

Caring for Budgerigars

Budgerigars, which are often called *budgies* or *parakeets* (in the United States), are among the most popular pet birds in the world. These charismatic little companion animals are lovable and affectionate and can mimic human speech like larger parrots, although in a smaller voice. Budgies are easy to care for and tame (if acquired at a young age); therefore, they are considered an excellent choice for first-time bird owners.

Biologic Facts

- The budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) is commonly called a *budgie*, *shell parakeet*, or *parakeet*.
- Budgies are only one of a large number of parakeet species
- There are two common varieties of budgerigars:
 - The American budgie has a smaller body and sleeker plumage
 - The English budgie has a larger body and fluffier plumage
- Average weight of the American budgerigar: 1 to 1.2 ounces (30 to 34 g)
- Young birds have forehead bands that fade by 3 to 4 months of age
- In general, adult males have a blue cere (skin surrounding the nostrils) and females have a pink cere; this applies to the natural color varieties (green), but not to all the various color mutations
- Sexual maturity: 6 months of age
- Average life span: 8 years
- Maximum recorded life span: 18+ years
- Origin: Australia

Behavior

- Budgies are playful and active
- They can be vocal, with pleasant, soft chirping sounds; in general, they are quieter than most parrots
- Budgies can be kept singly or in groups and do not require interactive time if the owner is not seeking an interactive relationship

- For more companionship, quality time is needed to develop the relationship, to teach the bird tricks, and for the bird to develop a vocabulary
- Two or more budgies can keep each other company, but multiple birds maintained in the same enclosure are usually less interactive with humans and do not mimic human speech as well
- Hand-fed babies and babies that are handled often are the easiest to tame as they mature
- Budgies should be exposed early to daily household activities; place the cage in an area of the home where family members spend the most time
- Budgies are intelligent and curious and need environmental enrichment to reduce boredom; they are easily amused with simple toys and enjoy exploring their surroundings
- Because of numerous household dangers, budgies should not be allowed unrestricted access in the home; when not directly supervised, they should be confined to a cage or a bird-friendly safe room

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Diet

- As with all parrot diets, a varied diet is recommended for nutritional balance and psychological enrichment
- Budgies should not be fed a seed-only diet; seeds are nutritionally imbalanced and high in fat, and parakeets that become accustomed to seeds are very hard to switch to a better diet
- Offer your budgie a wide variety of fresh foods (for example, vegetables, leafy greens, fruit,

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pasta, rice, beans, sprouted seeds) early in life; these foods should make up about 20% to 25% of the diet

- If fresh foods are offered, they should be cleaned from the cage on a daily basis to prevent spoilage and bacterial growth
- The best option is a pelleted diet specifically formulated for small parrots; pelleted diets are nutritionally complete and prevent birds from picking out only their favorite foods; pellets should make up about 75% of the diet
- Treats, including seeds, should make up only about 5% of the diet
- Clean, fresh water should be provided daily, preferably in a sipper bottle that is mounted on the outside of the cage to prevent spillage and fecal contamination of the water

Environment

- The cage should be as large as possible, allowing your bird to fully extend and flap its wings without touching the sides of the cage
- If multiple birds are maintained in the same enclosure, it should be large enough for all to comfortably fly and perch
- The cage should be clean, secure, safe, and constructed of durable, nontoxic materials with various sizes and diameters of natural wood perches
- The spaces between the cage bars should be 0.5 inch (1.27 cm) or less; horizontal bars provide the best opportunity for climbing

- To prevent contamination, avoid placing perches directly over food or water (if a sipper bottle is not provided)
- Access to natural light is preferred; areas of significant temperature fluctuation should be avoided
- When outside the cage, budgies require constant supervision to avoid dangers such as other pets, small children, hot stoves, sinks/tubs full of water, and household toxins

Preventive Care

- A complete physical examination should be performed every 12 months
- Consult a veterinarian with experience in avian medicine if you have any questions or concerns about your bird's health
- An annual fecal examination should be performed to check for parasites, yeast, and bacteria
- Blood work should be performed annually or as recommended
- Wing or nail trimming should be performed as needed

Common Medical Disorders

- Tumors
- Obesity
- Chronic egg laying
- Egg binding
- Internal and external parasites
- Overgrowth of beak and nails
- Scaly face mites