

# Animal welfare

The keeping, breeding and exhibiting of Budgerigars can be an excellent and rewarding hobby. Regular adequate exercise, in a clean and well fed environment, is a prerequisite for healthy, vigorous, and fit birds. However, if their care and conditions are not adequate or appropriate, a number of potential health and welfare issues can arise as a result.

The following guidelines may be of assistance with your introduction to this wonderful hobby:

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## **Health checks**

Budgerigars often display a 'preservation instinct' which means that they can sometimes appear healthy despite being very ill. Veterinary advice should always be sought immediately if you suspect that your bird is not well.

The following signs of illness can be subtle in birds:

- appearance of droppings (quality and quantity)
- amount of food or water consumed
- behaviour (eg ability to fly)
- appearance or posture (eg sleepy or fluffed-up)
- bodyweight (loss)
- rate and depth of breathing

Particular signs that indicate a health problem are:

- discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak
- excess loss of, or soiled or misshapen feathers
- inappetence (failure to eat) and weight loss
- soiled vents
- enlargements or swelling of body parts
- vomiting or regurgitation
- injury or bleeding
- dull or closed eyes
- lameness, wounded or swollen feet
- lumps or wounds on the body
- overgrown beak or nails
- stains or scabs around eyes or nostrils.

## **Budgerigar feeding guide:**

- Always provide an adequate supply of a clean quality budgerigar seed mix. A cheaper mix may have a higher percentage of less edible seed(s) and /or husk.
- Spoiled seed, due to mould, age or faeces, is the one of the most common cause of poor breeding performance and recurrent illness in the budgerigar aviary.
- Provide a varied diet - you should feed your bird a combination of both a high quality commercial food and some natural foods. e.g. fresh fruit, vegetables, seeding grasses, native flowers, green foods etc that are appropriate and safe. Check with your vet and experienced aviculturist to ensure all foods offered are appropriate and non-toxic.
- Food should be fresh and clean, and stored in a way that prevents deterioration or spoilage.
- Food containers should be checked daily to ensure there is an adequate supply. Feed should be changed regularly, rather than topped up.
- Placing a cuttlefish bone in your bird's cage will provide important trace minerals. Mixed grit and a source of calcium should be available for those bird species requiring it.
- Ensure fresh clean water is available at all times at a temperature and quality that meets the birds' needs and that the bird will drink. Water should be changed daily and receptacles kept clean.
- Please do not feed your budgerigars avocado, coffee or chocolate as these are highly toxic to birds, among other substances.

## **Supplements:**

- Vitamins specific to Budgerigars can be administered at the recommended dose.
- Grits, shell and stone types, need to be fed to help Budgerigars digest their food. Remember that birds don't have teeth to grind their food, but use the grits they swallow to grind food in their gizzard.
- Probiotics
- Minerals

## **Parasite control**

Budgerigars can be affected by both internal parasites such as intestinal worms and external parasites such as lice and mites. Factors such as the number of birds kept, the birds' housing system, exposure to new or wild birds and the climate, among other factors can influence the worming product and regime recommended. So please consult your vet directly for more information about parasite control in pet birds.

## **Vermin**

Rodents such as mice and rats are carriers of disease that cause more expense and harm to your prized stud of budgerigars than is first obvious. Rodents not only feed where your birds feed, but also foul the seed making its consumption very, very harmful to budgerigars. Given a chance Rodents will actually eat newly hatched budgerigars. Aviaries should be built in such a manner that denies these animals access.

## **Moult**

At certain times of year budgerigars go through a natural process of replacing their old feathers with new ones. After a budgerigars first moult at 10 to 12 weeks of age their feather replacement process can be quite variable. Sometimes they lose a few feathers at a time and at other times they cast a lot. The process generally takes from 2 to 8 weeks to complete. A full moult taxes the budgerigars system quite heavily, so it is very important that adequate nutrition is maintained during this period.

## **Weather**

Budgerigars should be protected from extreme hot and cold temperatures and other weather extremes. Any aviary or cage which is exposed to the weather should be constructed so that all budgerigars have the ability to perch in a place that is sheltered from wind, rain and constant direct sunlight.

## **Ventilation**

Budgerigars need adequate ventilation but also protection from draughts and fumes. For indoor housing, at least half of the largest side of the cage should consist of a metal grill, netting or mesh. For outdoor housing to provide shelter against prevailing winds, a solid material or cladding on the roof and walls should be used, and should cover at least one-third of the total area, running continuously around three walls. It is recommended that at least three-quarters of the area of one wall should be constructed from open-weave mesh.

## **Noise**

Budgerigars need to be protected from loud or sudden noises as they can be easily startled or stressed. A radio, on low, playing your favourite music tends to help by creating an happy environment for yourself and your birds.

## **Housing requirements:**

Birds require sufficient horizontal and vertical space to allow for natural free movement and flight. Please note that birds usually do not fly straight up and down vertically (like a helicopter) therefore cages that are narrow with a lot of vertical space but not a lot of horizontal space often do not provide adequate or suitable dimensions for pet birds.

Aviaries' and cages need to include the following:

- Provide protection from the elements with ease of access
- be clean and hygienic
- provide a variety of different diameter perches with enough space for all birds. Perches should be rough and made of natural, non-toxic wood to help prevent overgrown toe nails. Sandpaper should be avoided as this may lead to footpad abrasions. Perches should be placed apart to encourage flight but not placed directly above other perches or food and drink containers to avoid contamination
- provide environmental enrichment for mental and physical stimulation
- provide an adequate number of feed and water stations to meet the requirements of all birds
- provide sufficient room for nesting boxes - if birds are used for breeding
- be predator-proof. Predators should not be able to gain entry to the aviary. This can be achieved by installing concrete barriers or galvanized steel or mesh (or a similar resistant material), buried to a depth of 300mm
- be escape-proof
- be simple structures to enable birds to fly freely with clear lines of flight and allow for easy cleaning.

## **Wire caging**

Due to the presence of zinc and lead, galvanised wire may be toxic, especially to budgerigars. The risk of poisoning can be reduced by thoroughly brushing the wire, removing loose metal flakes and 'dags' of galvanised iron that could be swallowed. New wire should be washed with a mild acidic solution such as vinegar followed by a rinse with water. Weathering the new cage for twelve months also helps reduce the risk. Ideally, leave new wire mesh to weather naturally before using it to construct the cage.

Regardless of these precautions, wire chewing birds need to be regularly monitored for signs of poisoning. The selection of wire gauge size should be based on the birds' potential ability to chew through the wire, and the wire's suitability in deterring predators and vermin.

### **Minimum cage size guidelines:**

1. The minimum width of a cage for a pair of birds should be three times their combined wing span.
2. The minimum length of a cage should permit at least 2 wing beats (the more the better) between perches. Perches should be placed far enough from the ends of the cage to allow the birds to turn around on the perches without scraping their tail feathers against the cage.
3. The minimum height of a cage should be three times the length from head to tip of tail of the largest bird to be confined in it, and should be increased accordingly if more than one pair or more than one species is kept in the cage.
4. The cage should be constructed or positioned such that at least one perch is at standing shoulder height (for the sense of security of the birds).

5. The cage should provide room for the bird to fly between perches in an approximately horizontal plane.
6. There should be sufficient room for the bird to fully extend its wings and to fly without damaging wings or feathers on the walls or ceiling of the cage.

### **List of Victorian Avian Veterinarians**

<b>Dr Matthew Gosbell</b> <b>BVSV,MACVSC (Avian Health)</b> <b>Springvale Animal Hospital</b> <b>570 Springvale rd,</b> <b>Springvale South,3172</b> <b>Ph 03 9546 5022</b>	<b>Dr Stacey Gells</b> <b>BVSc.MRCVs</b> <b>Melbourne Bird Veterinary Clinic</b> <b>1 George St</b> <b>Scoresby,3179</b> <b>Ph 03 9764 9000</b>	<b>Dr Roger Carmondy</b> <b>Moama Veterinary Clinic</b> <b>1 Meninyah St</b> <b>Moama, NSW.2731</b> <b>Ph 03 5480 6071</b>
<b>Dr Pat McWhirter,</b> <b>BVSc FACVc (Avian Health)</b> <b>128 Highbury Rd</b> <b>Burwood, 3125</b> <b>PH 03 9808 9011</b>	<b>Dr Cameron Wood</b> <b>BVSc MACVc</b> <b>169 Dawson St</b> <b>Brunswick West,3055</b> <b>Ph 03 9387 6166</b>	<b>Dr Phil Sacks</b> <b>BSc MACVs</b> <b>128 Highbury Rd</b> <b>Burwood,3125</b> <b>03 9808 9011</b> <b><a href="http://www.birdclinic.net">www.birdclinic.net</a></b>