

HOUSING

Place your bird's cage in a draft-free area, out of direct sunlight. Don't place the cage under or near an air conditioning unit or vent, or in the kitchen. Select as large a cage as possible. The minimum suggested size is 30 cm x 30 cm x 60 cm for a budgie and 60 cm x 60 cm x 90 cm for lovebirds and cockatiels. The bars need to be close enough together to prevent the bird from getting his head stuck — a little over 1 cm for a budgie and 1.5–2.0 cm for cockatiels and lovebirds. Horizontal bars are best, as small parrots love to climb. A metal cage is preferable to wood or wicker. Line the bottom of the cage with newspaper or paper towels.

Provide your small parrots with plenty of perches of varying diameters. Pesticide-free branches from non-toxic trees such as apple, elm or maple make natural and attractive perches. Wood, plastic and hemp perches can also be purchased. Monitor hemp or rope perches carefully, as the fibres can become tangled around the bird's toes. Avoid perches made of synthetic fibres, which can cause irritation to the feet. Concrete perches can help keep the nails and beak properly worn down, but provide some non-concrete perches as well.

Food and water dishes should be made from easy-to-clean, non-toxic materials. Do not place them on the cage bottom, which is the bird's toilet, or directly under a perch. Each bird should have a separate food container so that those on the bottom of the pecking order have a chance to eat.

Small parrots love to play and explore. Ladders, ropes, swings and mirrors can all provide entertainment. Check all toys for potential dangers. Mirrors must have a covered back to avoid exposure to potentially toxic reflective backing. Rotate toys regularly. Provide your bird with a cuttlebone or lava rock to help keep the beak and nails properly worn down.

Change cage papers and disinfect food and water dishes daily. Clean and disinfect the cage at least once a week. Toys and perches will need occasional disinfecting as well. Replace wooden perches periodically as they cannot be properly disinfected. Rinse all items thoroughly after disinfecting.

DIET

Formulated bird feed, available as pellets, crumbles or mash, should provide the bulk of your bird's diet, though budgies almost never eat formulated food. For budgies only, try a vitamin-enriched seed mix. The remainder of the diet should be made up of fresh fruits and vegetables (about 20–25%) and a small amount of seed. Most fresh fruits and vegetables are suitable, but avoid avocado, which is potentially toxic. Ask your veterinarian about vitamin supplements. Fresh water must be available at all times.

HEALTH

Your small parrot will require regular, routine veterinary check-ups. During your annual visits, your veterinarian can perform any necessary grooming and a physical examination. Birds try to hide signs of illness, so by the time you notice something is wrong, the illness is usually well advanced. The following signs mean your pet needs urgent veterinary care: problems balancing, open-mouthed breathing when at rest, inability to perch, a change in vocalization, sneezing, discharge or swelling of the eyes, reduced appetite, decreased preening, swollen feet or joints, change in droppings or lumps anywhere on the body.

FERTILITY

Because it is difficult to find enough appropriate homes for these birds, breeding of small parrots is strongly discouraged. Determine the sex of each bird, and keep males and females separate.

A QUICK GUIDE TO SMALL PARROTS: BUDGIES, COCKATIELS AND LOVEBIRDS



Friendly and affectionate, small parrots can provide endless hours of pleasure and companionship. Most small parrots require training to learn to talk, but even without words, they can charm you. Budgies and lovebirds will generally live between six and twelve years. Cockatiels have a longer life span, averaging ten to fourteen years.

Before adopting a small parrot, consider the following:

- Parrots need daily attention and interaction.
- Parrots need nutritious food, fresh water and a clean habitat.
- All household members should understand how to handle and care for a small parrot, and they should all be as eager as you to welcome a small parrot into the family.
- Like cats and dogs, small parrots require routine veterinary care and should be seen by a veterinarian specializing in birds.

SETTING UP HOUSE

Essential items

- As large a cage as possible with safe bar spacing
- Perches
- Food dish
- Water dish
- Seed mix
- Safe toys
- Shallow dish for bathing
- Cuttlebone / calcium block / oyster shell (calcium source)

Optional items

- Small travel cage

ONE OR TWO?

Whether to get more than one bird depends on the type of bird. Contrary to their names, a single lovebird can be quite content. In fact, all small parrots can be happy without a bird companion, provided you can give them a fair amount of attention each day. If you are absent for long periods of time, you might want to consider a pair of birds of the same sex, although a single bird will likely form a stronger bond with the human members of the family. Two male budgies will get along better than two female.

GENERAL CARE

Your small parrot will need plenty of opportunity to fly, but should never be allowed out of the cage unsupervised. A typical house offers many dangers to a bird. Provide your bird with an appropriately sized cage and supervised in-house flight, not free reign of your house.

Offer your small parrot a bath at least twice a week. Fill a shallow dish with 6 cm of room-temperature water and place it in the cage. Once your bird has finished bathing, remove the water. Cockatiels and larger budgies may prefer being misted. Nails and wings will need to be routinely trimmed. Occasional beak filing may be required and should be performed only by a qualified veterinarian. Consult your veterinarian about your bird's grooming needs.

Unless you live in a cool climate, you likely won't need to cover your bird's cage at night. Some birds appreciate the extra privacy and others feel panicked. Take your cue from your bird's behaviour.

**Small parrots make good companions,
are fun to watch and hear,
and have their own personality.**

HANDLING

With training, cockatiels like to be held and scratched. Hold a treat between two fingers, and coax your cockatiel onto your hand. If your cockatiel nips, say "no" and repeat. Budgies don't like to be held or cuddled, but will learn to perch on your finger or stay on your shoulder. Lovebirds, if acquired as hand-fed babies and regularly handled, love to burrow in your hair or pockets. If your bird is unwilling to hop onto your finger or hand, and you need to pick your pet up, place one hand over the bird's back, with the head resting between your first and second finger. Use your thumb and remaining fingers to gently restrain the wings.



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