

BASIC CARE SHEET FOR AFRICAN GREYS

FOOD

The following foods should be served fresh every day:

10% of the diet a high quality parrot seed mix

25% of the diet a combination of high quality parrot pellets (80% Roudy Bush)

10% of the diet fresh chopped seasonal fruits 2

5% of the diet fresh chopped vegetables - specifically those high in Vitamin A with a combination of cooked beans, brown rice & pasta

30% of the diet whatever is served for breakfast & dinner daily - no avocado, sugar, alcohol, or caffeine (e.g. coffee, chocolate, etc.)

In addition the following should be offered 1 Parrot Biscuit softened in warm water morning & evening until refused consistently by the baby - remove any leftovers

1 scoop Ornabac sprinkled over all food for ten days

Cuttlebone is needed to provide needed calcium and to keep the beak in condition.

An excellent resource and reference is Burgmann's [Feeding Your Pet Bird](#)



VITAMINS

We recommend Nekton S be used as a daily multivitamin. Place three small holes in the foil seal and shake several times into the water. As vitaminized water can encourage bacterial growth a water change after work or school may be deemed appropriate. Though technically not a vitamin, Ornabac helps to reduce the complications of stress related diarrhea. It is especially important to use it during those periods when the bird is under physical or psychological stressful periods such as travelling, holidays, or when the normal routine of the household is disrupted. If droppings do not return to normal within seventy-two hours contact your veterinarian immediately.

As greys have a poor absorption capacity for calcium, a twice-weekly supplementation through the use of Nekton MS A is strongly recommended. Use in the place of, and in the same manner as Nekton S. Grating a cuttlebone directly over the seed & pellets is also strongly advised.

CLEANING

Wash all dishes in hot soapy water daily. Spot clean the cage daily and monitor droppings. The entire cage should be completely sterilized once per week with Liquid Lysol and water. Perches should be scraped or sandpapered clean. Toys should be washed or sandpapered as the materials dictate.

TOYS

Provide your bird toys to play with, exchanging them frequently to keep them interesting. Look for non-toxic items and items similar to those that the bird has shown interest in. Always keep in mind the size of the bird and avoid those toys that may prove dangerous due to poor construction.



TOYS *cont.*

Birds like and need to chew and should be provided with wood, or vegetable tanned leather. Avoid products where paint may be chipped off or small non-digestible pieces may be accidentally ingested. Some dog toys and baby toys are safe and virtually indestructible as well.

Toys should be continually checked, if worn out they need to be discarded. Greys become very distrustful of new situations and toys as they age, by training the baby that new toys are fun, by continuous exposure to changing them, much of this apprehension can be successfully eliminated.

GROOMING

Bathe your bird once per week. This keeps birdie odor under control and reduces the amount of airborne particles. Use a spray bottle with fresh warm water or Neon Cockatoo Bath. Spray the pet until it is wet all over but not soaked to the bone. Your bird may prefer a shallow bowl of water, showering with you (watch the temperature), or placing its head under a slow running faucet. Have the bird's nails manicured every four to six weeks. The use of Manzanita or Cholla branches will assist in keeping the nails trim and the muscles in much better condition. The wings should be clipped after every molt. As birds molt twice a year this should be monitored closely - a pet bird with flight capacity is always in jeopardy, and has a tendency to become a behavior problem

HEALTH

Your new baby must be brought back to the store seven days after its release from the nursery to have its weight checked, as this is an extremely stressful period. We strongly advocate a full checkup by a qualified veterinarian within thirty days as well. Baby birds like children do not have fully developed immune responses and thus are more sensitive to disease during their first several years. As a parent you will become familiar with what is "normal" for your pet - if you think something is awry call your veterinarian immediately. Remember birds have developed to mask symptoms to preclude predation. Any subtle change in dietary intake, droppings, appearance, or behavior is your first signal that something may be amiss. Please do not wait for the bird to be sitting on the bottom of the cage! Good nutrition, clean water, attention to sanitation, never allowing the bird outside, and a dose of common sense will go a long way towards a long and happy life for your baby.

HAZARDS

The unique bird's respiratory system dictates that they are much more sensitive to gas and vapors than we humans, hence special cautions must be exercised in the home. The gas released when Teflon pans are heated is perhaps the most devastating as they are not only odorless but few individuals even realize the hazard exists. This is not to say that all Teflon pans need to be removed or that home cooking should be stopped, but to be aware of the situation. Using a thin layer of water when preheating will absorb the formaldehyde gas released. Should exposure to any gas or vapor occur, immediately remove the bird from the environment and air out the house. Other common household hazards include insecticides, self-cleaning Teflon ovens, solvents (including nail polish remover and paint remover), most varnishes and stains, carpet cleaners, lead based paint, and oven cleaners. Remove the animal immediately if you believe that toxic gas has been released. Always err on the side of caution, waiting to watch the bird for a sign of a reaction will only prove irreversible.


African greys are particularly sensitive to a mold (aspergillosis sp.) that grows in the Midwest due to the extreme humidity changes we experience, particularly in spring and fall when molds grow at an accelerated rate. A good quality air cleaner and dehumidifier in the household is strongly recommended, to prevent this fatal disease.



HAPPY BIRDS

Bird behavior is one of the most fascinating and rewarding experiences a pet owner can enjoy. These complex members of the family have instinctual rules that we must learn to adapt to and in exchange they will remain loving, devoted family members. We highly suggest Mattie Sue Athan's [Guide to a Well Behaved Bird](#), and Sally Blanchard's [Pet Bird Report](#) for detailed discussions. Several points must be emphasized.

- 1) Help your new baby learn how to play with toys. You cannot be home all day. If your bird has learned to play with toys, he can amuse himself.
- 2) Set a **schedule before the baby even comes home and stick with it**. Decide those times that the bird will be allowed out to play with the family and abide to it. Most birds develop behavior problems at a young age when they are played with extensively, and then left in the cage longer and longer as the newness wears off. If the bird is brought up with a schedule that will be consistent two or three years later we have found that they are much happier. Be rational, a half hour to hour in the morning, and an hour or two in the evening after work or school is terrific. The most important function however is to be consistent. Remember the best times to build a strong trusting relationship, are at those times that instinctually are most important to a flock of birds - breakfast and dinner!
- 3) Birds define social dominance by vertical placement. Never allow your pet above you or to be at the same height as your head (no shoulder perching). Someone has to be in charge of the family and your baby instinctually recognizes that as long as he remains lower, you remain dominant.
- 4) Never show excitement to a negative behavior. Upset humans are exciting and entertaining to a bird and most will seek to recreate the same response by you if rewarded with it in the first place. A nip should be dealt with by a firm no command and a look of disapproval. Shouting and returning the bird to its cage merely reinforces the behavior.
- 5) Birds communicate instinctually amongst the flock and will seek to do the same with their new human flock. Always let your pet know where you are or what you are doing - usually their calls are merely questions regarding such. Use different terms to define that you are merely leaving his room versus you are leaving for work, that it is time to get up or go to bed, or time to eat or time to play.
- 6) Birds are monogamous intelligent creatures. If Bob gets a grey for himself but tires of the responsibility within a year and his wife takes over the feeding and cleaning, Bob will not have a pet in a short time - his wife will. If the grey is to be a family pet all members of the family must also participate in the responsibilities of day-to-day care so that strong pair bonding with one individual is discouraged. All the family is then treated as equal flock members as opposed to one single mate who is favored.
- 7) Pet birds may show personality changes from time to time. Often these traced to stress in the household situation, changes in schedules, the time of year (molting or breeding season), nutrition, or disease. If behavior does not quickly return to normal please feel to contact us immediately or your avian veterinarian if you feel a clinical problem is the cause.

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- 8) Certain intelligent species of pet birds show an unfortunate tendency (five to ten percent of the total species population) for a negative behavioral characteristic known as feather plucking. African greys are one of these species. There is no definitive cause and hence no definitive cure. There are thought to be several stimuli however that will predispose a bird to pluck.
- a) Immediately have a medical examination performed by your veterinarian. Many birds begin to pluck as a secondary symptom of hidden disease or poor nutrition.
 - b) Do not show any reaction to the behavior (see point 4). If the bird has been feeling neglected this becomes an ideal method to resume getting attention.
 - c) Poor diet will often induce feather plucking. It becomes very easy to say that the bird won't eat this or that, so we just won't feed it. Return to the basics of limiting the seed and fruit and place more emphasis on high quality pellets and veggies (especially those rich in calcium and Vitamin A). Some plucking has been tied to food allergies (specifically peanuts and sunflower). If need be, reduce the dry portion of the diet to a complete but simplified pellet (Roudy Bush) that contains no additives for several weeks to ascertain if an allergen is a cause. Then start expanding the diet again, slowly, looking for the one ingredient that seems to cause the behavior.
 - d) Increase the humidity and frequency of baths - whether your bird likes them or not. Greys come from Africa with more stable humidity than that found in midwestern homes. Dry skin is itchy and irritated for one, and most birds actually will learn to enjoy baths, being clean, and the social interaction of bath time with their families. Air cleaners may also be of benefit.
 - e) Increase mental and physical stimulation. Go back to the schedules, games, and new toys, that the baby enjoyed in the past with prescribed meal times and particularly play times with plenty of exercise worked in. We all get sidetracked from time to time, and priorities can change. Some birds just have a rough time understanding that their human flock mates may have other diversions or deadlines that infringe on the flock's quality time together.
 - f) Radical changes can trigger plucking. A new infant or new home need not create a neurotic bird if introduced slowly and methodically. Pet birds seem to be particularly sensitive to an increase in the stress levels of their adoptive families. If only for their sake, attempts should be made to diffuse the situation.
 - g) Some birds may even pluck out of sexual frustration and a veterinarian's assistance should be obtained. As complex as the causes may be, many birds do stop.