

Selecting Your Bird



Eenie, Meenie, Miney...

You've decided you want a bird, but you don't know where to begin your search. Maybe you find yourself drawn to the aviaries at the zoo and unable to leave until you've stopped at each cage to talk to the residents, or a friend's cockatoo amuses you with his antics every time you visit. Perhaps you have cherished memories of a childhood budgie or the canaries your grandmother raised in her spare bedroom.

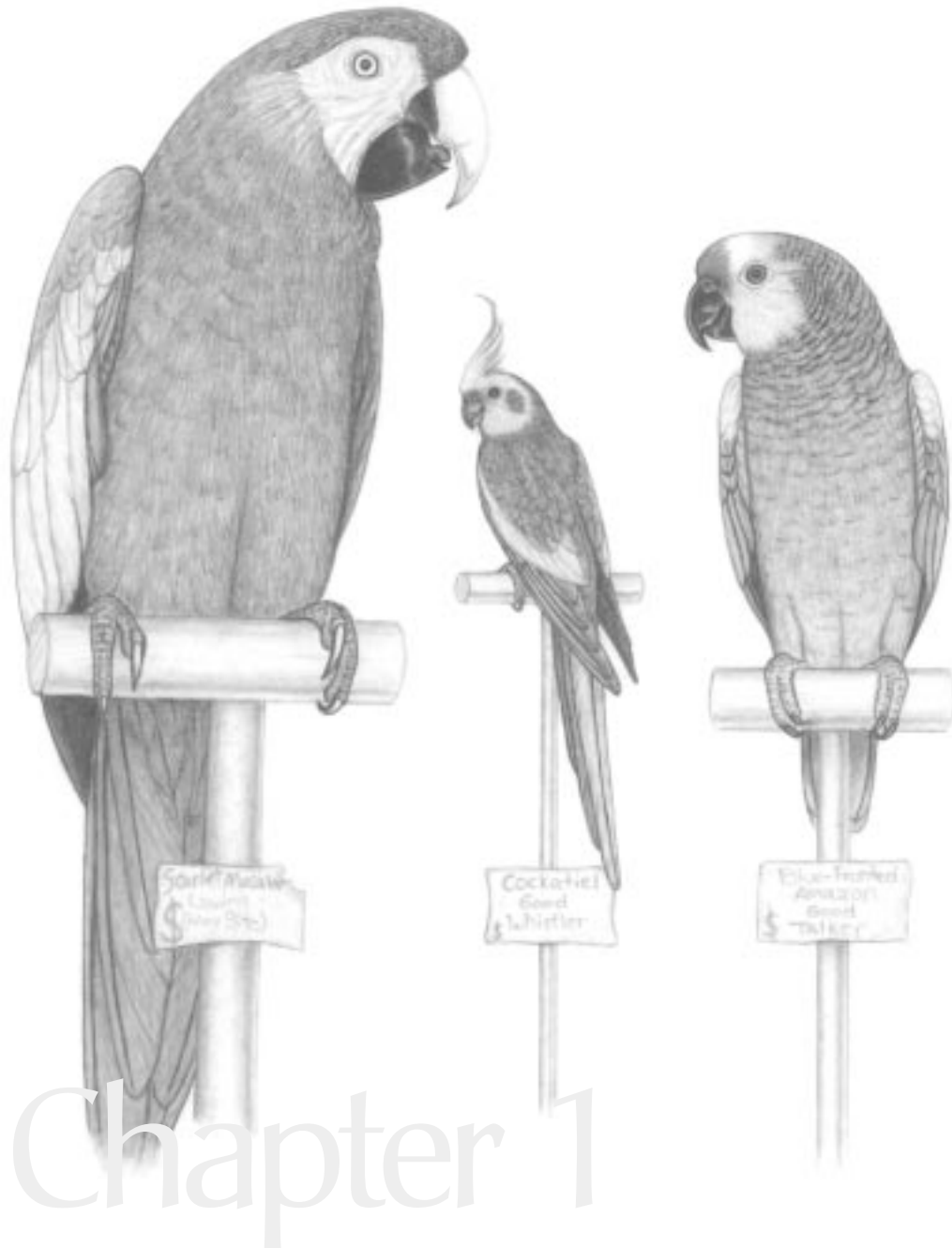
Before you begin your search, you need to understand a bird is more than a beautiful, animated creature. It has certain characteristics and quirks, along with requirements for care and maintenance. To ensure the best possible match between owner and bird, you must consider all these factors before you purchase a pet bird.

Although it's easy to put your needs and wants first when selecting a pet bird, stop and think about what your bird needs and what benefits it will derive from living with you. Will its life be interesting and content? Will it be well cared for? If so, your bird will be a lucky animal. If not, perhaps a bird is not the pet for you.

Simply put, bird owners need to be animal advocates. This means that the needs of a pet bird come before the needs of the owner. Will you be able to take care of the pet bird you've chosen for its entire life? Will you be willing to put up with a bird's constant demands on your time and your lifestyle? Remember, birds aren't like children--they won't grow up and move out someday. You will need to fix meals for, clean up after, and spend time with this pet for 10, 20, 50, or more years, depending on the species you select.

If you become bored with your pet and neglect it as a result, you'll probably feel somewhat guilty, but such a situation

Zoological gardens are one place that people first fall in love with parrots. This macaw is on display at the San Diego Zoo.



Chapter 1

- AFA recognizes that tragic results are likely to occur when unweaned baby birds are placed with those individuals who lack the necessary skills.
- AFA recognizes that successful hand-rearing involves a multitude of skills and that there is no substitute for experience.
- AFA finds the transfer of unweaned baby birds to parties unable to provide proper care is a problem of undocumented and unknown magnitude.
- AFA finds there is no PRACTICAL way to determine or define qualifications indicating that a particular party is or is not able to provide proper care for an unweaned baby bird.
- AFA finds the issue of whether or not an individual is able to provide proper care in a particular hand-rearing situation to be a matter of personal responsibility between the parties involved in the transfer of the bird or birds.
- AFA opposes the transfer of unweaned baby birds to parties unable to provide proper care.
- AFA opposes any legislative or regulatory intrusion on issues of personal responsibility surrounding the transfer of unweaned baby birds by attempting to define or qualify who can or cannot provide proper care or hand-feeding.
- AFA THEREFORE opposes any legislation or regulatory limitations on the sale of unweaned baby birds.

Experts now believe hand-feeding and weaning baby parrots are processes best left to people who are experienced in these areas.

When a parrot chick is newly hatched, hand-feeding is a round-the-clock process, and it often doesn't fit easily into a schedule that includes a full-time job or other time constraints.

During weaning, a baby parrot learns to eat solid food rather than the food it receives from its parents or from a hand-feeder. It is a stressful time for both bird and owner as the bird makes the adjustment to a grown-up diet. Weaning is different from fledging, when a chick starts flying, although some people use the terms interchangeably.

Before their owners wean them from hand-feeding for-

mula, chicks will often decide to stop on their own, and most will wean between the ages of 5 and 12 weeks. Smaller species, such as "budgies" and cockatiels, wean more quickly than the larger species, such as macaws and cockatoos.

These weaning ages will give new bird owners an idea of when young birds should be eating solid food and be able to go to pet homes.

New bird owners should try to purchase young birds that have been weaned. These blue-and-gold macaws may be too young to be cared for by inexperienced owners.



Approximate Weaning Ages

These weaning ages will give new bird owners an idea of when young birds should be eating solid food and be able to go to pet homes.

- budgerigar 6 weeks
- cockatiel 7 weeks
- conures 8 weeks
- miniature macaws 9 weeks
- Amazons 11 weeks
- African greys 13 weeks
- cockatoos and macaws 14 weeks

About three weeks before weaning time, breeders will place small chunks of fruits and vegetables in low-sided bowls in the chick's brooder to encourage it to play with (and hopefully eat) some of these interesting new foodstuffs. Cheerios™ and other unsweetened cereals are also popular weaning foods. The chick may play with these foods more than it eats them, but at least the bird is being introduced to foods that look, feel, and taste different from the hand-feeding formula.

The breeder will change the foods frequently because the environment in the brooder is warm and moist, which may cause food in the brooder to spoil more quickly. During this transition, the breeder will continue to offer the chick feedings of formula, and the breeder will monitor the chick's weight carefully. Expect the bird to lose weight--between 10 and 15 percent of its body weight--as it weans.



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You may think saving a small, "picked-upon" bird from its cagemates seems like the right thing to do, but please resist this urge unless you're willing to take on a "work in progress" that may have health or behavioral problems.

If possible, let your pet bird choose you. If one bird waddles right up to you and wants to play, or if one comes over to check you out and just seems to want to come home with you, that's the bird you want!

What to Look for

Here are some of the indicators of a healthy pet bird. Keep them in mind when selecting your pet.

- bright eyes
- clear nares (nostrils)
- upright posture
- a full-chested appearance
- active movement around the cage
- clean legs and vent
- smooth feathers
- good appetite

If the decision has been made to purchase a new bird from a bird breeder, the following questions should be considered:

- Ask for references from former customers, local bird veterinarians and local bird behavior consultants.
- Are the aviaries clean and not over-crowded?
- Ask about the method used to hand-raise baby birds
- Is the facility overly careful and conscientious about introducing new birds to their established collection?

Classified advertisements are usually placed in newspapers by private parties who want to place pets in new homes. If the advertiser offers young birds, chances are you've found a private breeder who wants to place a few birds in good homes. Some breeders may also offer older birds for sale from time to time. These are most likely breeder birds that are too old to produce chicks but are still good candidates for pet situations.

Bird breeders also advertise birds for sale in bird specialty magazines and on the Internet. In some cases, the breeders will ship a bird to you by air, while in other situations, they will only deal with buyers in their local area. Discuss delivery options with the breeder.

The downside of purchasing a bird through a classified advertisement is you can't be sure of the health and temperament of the bird you're buying, and you will likely have no recourse if the bird turns out to have health or behavioral problems once the sale has been completed.

Bird shows and marts offer bird breeders and bird buyers an opportunity to get together. Bird shows can provide prospective bird owners with the chance to see many different types of birds all in one place (usually far more than many pet



shops would keep at a time), which can help you narrow your choices if you're undecided about which species to keep. At a bird show, you can watch to see which birds win consistently, then talk to the breeder of these birds after the show to see if he or she expects to have any chicks in the near future.

A bird mart is a little different than a bird show. At a bird mart, various species of birds and a wide variety of birdkeeping supplies are offered for sale, so you can go and shop to your heart's content. Some bird marts even offer new bird checkups from an on-site avian veterinarian.

Bird rescue groups sometimes host adoption fairs to help place birds in their care in new, loving homes. (Parrot Education and Adoption Center)



Amazons

Amazons are chunky green parrots from Latin America. They are noted for their talking and singing skills and can be quite outgoing birds, singing opera or performing tricks for people outside of the family flock. Popular species include the yellow nape, double yellow head, blue front, lilac crown and red lored.

Amazons are playful birds that enjoy human companionship, and they will tolerate cuddling on

their terms. Some birds can be quite vocal at sunrise and sunset.

Amazons may be aggressive during breeding season. They can also bond to a single person in the home. They can be strong-willed and stubborn.

These parrots need roomy cages with interesting toys and time out of their cages on playgyms or with their owners to be mentally and physically fit.

Scientific name:	Amazona sp.
Where from:	Mexico, Central and South America
Size:	10 to 15 inches in length; 240 to 600 grams, depending on species
Minimum cage dimensions:	24 inches long by 36 inches high by 24 inches wide
Age at maturity:	Two years or more, depending on species
Suitable for apartments:	No
Behavioral quirks:	Many Amazons are not fond of cuddling. Some species can be aggressive during breeding season. Amazons can also be quite vocal, particularly at sunrise and sunset.
Activity level:	High
Noise level:	Moderate to high
Playfulness:	High
Destructiveness:	Moderate to high
Cuddliness:	Low to moderate

Talking potential:
Biting potential:

Moderate to high
High to extremely high, depending on the species. Biting by mature birds is particularly likely during breeding season.

Recommended for first-time owners:
Initial cost of bird:

No
\$\$ to \$\$\$, depending on species

Require regular interaction with owners:
Yes

Cockatoos

Cockatoos come from Australia and the islands of the South Pacific. These crested white or pink birds are sure to attract attention with their striking looks and cuddly personalities. Commonly kept species include the Goffin's, the rose breasted, the sulphur crested, the umbrella, and the Moluccan.

The pet qualities that most owners find appealing in cockatoos are that they are cuddly, comical parrots. With these charming qualities comes aggressive behavior, particularly during breeding season. Some birds may scream, pick their feathers or mutilate their skin. Most cockatoos are not recommended for small apartments because of the size of their cages and their potential for making noise.

A cockatoo owner must provide an adequate amount of attention to his or her pet, and the owner must also make sure that the bird has consistent guidance and opportunities to play quietly in its cage. Otherwise, the bird may become downright unmanageable. First-time bird owners may be surprised or even disappointed in the amount of attention cocka-



Proper Caging and Furnishings



Home Sweet Home

Your bird's cage is one of the most important purchases, beside your bird, that you'll make as a bird owner. The cage must be spacious, secure, comfortable, and safe. It will be your pet's home for years to come and it will likely be a sizable investment, since many cages cost almost as much as the birds that live in them. The cage must also be easy to clean and service. Although these requirements don't seem overwhelming, it can be difficult to find a cage that fulfills all of them.

In this chapter, we'll look at some of the criteria you'll need to consider when selecting a cage for your pet, accessories your bird will need in its cage, and how to set up the cage to make your pet feel most secure.

Choosing a Cage

When you walk into a large pet supply store or look through the pages of a bird specialty magazine, you're sure to see a wide variety of cages on display. Which one is the right one for your pet bird? Some of the things you'll need to consider are the size of the cage, the width of the bar spacing within the cage, the cage material, its design, the mobility of the cage and its doors, flooring, and feeder design. We'll look first at cages for parrots and then consider the special needs of canaries, finches, and softbills.

Size

First, let's consider cage size. The dimensions of the cage must be adequate for the size of the bird. For instance, a macaw wingspan can be 36 inches. In order to provide enough space to live, a macaw cage should have opposing sides that are more than 36 inches apart. An ideal rule of thumb is that

Cage Questions to Ask

When shopping for the perfect cage for your pet bird, ask yourself the following questions:

- Is the cage big enough for my bird?
- Is the cage rectangular or square?
- Is the cage stable?
- Is the door safe and secure?
- Is the cage made of strong, safe material?
- Is the bar spacing appropriate for my bird?
- Does the cage have some horizontal bars?
- Does the cage have a pull-out tray?
- Does the cage have a grate above the tray?
- Can the food and water bowls be accessed easily from outside the cage?
- Is the cage certified to be free of zinc, which can make a bird ill?