

## Parrot Health

Parrots are becoming common household pets. Before purchasing a parrot, there are many things to consider to see if they will integrate well into your lifestyle. The first thing to consider is how long they live- there are many parrot species that can live up to 50 years with good diet and proper medical care. The next thing to consider is that they need space- the larger the bird- the more space they require. Parrots are often loud and messy. These behaviors are natural and non-negotiable. They will shed feathers, dander (dust depending on the species of bird), and throw their food and bits of toys all over the floor and furniture. They require A LOT of human interaction and attention. Finally, expense must also be considered.

There are 3 basic elements involved in a parrot's daily life: nutrition (eating and foraging for food), social interaction (time spent in a flock setting, vocalizing, preening, and displaying), and maintenance activities (preening, bathing, and sleeping). In the wild, most of the day is taken up by nutrition and foraging. In captivity, these elements become imbalanced (food is now easy to find). Therefore, more time must be spent in the other two areas of life – maintenance and social interaction.

Diet is one of the most important aspects of keeping your bird healthy. In general, most parrots should receive a pelleted diet (few species exceptions like lorikeets etc). Fresh vegetables and fruits may be supplemented to offer some variety. Examples of healthy vegetables are: dark green vegetables (silverbeet, broccoli, beans, peas, cabbage, peppers) and some yellow vegetables (sweet corn, carrot, sweet potato, pumpkin). Fruits should be limited to papaya and mango. Any other fruits can be given occasionally as treats or for training purposes. It is also important to not just GIVE your bird its food, but to hide it in different places within the cage so that it mimics foraging behavior in the wild.

Habitat is equally important. Keeping a bird in a cage that is too small, unclean, or lacking in objects to play with will cause stress which results in an unhealthy bird. When it comes to the size of the cage- when in doubt, GO BIGGER.

Birds are like any other animals; they should receive a yearly check up from a veterinarian. At this yearly visit, weight will be monitored and diet/behavioral problems can be discussed.