

Bird-safe

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"Bird-safe" (alternatively "bird-proof") is a term used to describe objects and surroundings that are safe for captive birds and it is most commonly associated with pet birds. Birds are smaller than humans and other pets and therefore are considerably more vulnerable to dangers. Bird-safe environments are particularly important for parrots as they are inquisitive agile climbers and they have a tendency to chew objects.

==Household dangers==

Household dangers are one of the most easily avoidable kinds of dangers for birds. Common bird dangers include other pets, ceiling fans, ammonia based cleaners (glass cleaners), hot surfaces such as heaters and stoves, mirrors, electrical cords, open windows and doors, aerosol sprays, chemicals/pesticides, filled tubs, sinks, or open toilets, terrycloth towels (toe tangle), and certain kinds of applicants as well as lubricants. In some of the older buildings - roughly those built before the 1970s - the paint can also include a certain amount of lead, which can be dangerous to birds if they swallow it.

Also a pet bird should never be let out of its cage unattended, or else it can contact objectionable materials in its surroundings; such mishaps can also be avoided by keeping the bird's surroundings clear and free from dangerous objects. Most common household dangers can be avoided by proper supervision of the bird when it is outside its cage and by wing clipping, a bird that is not flighted will not try to fly through a window or mirror or land in a bathtub full of hot water.

Birds should not be left alone on the floor or allowed to wander on the floor unless being closely supervised. Captive birds do not see people as a source of danger and can be accidentally stepped on, or rolled on by wheeled chairs. Even a trustworthy bird should not be left alone out of its cage unless the entire room bird-safe: a bird that slips and falls from its cage or playgym might try to climb back up by using the holes in an electrical outlet, or decide to chew the toxic varnish from between the boards of a wood floor.

==Cage safety==

Except for cages constructed of stainless steel, almost all finch and parrot cages have some kind of covering on the wires, e.g., a powder coating, which not only protects the bird from bare metal, but also keeps the metals from rusting in reaction to air. Exposure to metals such as lead, zinc, tin, or nickel can cause heavy metal poisoning in captive birds, so the cage is less safe when this coating is worn. Hardware, such as screws or wiring, may also be a source of toxic metals. While some groups recommend washing the zinc mesh of outdoor aviaries with vinegar to guard against zinc poisoning, others advocate that zinc should never be used near birds--especially parrots--as they not only chew on everything (birds may detach and consume particles of toxic metal), but climb

using their mouths. Before buying items such as bowls, toys, perches, playgyms, cages and other accessories, it is important to check the items for toxic metals, and to that end, stainless steel dishes and hardware, while more expensive, are considered safe and worth the higher expense.

Cubic cages are preferred over round cages because a round cage lacks a safe corner for a bird to hide when frightened or alarmed. Round cages may also affect a bird's psychology; when kept in round cages birds often exhibit an unusual and repetitive stereotypical behavior whereby they twirl their heads and look round-and-round at the domed ceiling. The bar positioning in round cages can also affect a bird's feathers-- particularly the tail feathers.

Bar-spacing is an important consideration. There should be no possibility of a bird getting its head stuck between the bars, or getting its head through then injuring its neck while panicking. Some caging that is safe for large birds can pose a toe-entrapment risk to small birds such as finches or parakeets. For example, a collapsing cage with hinges cannot trap a macaw's enormous toes, but the small spaces of the hinge can catch the nail of a tiny parrotlet and cause it to break a leg or hang by its foot until it dies of stress/dehydration.

Another point to consider in bird cages are the toys with which the bird will play. The toys should be constructed of material non-toxic to birds (marketed as "bird-safe"). The toys should not contain lead and/or zinc. If a toy contains colored leather and/or wood, it must be vegetable tanned or colored with food coloring. If a toy contains rope, it should be of the safest material possible; Supreme Cotton Rope and Paulie Rope are considered the best. In some cases "vegetable tanned leather" may include the harmful chemical formaldehyde, so purchasing leather pieces and toys from bird stores or bird catalogs is a safer bet than contacting a leather company.

Toys should not be an entrapment hazard. "Jack chain," clips that have a keyhole shape, and loops of chain or rope that can entrap the head or torso of a bird should be avoided. When cotton or sisal rope becomes frayed it can pose an entanglement hazard to toes and must be replaced or repaired.

Many toys can be disassembled by birds into dangerous components. For example, a popular foraging toy is a round metal cage that screws into a chain for hanging. With extended play the bird may unscrew the toy and get squashed by the heavy metal cage as it falls. Spinning treat mazes can also come unscrewed in a similar manner. Large wooden chains can be chewed through causing the lower part of the chain to fall potentially injuring a bird. Small plastic, acrylic, or glass bits can be snapped into shards by powerful beaks of birds larger than those the toy is intended for. Less expensive rope perches may be glued into their plastic ends, and can pop out unexpectedly after long use or having been washed. It is important to keep toy and accessories maintained or disposed of if they are damaged. Always observe a bird interacting with a new toy until you are sure it does not pose a hazard.

==Safe plants and foods==

There are also many plants that can be harmful to pet birds. In some cases an entire plant can be harmful to a bird and in some cases only some parts of certain plants can be dangerous to birds [<http://www.flyinggems.com/BirdAdvice/toxicplants.htm>].

Toxic foods are foods that can cause allergies and/or health problems in birds. Avocados, alcohol, chocolate, milk, foods high in salt and/or sugar and fatty foods should be avoided. Any food considered junk food for humans should also be considered junk food for pet birds.

Guacamole contains avocados and can cause almost instant death in birds. Seed-only diets are not healthy for most pet birds, contrary to popular belief. Seeds are high in fat and low in nutrients, qualities that can lead to obesity or malnutrition. Your bird will live much longer if you feed it a healthier diet of pellets, fresh vegetables and fruit, and only using seeds as occasional treats.

Salty foods are considered toxic as bird species that do not live on the shore or at sea have very low salt in their diet. Salty food can lead to a condition known as salt toxicosis.

Foods that contain the mineral iron can be toxic to certain species, such as toucans where iron-storage disease can come about from the consumption of such foods. Special "low iron softbill diets" are available for iron-sensitive species.

Birds are not equipped to digest milk so milk and milk products are considered a poor choice by some keepers. However, cheese and yogurt can add helpful bacteria to a bird's digestive system and offer a calcium boost, for example, when a female laying eggs. Some captive birds enjoy milk products and show no ill effect from eating or drinking them.

Many toxic plant and food lists are overly cautious, or have additions that are based on rumor instead of fact. They are also not accurate for all species. What is accurate for a macaw may not be the same for a Gouldian finch or a toucanet. In the example of iron sensitive species above, some store-bought bird foods could be toxic. Some lists state that all parts of the cherry tree are toxic, yet feral parrots in San Francisco have been observed feeding on cherry blossoms.

[http://www.markbittner.net/parrot_pages/faq/foods.html Feral Parrot Observations by Mark Bittner] In her book "The Parrot Who Owns Me" (2001) author Joanna Burger states that she gives her Amazon parrot chocolates a few at a time as a treat. While this DOES NOT mean keepers should feed their birds chocolate and cherry pits, it gives an idea that many toxic lists discourage keepers from giving their birds pleasant experience for fear of killing their bird at every turn. It is unlikely that snapping off a few cherry or oak tree twigs will lead to the death of a large parrot.

==Toxicity of overheated non-stick surfaces==

Many reports from bird owners claim that their pet birds died after the owners used non-stick cookware around the birds. The cause of this phenomenon is polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE), a chemical used in the manufacture of industrial non-stick coatings. When they are overheated, the resulting combination of particles and gasses emitted from the surface is extremely toxic when inhaled for only a short time. PTFE becomes dangerous when the surface is heated over 300 degrees Celsius (572 degrees Fahrenheit). [<http://www.fluoridealert.org/pesticides/teflon.effects.lung.htm> Lung Effects. Teflon (PTFE: polytetrafluoroethylene). CAS No. 9002-84-0. Fluoride Action Network Pesticide Project. The most common source of these non-stick coatings is DuPont's Teflon, but there are other brands that produce non-stick coatings. PTFE-coated surfaces should be used very carefully, or perhaps not used at all, in households that contain birds, as there are no warnings on these products about the dangers.

Other sources of PTFE include wafflemakers, some irons, and some self-cleaning ovens, among other things. People using PTFE-coated surfaces in a household that has birds should make sure that the stove is never left unattended while something is cooking on it, and the kitchen in particular should be well ventilated. A pet bird should not be kept near the kitchen due to the proximity of these fumes when cookware is overheated.

==Introducing your bird to strangers==

Strangers to a bird include new people and animals. It is recommended that a stranger bird be quarantined before being kept in a cage with another bird.

Some people don't know the sensitivity of a bird and handle it recklessly, this is especially with younger children who may be too excited to handle a bird, therefore first tell a stranger that a bird is frail and sensitive and that it needs to be handled in the gentlest way.

Well-bred house pets such as cats and dogs will usually have little trouble adapting to a pet bird. However a pet bird should never be left open alone and unattended around a cat or dog since one doesn't know what the animal may be planning to do the bird in the owner's absence.

== Disease Carriers ==

Strangers to newly-bought birds include birds of other species or even of the same species. Some people have found to their dismay and cost that although newly bought birds that they put through quarantine looked healthy, the new birds caused birds of certain species of their stock to become ill and even die when they were mixed together. That is what birds known as disease carriers can end up doing to your stock. Mixing newly bought birds with your established stock is fraught with danger, no matter how healthy the new birds look even after any number of days in quarantine. Astor, William (2008) [<http://astorwilliam.tripod.com/id9.html/> Disease Carriers]

The best way to explain to beginners what disease carriers are all about is by giving them an example. This is a true story.

A pair of Black faced Fire finches were bought and placed in quarantine. Afterwards due to the fact that they looked really healthy, they were released in an aviary containing Pintail parrot finches, Bamboo Parrot finches, Gouldians, Munias and Waxbills. In three days all the Parrot finches and Gouldians were dead. Autopsies revealed that they had died of Avian Pox and that the pair of Black faced Fire finches were carrying the virus even though they were not showing any signs of illness. The parrot finches and the Gouldians were not genetically immune to Avian Pox and they perished. The Munias and Waxbills and the Black faced Fire finches were immune and they survived.

The most incredible aspect about this story is that the aviculturist in question was a very experienced finch breeder and his wife was a veterinary science lecturer at a university. And still this simple mistake was made. All too often even educated and experienced people forget all about the danger of disease carriers and are completely taken in by the apparent health of the new birds that they have bought due to their activity level or tight featheredness.