1988

4-H 279 Birds: Part of the Nebraska 4-H Small Animal and Pet Series

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/a4hhistory

http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/a4hhistory/393

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the 4-H Youth Development at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Nebraska 4-H Clubs: Historical Materials and Publications by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.
Birds

Part of the Nebraska 4-H Small Animal and Pet Series
Acknowledgements

This publication is a reprint of the ‘4-H Pet Care’ manual published by the Cooperative Extension Service, University of Massachusetts. Portions of two publications, “Pets are Fun” by Denice Braundhordt and “Iowa Pet Care Project” have been incorporated in this manual.
BIRDS

Birds are warm-blooded, air-breathing vertebrates with two unique features. They have the ability to fly, and they are covered with feathers. Their bone structure is ultra light, with strong flight feathers and muscles which allow them to fly.

Throughout the centuries, many species of birds have been kept for their beauty, their ability to sing, or their ability to talk. Birds were sold in the streets of Ancient Rome and offered in the markets of medieval villages. Most birds kept as pets today come from two main families, perching birds (Passerines), including Finches and Canaries, or the Parrot family (Psittacines), including Parrots and Parakeets (Budgies). There are several major differences among these bird families, as this chart explains:

### PERCHING BIRDS

1. 3 unwebbed toes in front
2. 1 toe in the rear
3. Ligaments tighten the foot around the perch in an unconscious effort
4. Beak is hinged at the bottom
5. Birds cannot use their beaks for support
6. Can sing lovely songs
7. Are not often affectionate or willing to learn tricks

### PARROT FAMILY

1. Two unwebbed toes in front
2. Two toes in the rear
3. Jaws hinged at the top and bottom
4. Uses its beak as a third "hand"
5. Will imitate speech
6. Can be very affectionate and very jealous
7. Will amuse owners with numerous tricks
8. Can grasp objects and climb
All birds have four types of feathers. They are:

a. Covert feathers — cover the entire body and are the most numerous.
b. Quill feathers — the flight feathers.
c. Down feathers — provide protection from the cold.
d. Filoplumes — hairlike feathers with no barbs. The barbs of a bird’s feathers lock together forming a smooth surface, allowing the wing to cup air during flight.

Officially, the Parrot family is below the Passerine family on the evolutionary scale. This is because their nests are sloppy, behavior simple, and they do not sing their own songs. However, their skill at imitating speech and their willingness to repeat behavior can make them interesting pets.

**HOUSING**

To remain healthy, all birds need exercise. Small birds should have cages which are large enough to fly around in. As birds become more tame, you could let them fly around a room. Be sure that all window glass and mirrors are covered and no doors or windows are open. Larger birds, such as parrots, should be able to flap their wings in the cage. The ideal is to have a parrot perch, so your tame parrot can fly at will in a confined room. Just make sure you have plenty of tissues handy to clean up droppings.

Bird cages should have several perches appropriate to the size of the bird’s foot. Perches come in many shapes and sizes. You should provide several types so that the bird does not always have to stand on the same size perch. Another important thing to remember is that if you are purchasing a parrot, you will need hardwood perches. Parrots love to chew. It helps them keep their beaks trimmed. If you use soft woods, you will need a constant supply of perches.

All bird cages need food and water dishes. Your breeder or pet shop owner will show you those most appropriate for the type of bird you buy. Parrot dishes are not the same as canary dishes for obvious reasons. Parrots will require a larger, more sturdy dish. You may want to purchase two types of dishes for your parakeet or canary. A covered dish helps keep seeds from being scattered. However, some parakeets will not eat from a covered dish so you may need to buy the uncovered type. For the first few days in its new home, scatter small amounts of seed on the bottom of the cage until your pet finds its food containers.

Birds’ toenails grow all the time. To help your bird keep its nails trim, you can put a sandpaper cover on one perch. Although these do help keep nails trim, perch covers are not ideal because they can irritate the sensitive parts of the foot. If you would like to make special perches for your bird, follow these directions:

1. Buy a **NON-TOXIC** white glue.
2. Apply glue to the **bottom** half of a few perches.
3. Dip the bottom of the perch into clean, fine, dry sand.
4. Dry thoroughly.

Now your pet can keep its nails trim without hurting its sensitive feet. Another good idea is to find a sturdy, unusually-shaped fruit or maple tree branch with rough bark. Put the branch in your bird’s cage after disinfecting and drying it well. A branch will look pretty and help trim nails naturally! You can secure the branch to the cage by fastening it with twist ties you would use on plastic bags. There is also another advantage to using a branch. It will be thick in some places and thin in others. Now your bird can choose to land where it is most comfortable.

Birds’ beaks have a thin layer of tissue similar to our fingernails and this grows continuously. For small birds, a piece of cuttlebone attached to the side of the cage will provide calcium, minerals and help trim the beak. Larger birds, such as parrots, can chew hardwood toys or special mineral bones that are more durable than those used for small birds.
You can purchase several types of toys for your bird which will help keep it amused when you are away. These include bells, sticks, balls, and wooden sticks. Do not use chains. Your bird can get its toes stuck in them and break a leg. Ask your pet shop owner or breeder to recommend one or two toys for your type bird.

CLEANING

Make sure that you clean your bird's home at least twice a week for all birds except mynahs. Mynahs will have to be cleaned daily. All pet shops sell bird cage paper which can be cut to the size of the cage. After cleaning the cage, line with paper and sprinkle on a generous amount of gravel. Birds have a muscular organ known as a gizzard that replaces teeth, and gravel is needed by the gizzard to grind food. If you like, you can also add a small amount of gravel in a seed cup.

Clean all perches well, either with a stiff brush or a plastic scouring pad. Wash the food and water dishes with warm soapy water, rinse well, and dry completely before returning to the cage. You should also plan on washing down the bars of the cage on occasion to remove any dust or waste materials. Of course, sweep the floor under the cage regularly to remove seed hulls that have fallen there. If your bird is messy, there are several types of plastic or cloth "seed catchers" that fit under the cage on the outside to help catch most of the hulls.

WHERE TO KEEP THE CAGE

Most birds that we see in pet shops are tropical birds that are now bred in captivity. You can tell when a bird is domestically bred by a leg band that indicates its date of hatching. These birds have been bred for life in our homes. Remember, native wild birds should remain free; do not try to capture them. They will never make good pets.

Since tropical birds are native to warmer climates, you should keep your bird cage in a relatively warm (70 °F) room where it will be protected from drafts and sudden temperature changes. All birds enjoy bright light, but do not put them in direct sunlight. Small birds in cages cannot find shade and can overheat and die.

Another place you should not have a bird is in your kitchen. It is unhealthy for your family and dangerous for your pet. Dangers include: hot stove tops, scalding tap water, and sinks full of detergent. Birds may also carry contagious diseases, for example birds and humans are both susceptible to the common cold.

A special cover can be purchased at pet shops to fit over the cage at night or during times when you would like the bird to be quiet. A heavy towel or lightweight blanket can also be used. This will protect the bird from night drafts and help it feel warm and secure.
FEEDING

As with all pets, birds need food and water every day. Ask your pet shop owner about the special foods each type of bird will need. Birds require a great deal of food for energy. Their body metabolism is very high, meaning they have a naturally high body temperature and need to eat often. If you are feeding wild birds in your backyard, you would make sure that they have food every day, particularly in cold weather. A small bird can freeze to death in a matter of a few hours unless there is sufficient food. If you have taught these outside animals to depend on you, it is your responsibility to care for them correctly.

Be very careful when you check your pet’s food dish. It may appear to be full, yet if you blow on it gently, you may see that there is no food at all, only the hulls your bird has removed from the seed. For most birds, small amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables or hard cooked egg yolks are welcome additions to their diets. Never feed your bird lettuce, use spinach instead and make sure that you remove decaying food each day. An easy and appreciated way to provide fresh greens for your bird is to purchase a special sprouting cup that attaches to the side of the cage. Water the seeds, watch them sprout, and allow your bird access to as much fresh green food as it needs. Periodically mist the cup so the greens continue to grow.

Don’t forget to provide clean fresh water in your bird’s cage daily. Some small birds will try to bathe in their water dish. You can help prevent this by giving them an opportunity to bathe regularly. Bird size “bathtubs” can be purchased at pet shops. Also, plastic containers from home or spinach leaves sprinkled with water make fine bathing places for birds. All bath water should be at room temperature. It is not a good idea for you to teach your pet to fly under a stream of water from the faucet. Someday you could be running hot water, and your pet could be seriously injured.

TAMING

Taming a bird will take time and patience. You will probably not be able to tame your pet canary, but a male will learn to sing songs for you. Sometimes it is necessary to purchase a record of canary songs or leave your pet with a reliable breeder who has several singing canaries. Each bird’s song will be individual, but very young birds learn by imitating.

Birds of the parrot family, including budgies, will learn to sit on your finger or
shoulder. As the bird becomes accustomed to you, don’t be surprised if it flies over and perches right on your head! If your bird starts to pull your hair through its beak, it is actually grooming you and showing you affection. The larger birds, such as parrots, will become jealous of any attention you show to other pets.

When you first bring home your new pet bird, give it a few weeks to become comfortable in its new home. Then gently introduce your finger to its cage. It will probably flutter around quite a bit. Move slowly away and when the bird calms down, try again. If you practice this every day, within a short time your pet will soon learn to perch on your finger. Remember, because birds are sensitive and fragile, always move slowly and speak softly to them.

As your bird develops confidence in you, it will show you that it is happy and comfortable by coming to you in its cage and flying to you when outside the cage. (Don’t forget to close all doors and windows!)

One of the easiest ways to help your bird learn how to trust you is to train it to take small pieces of seed from your fingertips. Again, always move slowly and speak softly.

Birds of the parrot family can be taught to talk. This process can become very involved, and you should ask an expert about the proper way to teach each type of parrot. Remember to start with one word and continue with it until the bird learns that word.

DISEASES COMMON TO BIRDS

By providing a clean and dry home, you will help your bird stay healthy. All birds get colds, and there are several other illnesses common to them. Should your pet show any of the following symptoms, consult a veterinarian who specializes in birds. Your local breeder or pet shop owner may know which veterinarians in your area to contact.

SIGNS OF ILLNESS

Nasal discharge or crust on bill
Change in eye color
Swellings and swollen joints
Ruffled feathers and shivering indicates a fever
Puffed out feathers and panting are signs of overheating
Soiled vent opening (diarrhea)
Noises when breathing
Scales on legs
Poor feather condition or excessive preening can indicate mites
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISEASES</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mouth Canker</strong></td>
<td>An infection caused by an unsanitary water supply.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>External Parasites</strong></td>
<td>Includes mites and lice. Treat the cage and bird with a mite and louse powder available in the pet store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diarrhea/Constipation</strong></td>
<td>Can be caused by an incorrect diet. Make sure you feed the correct type and amount of food. Diarrhea can also be an indication of a more serious disease.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaly Leg</strong></td>
<td>Crusty looking beak and legs caused by small mites. Can be treated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Internal Parasites</strong></td>
<td>Very difficult to diagnose and can be very serious.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Avian Pox</strong></td>
<td>Usually causes lumps on the face. A viral disease difficult to diagnose, so consult a veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>French Molt</strong></td>
<td>The bird loses its flight feathers first, then later its covert feathers. Little can be done about this disease. Sometimes the feathers may grow back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chills, Colds</strong></td>
<td>Caused by a virus. May result from damp, drafty conditions. May also be picked up from humans.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspergillosis</strong></td>
<td>A serious fungal disease causing lung growths; consult your veterinarian.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**First Aid** - Immediately raise the temperature near your bird to 80° - 90° F, but give the bird room to get away from the heat. A light bulb with a reflector is ideal. For very weak birds, put them in a box with a heat lamp or heating pad with a thermometer to be sure the temperature doesn't get too high. Sometimes heat alone will make a very sudden improvement in the bird so be sure they cannot escape from the box.
TYPES OF BIRDS

Birds are great pets for elderly people and people who live in apartments. There are many kinds — from a few dollars to many hundreds of dollars, and from very small to pretty large. Some are easy to cage and feed; others get sick easily or are hard to feed. For your first pet choose one that is easy to care for.

Parakeet - From Australia, can learn to talk; green, blue, yellow, white: 7” long.

Zebra Finch - From Australia; gray-brown above, white below with black stripes, red bill, orange cheek spot; 4½” long.

Ringneck Dove - From Europe; light brown with pink feet. Gets very tame, but can be messy; 10” long.

Society Finch - Super-parents from Asia. Brown with white; 5” long; very quiet.

Green Singing Finch - From Africa; green above, yellow below, yellow eyebrow; glorious song, 5” long.

Cockatiel - From Australia, white, and yellow with orange cheek spot; 11” long.

Lovebird - From Africa, many kinds. This one is green, with salmon-pink head and beak; 6” long.

Button Quail - From Asia; blue back, maroon belly, black and white head. Gets very tame; 6” long.

Canary - From Europe, for experts only. Yellow, green, orange, white, with ver nice song; 7” long.
This bird cage is appropriate for small birds such as canaries and budgies.

A large parrot will appreciate this type of parrot stand. However, you will have to provide a larger catch pan underneath to help keep floor neat.
BIRD CAGE EQUIPMENT

Seed cup or treat cup

Fresh Greens Cup - plant a few seeds, place a screen on top, water, and watch them sprout.

Weekend bird feeder

Leaf Holder - Fill with small amounts of fresh spinach and remove leftovers daily.

Gravity-fed water cup

Cuttlebone - Provides minerals and helps trim beak
Place the letter of the correct definition next to each bird word.

____BILL
A. a variety of finch known for its singing ability.

____BUDGIE (BUDGERIGARS)
B. the inner feather covering bird’s need for warmth.

____FEATHERS
C. the outer covering of a seed which a bird discards.

____PARAKEET
D. an area with hot human weather.

____PERCH
E. a large tropical bird which can live to be 100+ and imitate speech.

____GRAVEL
F. a tool used for feeding, preening, and nest building.

____GIZZARD
G. cover a bird’s body and help it fly.

____PARROT
H. the correct name for Parakeets.

____TROPICAL
I. one of the many foods needed by birds to survive.

____HULLS
J. common name for Budgerigars (Budgies).

____DOWN
K. needed by all birds to help grind food in gizzard.

____SEED
L. a hardwood object provided in bird cages as a rest spot.

____CANARY
M. a bird’s organ which predigests seed.
Match the parts of the bird with the names listed below. Check the parts that are different from other animals.

_____ Crown
_____ Throat
_____ Tail Feathers
_____ Primary Flight Feathers
_____ Leg and Foot

_____ Nape
_____ Beak
_____ Secondary Flight Feathers
_____ Ear Coverts
BIRD CARE QUIZ

Fill in the blank using the correct word from the list below.

1. Birds are warm-blooded animals, unique because they ________________ and have ________________.

2. The two main bird families are ________________ and ________________.

3. Parrots can ________________ speech.

4. All birds need some sort of ________________ including stretching and flying.

5. ________________ are the portion of the seed that the bird discards.

6. The common name for Budgerigars (Budgies) is ________________.

7. Some of the birds we purchase from pet shops and breeders are native to ________________ climates.

8. A ________________ is used to provide minerals and help birds trim their beaks.

9. You should never place a bird cage in direct sunlight or ________________.

10. Pet shop owners or bird breeders will be able to help you choose the proper type of ________________ and ________________ for your pet.

11. You should clean a bird’s cage at least ________________ a week.

12. A ________________ is an object you provide for the bird to stand on. There should be several in its cage.

13. ________________ amounts of fresh fruits or hard-cooked eggs are appreciated by pet birds, but always remove leftovers ________________.

14. Clean water dishes and fill food cups ________________.

15. Taming a pet bird takes patience and time you should move ________________ around your pet, and treat it ________________.

Fly
imitate
cuttlebone
perch
daily
Parrot
food
feathers
Parakeets
Small
perching
Hulls
drafts
equipment
gently
slowly
daily
exercise
tropical	

14
**HOW MUCH WOULD A PET COST YOU?**

**Expenses**

1. **Cost of Pet**

2. **Cost of Appropriate Cage or Building Materials**

3. **Cost of Food**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kind of Food</th>
<th>Date Purchased</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. **Cost of animal care books for pet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. **Cost of veterinary care (1st check up, annual boosters, emergency)**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. **Other expenses (toys, bedding, vitamins, training)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL EXPENSE**

**AMOUNT FAMILY WILL PAY**

**AMOUNT YOU NEED**