

Birds Can Make Great Pets with the Right Care

Birds make wonderful pets and caring for them can be extremely rewarding for the whole family. There are currently over half a million pet birds in the UK¹. In addition to being beautiful to look at, birds are inquisitive, intelligent and have a great capacity for learning. Most are highly sociable, eager to learn and can develop strong bonds with their owners.

There are many bird species and they are all different! Small birds include canaries, finches and budgerigars. Medium birds range from parakeets and lovebirds to cockatiels. There are also larger parrots of which the most popular is the African grey parrot.



Most birds would prefer a companion of their own but if kept alone will often bond closely with their owner. The enjoyment of caring for pet birds can last a lifetime, with larger birds sometimes living for 60 years or more. Smaller birds can live for around 15 years.

Examples of pet birds based on size

Small Birds



Canaries



Finches



Budgies

Medium Birds



Cockatiels



Lovebirds



Parakeets



African Grey

Is it difficult to keep pet birds?

Along with the enjoyment of bird ownership comes responsibility – as with any pet. Each type of bird has their own nutritional and housing requirements and it is important for potential pet owners to make sure they can provide the right environment before bringing home any pet birds. Due to their size and housing requirements, birds can sometimes be enjoyed by those unable to care for larger pets such as cats and dogs.

Can birds eat the same food as humans?

A balanced diet is very important for pet birds and it's nearly impossible to achieve this using human food or scraps. Bird food products are usually made using careful formulations based on studies. For example food choices and feeding habits of a particular species in the wild can provide insight into appropriate diet for them as pets.² Owners are encouraged to supplement commercial bird diets with low energy-density, fresh foods to provide stimulation and foraging opportunities.

It is also important to know some human foods may contain components that are dangerous or poisonous for a bird. For example birds cannot digest lactose, so milk, cheese and other dairy products might make them ill. Avocados, onions, chocolate, red meat and processed foods should not be given to birds.

Do all birds eat the same thing?

The range of birds is enormous and they all have different dietary requirements. Most companion birds (hard-bills) are seed eaters. These are canaries, budgies, finches, cockatiels etc. Soft-bills, which include mynahs, ornamental starlings, thrushes, blackbirds and pekin robins, eat mainly non-seed diets including insects, fruit, flowers leaves and nectar.

PFMA members produce species-specific diets plus supplements and treats, to make it much easier to ensure your pet bird receives a balanced diet. Always look for high quality products from responsible outlets that can provide nutritional advice.

It's vital to remember that birds are selective feeders. Given the chance to select from, they will choose their favorite food only. So providing a variety is important for a balanced diet. If your pet turns up its beak at a particular food, don't give up! Keep offering it and you should find that eventually they will eat a more varied diet, as they do in the wild.

¹ PFMA Pet Population 2015

² Koutsos, Elizabeth A., Kevin D. Matson, and Kirk C. Klasing. "Nutrition of birds in the order Psittaciformes: a review." *Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery* 15.4 (2001): 257-275.



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More information can be found at www.pfma.org.uk/indoor-birds

For more nutrition advice you can speak to bird-specialist (avian) vets, **reputable manufacturers** and retailers and **The Parrot Society**.



Are seed-based diets a viable option for pet birds?

While seeds alone are a popular choice, they may not provide all the nutrition your pet bird needs. Being selective feeders, it is important to control portion sizes and read packaging carefully and adapt quantities for your pet. To ensure your bird consumes a balanced diet, follow its feeding guidelines and make sure your bird eats all the elements of their food portion (to avoid selective feeding). A seed-based diet, if correctly blended by **responsible manufacturers** and fed correctly, will provide the majority of the nutrients necessary to keep your bird fit and healthy.

It is important to make sure that the blend is suitable for the bird species you are keeping. Seed-based tonic mixtures can be used to supplement the diet and should be fed according to the manufacturer's guidelines. Cuttlefish bones (for calcium) and millet sprays will not only add additional calcium and carbohydrates respectively but will provide entertainment for smaller species such as budgerigars and parakeets. There are many supplements available on the market in both mineral and water-soluble forms which can also be used to supplement the diet.

When choosing seed based diets, make sure that the seed is clean and fresh and if any fruit is used then this has not gone sticky and sugary.

How about Pellet Feeds?

Pelleted feeds are usually complete diets, which means they have the necessary vitamins and minerals added to them. Pellets should also be chosen based on their suitability for the bird species you keep, and fed according to manufacturer's guidelines. It is also possible to give them both pellet and seed mixes, while additional vegetables, fruits and greens should also be provided to them daily.

Aren't treat sticks full of sugar?

In the wild, birds eat millet sprays fresh from the branches, and millet sprays can offer both a source of entertainment and a healthy treat for pet birds within the home. Other treats, such as 'seed sticks' are also widely available and provide vitamins and minerals but also are a great source of activity for the birds. As with all additional sources of nutrition, care should be taken to avoid any over feeding of your pet. This means that treats should form a small part of their diet (approximately 10% of their calorie intake).

To find out whether your bird is in a healthy shape please visit our website to download a Bird Size-O-Meter and watch our video on how to assess your bird's body condition score. <http://www.pfma.org.uk/bird-size-o-meter/>

Are the fruits & nuts used in bird food out of date, rejected stock?

Bird food products made by PFMA members are strictly regulated and governed by **EU legislation for animal feed**. The industry uses products from the human food chain, which are surplus to requirements. Many **PFMA members** also have their own in-house safety and quality assurance and supplier schemes, exceeding legislative standards.



³ Brightsmith, Donald J. "Nutritional levels of diets fed to captive Amazon parrots: does mixing seed, produce, and pellets provide a healthy diet?." *Journal of avian medicine and surgery* 26.3 (2012): 149-160.

