



CARING FOR YOUR PET PARROT

If your pet parrot is sick or has problems, do not delay. Call Island Veterinary Services immediately at 949-0787. Parrots “mask” their symptoms when they are ill. By the time you notice, it can be too late.

To see healthy Cayman Islands Parrots visit Mr. Otto Watler’s Cayman Honey Farm or the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park.

For information about Cayman Islands’ Parrots; help in finding your unwanted parrot a new home; or for help in rehabilitating a parrot for return to the wild, call the National Trust at 949-0121

If you find an injured parrot call the Wildlife Rescue Centre
HOTLINE: 917-BIRD or Island Veterinary Services, 949-0787.

To assist the National Trust with Post-Ivan Cayman Parrot Conservation efforts call 949-0121. To volunteer for the Wildlife Rescue Program call 917-BIRD.

To help wild parrot and other native birds, plant a Mini-woodland. Visit www.caymanwildlife.org for list of recommended plants.

Drawings donated by John Doak, Judy Steele and Philippe Bush. Special thanks to Dr. Brenda Bush of Island Veterinary Clinic for editing, to Mr. Otto Watler for his on-going support and to Petique shop for their initial sponsorship of this booklet.

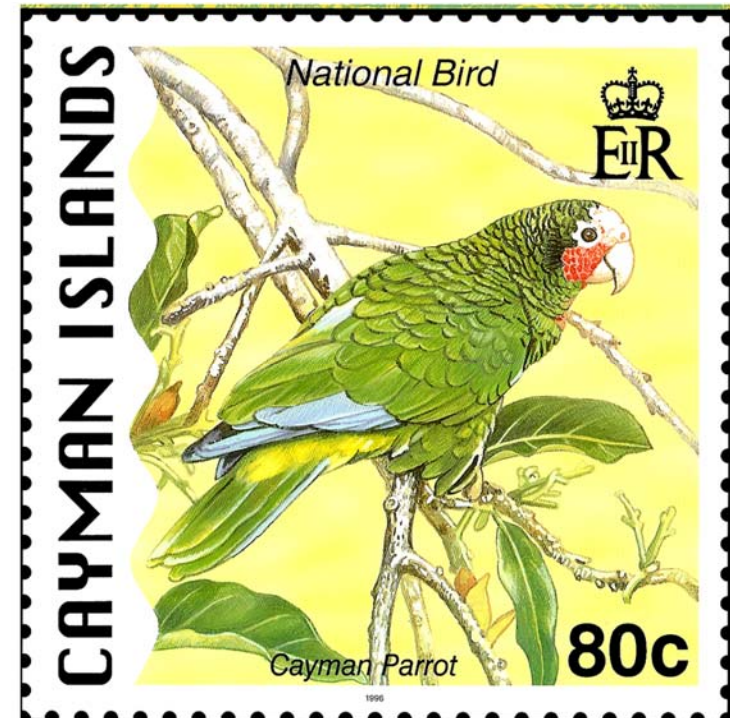


www.caymanwildlife.org

*Collated and written by Lois Blumenthal for the
National Trust for the Cayman Islands*

www.natiionaltrust.org.ky

It is illegal to take parrots from the wild. This information is provided to improve conditions for birds that are already in captivity.



“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Parrots Need Friends

In 1990, an amendment to the law was passed that made it illegal to capture, export, sell or keep a Cayman Islands' Parrot as a pet. Because pet parrots don't always know how to live in the wild, people who already had them as pets were permitted to keep them. If pet birds that have been raised in captivity are set free, they might starve or eat the wrong foods and die.

Parrots are intelligent and sociable animals with special needs. It is important that captive parrots receive good care.



Pet parrots can learn to love their owners. They can talk by mimicking words and phrases, but they *also* use body language. They fluff, preen, make eye contact, nod and express happiness when they are near their favourite person. Owning a pet parrot should be FUN - for you **AND** for your bird! Otherwise, you might as well have a potted plant!

If you are too busy to give your pet bird several hours of attention every day, consider finding it another home or pairing it with another lonely parrot. (Do this with expert advice to avoid fights and injuries.) A parrot is as smart as a three-year old child with the emotions of a two year-old child and hates to be alone. A very young parrot **cannot be left alone at all!** It must be treated like a baby and needs constant love and attention.

Check List for a Healthy Pet Parrot

If you want your pet parrot to be happy and healthy, give it the things that it would have in the wild.

- ✓ **Healthy Food** – Parrots need special vitamin-enriched seed mixtures designed for them and fresh fruits and vegetables every day. They also enjoy the fruits and seeds of some wild plants like Seagrapes, Almonds, Red Birch, Parrot Berry and Wild Calabash.
- ✓ **Space** - Parrots need space to spread their wings. Cages must be large and rat-proof.
- ✓ **Perches** - Non-poisonous branches from Sea-grape or Almond trees are good perches, because their rough irregular shapes are good exercise for parrots' feet.
- ✓ **Water** - Parrots need fresh water every day. Be sure no droppings can fall into it.
- ✓ **Baths** - Give your bird a large bowl of clean water and allow it to wash. Some parrots like a gentle spray of water from a clean spray bottle.
- ✓ **Toys** – Parrots like action. They need things to swing on and things to chew and shred like coconut husks or soft wood blocks. To save money look for used non-toxic safely designed baby toys at thrift shops for your pet. Parrots become bored if they have nothing to do and will even have nervous breakdowns and pull out their feathers. This is very serious. If this happens to your parrot, take it to your veterinarian.
- ✓ **Attention** - Wild parrots are very social animals and are always in pairs or groups. In a cage, they miss the fun they used to have. Spend time with your bird, talk to it and play with it, so it won't be so lonely.

Clipping Wings & Toenails

To prevent accidental escape, both wings should be trimmed evenly. Your parrot should still be able to fly a little if it is dropped or falls. The trimming should be almost invisible. Ask a veterinarian to do this. Never let anyone “pinion” or cut the bone of the bird’s wing. A veterinarian can trim your parrot’s toenails if they are too sharp or too long. A parrot’s toenails will bleed profusely if cut too short. It is risky to attempt to cut them yourself.

Training

Training your parrot to talk or do tricks (or not to bite!) takes patience. Parrots do not respond to punishment, but regard anyone who hurts them as a predator. Find a good book like Guide To A Well-Behaved Parrot by Mattie Sue Athan, and train your parrot using proven methods. A tame parrot that can be allowed out of the cage is much happier and more fun for everyone. A “mean” bird is an unhappy bird. It is your responsibility as a pet owner to help “socialize” your parrot.

Breeding

Parrots won’t breed if they are unhappy. The best place for them to breed is in the wild. Captive breeding is difficult and expensive.

Parrots mate for life. This may be why some parrots in cages seem to pine away. They miss their mates.



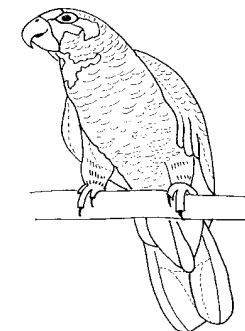
How Healthy Is Your Pet Parrot?

Fifty years ago people were home more and could spend time playing with their pet parrot. Now people are away at work and school most of the day. When they return they often go inside and watch TV, leaving a lonely bird sitting in a cage outside. Neglected parrots can actually lose their sanity from this solitary confinement and “turn mean.”

A perch or a second cage inside the house, where the family spends time, will be good for your parrot’s mental health and allow time for you to get to know the personality of your bird. It’s much more fun to own a pet that knows you and likes you.

Parrots are beautiful when they are happy and healthy. They should have bright sparkling eyes and shiny clean feathers. Look for these warning signs:

- Dull lifeless feathers
- Loss of appetite
- Pecking its claws
- Pulling out feathers
- Change in droppings
- Weaving and bowing
- Sitting on the bottom of the cage
- Screaming for no reason
- Glazed, cloudy or half-closed eyes
- Bare skin showing through the feathers
- Shifting from one foot to another
- Bobbing up and down constantly
- Prominent heart bone, thinning of chest muscles
- Sitting too quietly on the perch with feathers fluffed



If you notice your parrot doing any of these things, call a veterinarian right away and ask for advice. A sick parrot can die very quickly.

A pet parrot is not just a decoration. It is a living animal with needs and feelings and should be kept by someone with the leisure time to care for it. Parrots can live for 30 years or more in captivity - a lifetime of misery for those that are neglected. It is no pleasure to own an unhappy bird.

What To Feed Your Pet Parrot

Parrots need to eat lots of different seeds, nuts, vegetables, fruits, and some protein. **When parrots are fed only sunflower seeds or rice they will sicken and die.** Vitamin enriched seed mixtures are sold in pet shops. Parrots also like cheese if it's not too strong or salty and most fresh fruits like papayas, mangoes, watermelon, apples, grapes or oranges; They like cooked or raw vegetables like callaloo, broccoli, pumpkin (including the seeds), sweet potatoes, corn on the cob, peas, grains like rice, and whole wheat pasta, bread or cereal. Some people serve their pet parrots small *cooled* items from the family dinner using a plastic jar lid for a plate!



Parrots like the foods they would eat if they were still free in the wild. Seagrapes, Red Birch berries, Chinaberries, and ripe almonds are all good choices. ***Be sure exactly what a plant is before giving it to your parrot.*** Be sure wild foods are clean, and wash them if they were gathered near a busy road. Parrots like ixora and hibiscus flowers that have not been sprayed or heavily fertilized. An occasional treat of fresh coconut adds interest to your bird's day, but coconut, like sunflower seeds, is high in fat and a caged bird should not eat too much of it. Parrots need a small amount of fine gravel or crushed oyster shell. Buy these at pet shops.

Perches

Parrots need perches inside their cage made from the branches of unsprayed fruit trees, Seagrapes, or Almond trees. Standing on a flat surface is not natural for birds. The perch must be thick enough so that the bird's toes do not meet underneath. Use several branches of different sizes so your parrot's feet can exercise and stay strong. If your parrot is tame, put perches around the house, near where you work or watch TV, so it can be near you. A simple free-standing perch can be made from a Christmas tree stand and a larger Almond or Sea grape branch.



Toys

Toys are not just a luxury for your pet parrot. They are a necessity. Find interesting toys in your pet shop and replace them often. A great tip is to check thrift shops for used baby toys. These are non-toxic and cost very little. Some parrots become attached to toys with tassels and groom them as they would a mate or a friend. Any toy that the bird becomes attached to in this way should stay in the cage, but most toys should be changed or rotated often so that the bird does not become bored. Coconut husks, seeds pressed into squash, pumpkin or raw sweet potato, leather strips that have not been dyed, mineral blocks, and lava blocks all make good toys for pet birds. Be sure to wash and rinse toys carefully. Avoid toys like chains with large links, rings or anything with threads that could entangle or even strangle a parrot.



A Big, Rat-Proof Cage

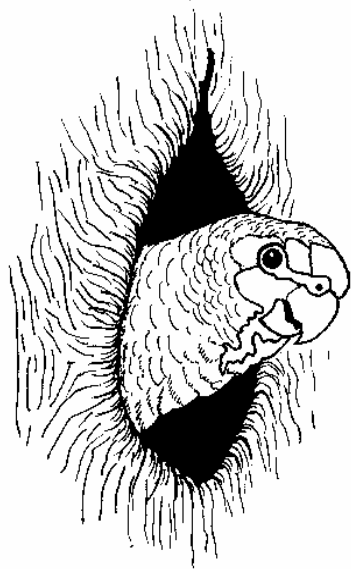
Parrots need a big comfortable cage. It should be rat proof and at least three feet on each side and four feet tall. Parrots should be able to stretch and flap their wings inside the cage and their tail feathers should not touch the bars. There should be plenty of room to climb and exercise. **Always put the cage on a high shelf or hang it from a ceiling. Parrots hate to be down on the floor.** The bars should not be too widely spaced, or your parrot could become stuck.

A tame bird should be allowed to spend time outside the cage on perches during the day and only put inside the cage for safety at night or if you are not at home. Some people maintain several cages, a smaller cage in a quiet place for nighttime, and one (or more) larger “play” cages in areas where the family spends time. Parrots enjoy the routine of being greeted in the morning; perhaps having breakfast with the family, and then being put in a more interesting cage near the center of activities. Moving your parrot from place to place like this gives you a chance to interact with your bird every day and helps to make training easier.

A Little House

In the wild, Cayman Parrots nest in tree hollows. They enjoy having a dark private “house” inside their cage. This can be easily built from untreated wood or bought in a pet shop. Parrots can become very attached to their little houses. They climb in and out often during the day and sometimes sleep in them at night.

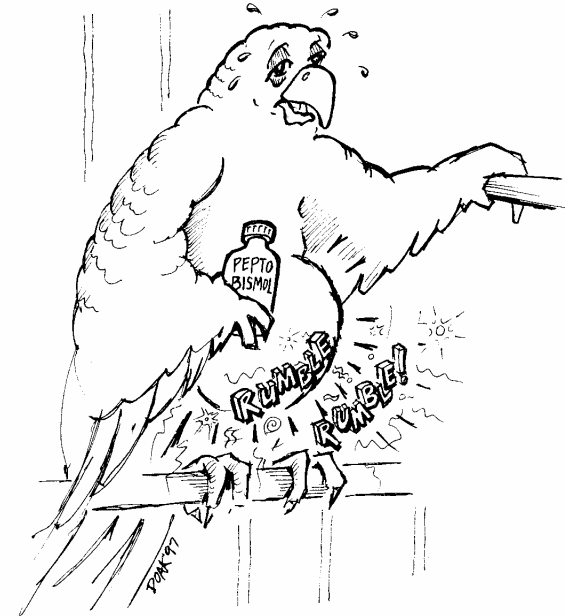
Some parrots see “predator eyes” in paintings and the shapes of wall ornaments. If your parrot seems skittish, check the room for something that might look like a “monster” to the bird!



What NOT to Feed Your Pet Parrot

NEVER feed parrots salted popcorn, salted peanuts or potato chips, apple cores with seeds, cherry and peach seeds, raw meat, red meat, hot soups or other hot foods or beverages, coffee, tea, chocolate, cinnamon, (especially rolled cinnamon bark), sodas, alcohol, iceberg lettuce, junk foods or unidentified wild fruits or flowers. Though some parrots enjoy avocado pears, the part near the seed can be poisonous for them. Avocados are also very fattening for birds and for these reasons should not be given to your pet parrot. **Sunflower seeds should be given only as a treat and a small part of the overall diet.**

You should never put plants or sticks in the cage unless you are sure that they are non-poisonous. Oleander is especially dangerous.



It is important to supply your pet bird with the proper nutrients. Parrots fed poor diets have shorter lives and more diseases. Because parrots naturally hide their illnesses, those fed only sunflower seeds may appear healthy until they are about to die of severe malnutrition. It is usually too late for even the veterinarian to save them when this happens. Parrots **need** a variety of fresh foods to be healthy.

A Clean Cage for Good Health

Wash and refill water and food dishes every day. Remove water bottle and scrub it with a bottlebrush. Take the cage apart and wash it well every week. Disinfect with a mild bleach solution (no more than one ounce of bleach per quart of water). **Rinse well.** Scrub & rinse perches and toys too.



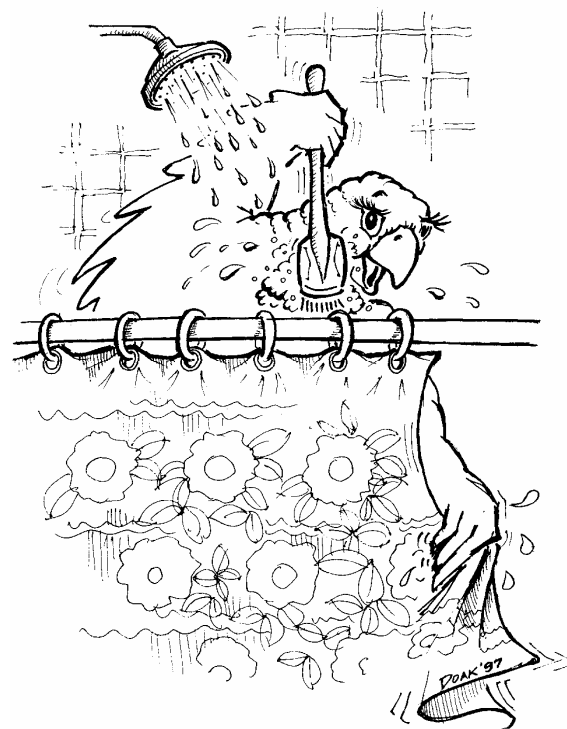
Note: When parrots live in the wild they must not appear sick or weak to other parrots or predators. They hide symptoms of illness until they are almost dead. This is why it is so important to keep your parrots food, water, and cage perfectly clean. If a parrot eats moldy or rotten food, or drinks slimy water you may not know how sick it is until too late. Always rush your parrot to the veterinarian at the first sign of illness. Never spray aerosol insect poisons around parrots. If ants are a problem, clean the area and use Bird Cage Spray available from in pet shops. Parrots have very delicate respiratory systems. Always move the bird to a different room when you are spraying poisons or using strong solvents or cleaners.

Water

Parrots need fresh water every day. Put water bowls where droppings can't fall into them. Water bottles that clip to the bars of the cage work very well and can be purchased at pet shops. They should be cleaned often, especially if they receive sunlight. If not kept perfectly clean, water bottles can become slimy and make your parrot sick.

Bathing: How Parrots Keep Clean

Parrots enjoy bathing and will clean themselves, splashing about happily, if provided with a bowl of pure water. **Never** add soap to your parrot's bath.



Take away the water when your parrot is finished so that droppings will not fall into it. Some parrots enjoy spray of pure water from a **clean** spray bottle that has never been used for anything else. They will turn around and around spreading their wings and shaking their feathers. Birds will not bathe after three or four o'clock in the afternoon, as they prefer to have plenty of time to dry off before night falls. Keep damp birds out of cold drafts and air-conditioning.