Some birds like handling, yet others are observation only. Some are better singly, others in multiples. Some are great talkers while others have a beautiful song. There are very colorful pet birds and others full of antics. Learn all you can about the species you are interested in to provide the care it needs. The result is a great relationship with your pet!

Basic supplies you will need:

- A cage with metal bars or aviary. Bar spacing should be smaller than the bird’s head. Tip for finches and other flighty birds: the space should be minimum 5 times the bird’s wingspan horizontally and 3 times vertically other climbing birds: a minimum of twice horizontally and 3 times vertically. Also, be sure to look for cages with horizontal bars for climbers, thicker for very strong species.
- 4 bowls. One each for food, water, supplements, and non-hanging treats.
- High quality food. Normally a seed mixture is the staple.
- Treats and Supplements such as fresh food, minerals, etc.
- Perches. Provide a variety of sizes to exercise your bird’s feet.
- Toys. Provide a variety, size and toughness depend on the species you plan to keep.
- Nail clippers, spray bottle or bird bath.
- Nest and nesting material for nest-sleeping birds only. Usually in box or basket form.

General - All birds should be housed in a cage that is as roomy as possible. Cages should be in a draft-free area that is well lit, but not in direct sunlight. To make your birds feel secure and comfortable keep them against a wall or in a corner, and reasonably high off the floor.

Perches not only provide standing places for birds, but also an opportunity to exercise and keep their beaks trim. Size and shape should vary but should fit their feet. Round and oval wooden perches are common, and sometimes plastic perches are used for small birds. Concrete makes nice perches that help them keep both nails and beak trim.

Bird toys are a great way to combat boredom. Toys for birds are designed in lots of combinations of woods, leathers, ropes, chains, bells and even acrylics. A variety of non-toxic colors, fun textures, shapes and sizes, sounds (and even smells) in bird toys will keep your bird interested in their environment.

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Training - Exercise and activities are extremely important to keep your pet healthy and happy. Birds are intelligent, inquisitive, and can be trained to do many tricks. Check out training guides for more information. However, contrary to popular belief, hookbills (both small and large) are the highest or near highest maintenance pets due to their constant attention requirements. Many birds suffer from psychological and/or emotional problems if they do not have enough stimulation. Be sure to make plenty of time daily to spend with your pet.

Diet - Fresh clean water should always be available. Feed mixes (specific to each species) consist of seeds, formulated foods, supplements, and vitamins. Choose high quality ingredients and add fresh fruits and vegetables. Cuttlebone or calcium blocks will provide minerals, and proteins can be offered, such as cottage cheese, eggs, and even insects. Be sure anything you offer is not toxic; obtain a list via the internet or your veterinarian.

Small birds can use plastic bowls where ceramic or stainless steel are needed for medium to large parrots (who will often chew or even pick up plastic and dump or toss). Built in holders are often part of the cage and keep the bird from removing the bowl. Other bowls are attached with hooks, bolts or clips, and may mount in or outside the cage.

Hygiene – Wash the bowls every couple of days and the cage floor at least once a week.

A bath placed in the bottom of the cage or mounted through a side door will allow small birds to bathe. Larger birds usually like a light misting from a spray bottle 2 or 3 times a week. Hand-tamed birds often prefer to shower with their owners. Also, learn how to trim your pet bird’s nails to keep them from getting painful when perching on skin.

Health – Try not to breed your bird to help solve the problem of pet overpopulation. Be observant and consult your avian vet if you notice signs of illness or injury such as: dull and patchy feathers; lack of appetite; persistent self-damaging behavior; difficulty going to the bathroom; discharge from eyes or nose, or sneezing. Taking precautions to create a suitable environment and provide a good diet will help your pet enjoy a long and healthy life.

Welcome to the wonderful world of birds. Be a responsible pet owner and you and your bird will enjoy a long and happy relationship!