Pet bird

Information Pack

Owning a bird can be a hugely rewarding experience, but they're also a big and potentially long commitment - some parrots can live for **over 50 years**. Owners should be willing to commit to providing the best care for the lifetime of their pet. Please consider adopting a bird from a reputable rescue centre.

Many birds are very intelligent, and they lead busy lives in the wild - finding food, flying and living in groups. That's often hard to replicate in captivity, so they can be difficult to look after. Different birds will have different needs, so it's very important to do your research to find out what your species of bird requires.

Under the Animal Health and Welfare (Scotland) Act 2006, pet owners are legally obliged to care for their pets by meeting their **five basic welfare needs**:

- suitable environment
- suitable diet
- ability to behave normally
- appropriate companionship
- be protected from suffering, injury and disease.

This pack provides information on how to meet these needs, and where to go for support if needed.

1. Environment - creating the ideal home for your bird

The best thing you can do for your bird is to give them somewhere to live where they can safely do the things they'd naturally do in the wild, such as flying, climbing, perching, hiding, feeding and roosting.

An aviary is the best way to do this. You'll need to protect your birds from extreme weather but being able to experience sunshine, light winds and

rain will keep them mentally stimulated and in good condition. Remember to seek permission from your landlord before installing an aviary.

A cage is another option, but they will also need to be given space to fly freely as birds are not meant to be kept in small spaces. They need at least **6 hours outside their cage every day** (e.g. interacting with you and enjoying other activities such as playing with toys). They will need plenty of space in which to fly freely and safely indoors. Keeping your bird in an indoor cage for too long can make them bored and frustrated, which can lead to problem behaviour.

What to put in your aviary or cage

Inside the aviary or cage, give your bird plenty of things to do.

- Your bird needs to use their feet in different ways, to stop them getting a nasty infection called bumblefoot.
- Make sure there are plenty of natural wooden perches of different sizes, shapes, thicknesses and textures. There should be enough of them so that all the birds in the cage can perch at the same time.
- Put your perches in places that encourage your bird to fly.
- Fix perches at different angles, so that they can climb.
- Add swings to help your bird exercise.
- Add some toys, such as foraging toys with food in them.
- Change the toys from time to time to keep your bird interested.

Keeping it light

In your bird's cage, aviary or indoor flight area, you need to provide lighting that is as close as possible to daylight. Many bird species benefit in terms of health, feather condition and vitamin absorption from specialist lighting from UVA and UVB lamps. Please see this page for more information.

Please see this page for more information on providing the best environment for your bird, including introducing your bird to an aviary for the first time and what to do if your bird can't fly.

2. Diet - providing a suitable diet for your bird

It is important to give your bird a variety of high-quality, healthy food as it plays a crucial role in their health, happiness and overall well-being. Most birds should be fed a balanced and varied diet, **consisting of around 60-70% nutritionally complete pellets, and the rest made up of seasonal fruits, vegetables, seeds, foraged flowers and whole nuts.**

Birds also need constant access to fresh, clean water from a suitable water drinker.

Different species require different types of diets, so please find more information here or speak to your vet if you are unsure what is best for your bird.

3. Behaviour - ensuring your bird is able to behave normally

Knowing the meaning of your bird's behaviour can help you understand their needs, so you can keep them safe and happy. For example, if they're distressed, some birds will show this through problem behaviours such as self-plucking, loud noises or swearing, aggressive biting, jealous preference for one person and damaging household items. If they're frightened, they may fly off and crash-land. To find out more information please visit the RSPCA website.

Birds who are kept as pets can't really behave as they would naturally in the wild but there is plenty you can do as an owner to give them the best possible life. Your bird will cope better with life as a pet if you train them to do a few simple things.

Let them fly

Some people worry about letting their pet birds fly freely. They think they might fly away when outside or fly into things and hurt themselves when indoors, so they ask to get their wings clipped. But **wing clipping is bad for your bird** and doesn't always help anyway. Find more information on why wing clipping is bad here.

How to keep your bird safe whilst allowing them to fly freely:

- Train your bird to accept simple commands, such as flying to or from you on request. You should be able to teach your bird to step on and off your hand or a small hand-held stick when you ask them to. A bird who can do these simple things is much easier to look after when out of their cage.
- Microchip or ring your bird so that, if they do fly away, they can be easily identified and returned to you when they are found.
- Keep doors and windows shut when they are out of their cage.

Foraging for food

In the wild, birds naturally forage for their food. Helping to give them a similar experience in captivity can make all the difference to your bird's wellbeing and will help stop any abnormal behaviours.

- You can buy foraging toys made for indoor birds, such as pipe feeders or puzzle feeders.
- You can buy seasonally available wild fruits and flowers for your bird.
- For homemade foraging toys, roll up bits of food in newspaper, push it into cardboard tubes and then wedge them in your bird's cage bars for them to chew on.
- Giving smaller meals, more often and in different places, can also help mimic feeding in the wild. You can also try scattering their food or changing to different sized pellets.
- Pinecones are good for dotting tasty bits of natural peanut butter or honey with seeds in the crevices.
- Food frozen in ice blocks will give parrots the chance to chip away at the ice to get to the food.

4. Companionship - making sure your bird has appropriate company

Most birds are social animals **who do better with the company of other birds**. But you will need to manage this very carefully, depending on the type of bird, their previous experience, their flying ability and the type of housing you can give them.

Please visit the RSPCA website for more information such as which birds can live together, how to introduce birds to an aviary for the first time and how to introduce pet birds to each other.

As your bird's main carer, you should have a positive, friendly relationship with your bird. They should know you well and like to be with you.

5. Health - making sure your bird is protected from pain, suffering, injury and disease

To keep your bird's feathers in good condition, give them a good spray with a fine mist of room-temperature water from a plant sprayer every few days in the morning. This will encourage them to preen (groom) which helps them keep clean.

Birds will hide signs of illness or pain, so it’s important to get help from a vet as soon as you notice any changes in their behaviour. Even if it’s just a small change, they may be more seriously ill than they look. Not all vets are able to treat birds, so research in advance and ensure you register with one that can.

It is very helpful for your bird's health to train them to get your bird used to a carrier and to be handled for health checks (including weight checks and claw trims).

If you own a parrot please visit The Parrot Society for further information, as parrots have complex needs to ensure their welfare is met.

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Support

for bird owners

- **Scottish SPCA** run Pet Aid to support people and their pets. You can find cost of living advice on their website here.

- **Blue Cross** run a Pet Loss Support service so that no one has to face the pain of losing a pet alone. The service is free and confidential and can be accessed via emailing plsmail@bluecross.org.uk or calling 0800 096 6606. You can find more information here.

- It is wise to have a plan should you ever become unable to care for your bird, a family/friend might be able to help. Pet Fostering Service Scotland is a service available if you are unable to look after your pet through illness, homelessness or domestic abuse and cannot arrange any alternative care. Please phone 0344 811 9909 to access the service or email fosterenquiry@pfss.org.uk to arrange a call back.