

COMMERCE AND EMPLOYMENT DEPARTMENT

GUIDANCE FOR THE WELFARE OF PET BIRDS

MADE UNDER SECTION 13(6) OF THE ANIMAL WELFARE (GUERNSEY) ORDINANCE, 2012

GUIDANCE – FOOD AND WATER

Introduction

A variety of species of birds are kept in captivity. This document is only intended to provide general guidance and owners should ensure that they have a good knowledge of the specific feeding, environmental and any other requirements of the types of bird that they keep in captivity. Pet birds are defined as all seed and nectar feeding birds that can be kept legally in a state of captivity, and spend all or part of their time housed in cages. Other types of birds, including insectivorous and birds of prey, waterfowl, ratites, pigeons used for racing, poultry, pheasants or quail used for the commercial production of meat or eggs, have specific needs and are not covered by these guidelines.

Nomenclature

Aviary - A large building used to accommodate birds in captivity separate from the owners home.

Cage – A wire cage used to accommodate birds usually inside their owner home.

Food

A varied diet that meets the needs of the species of bird that is kept should be provided and the diet alternated regularly between fresh fruit, vegetables and seeding grasses appropriate to the bird species. Suitable pelleted food can also be used.

Food should be fresh and clean.

Food should be provided in containers, except where direct feeding from the ground is the specific requirement of a particular species.

Food should be not be placed below perches or where it is likely to be spoiled or contaminated.

Food containers should be checked at least daily to ensure there is an adequate supply. Uneaten feed should be discarded regularly, rather than being topped up.

Mixed grit and a source of ground up digestible minerals and indigestible minerals should be provided for those species requiring it. The digestible mineral is usually limestone which is calcium carbonate and is a source of calcium. Digestible mineral can also be made from cuttlefish bones or from ground up oyster shells. Indigestible mineral is made from sand and ground up sandstone and is used by the bird to grind ingested food within the gizzard to access nutrients.

Most parrots are able to remove the husks and shells with their beaks and do not require grit in their diets. Most canaries and finches are able to remove the shells with their beaks and do not normally require grit to help in digestion.

Any bird fed a pelleted diet does not need grit.

In the case of doubt, advice on diet should be sought from an experienced aviculturist or a veterinary surgeon.

Water

Clean fresh drinking water must be available to all the birds that are kept at all times and all water containers should be refilled daily.

Water containers should not be located in direct sunlight nor should they be placed in positions where they are likely to become contaminated by faeces.

Where birds are kept in an outside enclosure, water must be checked in cold weather to make sure that it has not frozen.

Where required water should be provided for bathing and swimming to fulfil biological and behavioural requirements. This must be cleaned regularly to avoid accumulation of detritus and overgrowth of potentially hazardous micro-organisms.

GUIDANCE – LIVING ENVIRONMENT

Housing

Accommodation should :

- a) be escape proof and vermin and predator proof. In the case of an aviary it is necessary to install concrete barriers or galvanised wire buried to a depth of 300mm to keep vermin and predators out.
- b) draught-proof, but well ventilated. In the case of an aviary to provide shelter against prevailing winds it is necessary to ensure that at least one-third of the total floor area is protected by vertical walls and a roof which are constructed of a solid material. The shelter should run seamlessly around three walls. It is recommended that at least three-quarters of the area of one wall should be constructed from open mesh,
- c) in the case of multiple occupancy,
 - i) provide a means of escape from or avoidance of other cage birds,
 - ii) provide a variety of different diameter perches with sufficient space for all housed birds, and

- iii) an enough feed and water stations for of all housed birds, and
- iv) only compatible species should be accommodated together.
- d) provide a choice of roosting sites suitable for the birds that are housed and enabling them to find a place that is sheltered from the wind, rain and direct sunlight.
- e) be free from hazards such as sharp objects and constructed with materials that are not hazardous to birds or which have not been painted or treated with substances that are hazardous to birds,
- f) ideally provide natural light in the living enclosure, but also provide areas of protection from direct sunlight sufficient for all the birds present, and
- g) allow continuous access to food and water, and
- h) when outside have aviary doors which do not open directly to the outside, but open into an enclosed area with a second door, and
- i) where there are multiple aviary's any surface drains must not allow fluids from one aviary to run into another, and
- j) in the case of an aviary have a solid, impervious floor so that it can be kept clean, and
- k) if vermin traps and bait stations are used they should be positioned outside the aviary, and

Size of Cages and Aviaries

Guidance Table 1 – recommended minimum indoor or suspended cage dimensions

Size of bird (approx. length in cm)	Minimum Floor Area (Square. cm.)	Number of Birds	Minimum Height (cm)	Increased floor area for each additional bird. (square cm)
10	1,000	2	34	500
20	1,600	2	34	800
30	5,000	2	70	2,500
40	8,000	2	70	5,000
50	22,500	2	100	7,500
90	36,000	2	120	12,000

Guidance Table 2 – recommended minimum outdoor aviary dimensions

Size of bird (approx. length in cm)	Minimum Floor Area (square cm)	Number of Birds	Minimum Height (cm)	Increased floor area for each additional bird. (square cm)
10	3,700	2	180	1,800
20	7,200	2	180	3,600
30	10,000	2	180	5,000
40	15,000	2	180	7,500
50	25,000	2	180	12,500
90	50,000	2	180	25,000

The tables above provide the recommended minimum dimensions for cages and aviaries, for breeding pairs. The dimensions of holding cages for juveniles or single sex adult birds, and for highly domesticated birds may differ from these. Advice should be sought from a veterinarian or experienced aviculturist.

Temperature, Ventilation and Light

Any aviary or cage which is exposed to the weather should be constructed in such a way that every bird is able at all times to perch or roost in a place which is sheltered from the wind, rain and direct sunlight. This can be achieved by using solid construction or cladding of the roof and walls or by roosts covered by dense vegetation..

Cages should be placed in a room that maintains a temperature of between 17-24°C, that has natural light and is well ventilated. Cages should not be placed in direct sunlight, draughts or over a source of heat.

Noise and Fumes

A cage should be located so as not to expose birds to sudden, loud noises and noxious fumes (e.g. non-stick frying pans, air fresheners, gas fires, tobacco smoke, etc).

Enrichment of the Environment

Birds can benefit from environmental enrichment, such as hanging objects or toys and vegetation, however, it should not be clutter a cage or impede lines of flight.

Bathing Water

Bathing water should be available by sprinkler or in a container that is appropriate for the species.

Perches

Perches should not unduly impede lines of flight nor be placed directly above other perches or food and drink containers. Perches must not be sharp or abrasive and a variety of diameter perches or perches with variable diameter should be available so that birds can find an area that they are comfortable to perch upon. Perches and cage floors should not be coated with sandpaper as this may lead to footpad abrasions. Roosting perches should be positioned appropriately for the species, and should be cleaned regularly, or preferably replaced. Occasionally fresh fruit tree branches with foliage should be substituted to provide stimulation. Fresh branches must not have been treated with anything that may be hazardous to the health of birds.

Cages

Cages should be built with strong materials that allow for thorough washing and cleaning. Removable trays provide a simple means of cleaning the floors of cages. The floors of cages should not be covered with sand paper but should have a material on them that cannot be easily displaced. Suspended cages should be hung over a floor that can be cleaned easily.

The interior of the cage should be free from any sharp points or edges and any dangerous obstruction.

Indoors cages must not be left in the full sun without shade being provided. To provide adequate ventilation, at least half of the largest side of the cage should consist of a metal grill, netting or mesh. Cages should not be placed close together because it will impair ventilation.

GUIDANCE - HEALTH

Monitoring Health

Birds should be observed at least daily to determine whether they are:

- a) eating and drinking normally,
- b) defecating normally,
- c) expressing usual behaviour (for example the ability to fly),
- d) able to move about freely and have a normal posture, and
- e) have a normal rate and depth of respiration.

Injuries and Illness

Signs that indicate a health problem include:

- a) discharge from the nostrils, eyes or beak,
- b) excess loss of, or spoiled or misshapen feathers,
- c) loss of appetite and weight loss,

- d) soiled vents,
- e) enlargements or swellings,
- f) vomiting or regurgitation,
- g) dull or closed eyes,
- h) lameness or wounded or swollen foot,
- i) lumps and wounds,
- j) overgrown beak or nails, and
- k) stains or scabs around the eyes or nostrils.

This list is not exhaustive.

Sick or injured birds should be isolated from any other birds for observation and treatment and veterinary advice must be obtained promptly if a bird appears to be ill or in pain and the cause is not clear, or if initial first aid treatment is not effective.

Psittacosis

Psittacosis is an infectious disease of humans caused by a bacterium called *Chlamydia psittaci* most commonly caught from parrots though many other species of bird can be the source of infection.

An infected bird exhibits cold-like symptoms and sneezing and must receive urgent treatment by the veterinary surgeon.

Exercise

Cage birds should have the ability for free flight. If it does not have enough space to do this in a cage or aviary, it should be regularly allowed out to fly in a larger, secure environment.

Exercising indoors, but outside of a cage will help to keep a bird happy and healthy. Before a bird is allowed to fly outside of its cage, doors and windows must be closed, predatory pets removed, heat sources removed or protected and toxic or prickly plants removed or covered.

Pet birds should not be wing clipped except for the health of the individual bird and on the advice of an avian veterinary surgeon.

Use of Wire

Due to the presence of zinc and lead, galvanised wire may be toxic, especially to parrots. 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.

The potential to chew through wire depends on species as much as size. 15 SWG (1.829mm) wire is suitable for most medium sized parrots and 16 SWG (1.626mm) is suitable for most small to medium sized parrots and finches. Mesh size depends on the size of the smallest birds. Common sizes are 12mm x 12mm for small birds, and 12mm x 25 mm.

Parasite control

Pet birds can be affected by internal parasites which cause health problems, and may also result in death. Treatment can be put in food or water but dosing of individual birds is the most efficient and effective treatment method. Individual dosing should be performed by experienced handlers.

External parasites should be eradicated by applying an appropriate insecticide to birds, cages and nest boxes, and may include dusting, spraying, oral medication, or contact insecticides on perches. It is important to have a year-round parasite control program rather than treating birds after they are affected or losses are incurred.

Care of Nails

Cages should have rough uneven-diameter perches of natural, non-toxic wood to help prevent overgrown toe nails.

Perches and cage floors should not be coated with sandpaper as this may lead to footpad abrasions.

If necessary, overgrown toenails should be trimmed carefully to avoid haemorrhage.

Care of Beak

A bird should be provided with a means to keep its beak in good health and condition. This can be achieved by providing

- a) hard foods such as nuts seeds and pellets in their diet,
- b) chews, toys or cuttlefish bones, and
- c) a conditioning perch that will allow it to rub its beak to keep it clean. (The 'Safety Pumice Perch' provides a flat smooth top to support the soft pads of the foot while the sides are rough to keep the nails short.)

Beak trimming should only be performed by a veterinary surgeon, as it is possible to damage the underlying tissue if too much grinding is carried out.

Bathing

For species that require it, at least once a week, clean water should be provided in a shallow dish to allow a bird to bathe.

Rings

If identification rings may be used, they should be sized to fit closely, but allow free movement on the leg of an adult bird. Over-large rings may be caught in obstacles such as vegetation or wire and rings that are too tight may restrict blood flow to the leg.

Hygiene

Wet areas may present a health hazard and suitable floor drainage should be provided. Removeable trays are advantageous for small cages.

Contamination on floors should not be allowed to build up to a level where it puts the birds at risk of disease. If floors are covered with absorbent litter (sand, etc), all the material should be replaced at least twice a year.

To avoid the spread of disease through cross contamination, food containers should be cleaned regularly and then disinfected using a disinfectant that is not hazardous to birds at an appropriate dilution. Containers should always be cleaned before use in different cages.

Food and water containers should not be transferred to other cages without prior washing in a disinfectant solution.

If bait stations or traps are used inside cages, they should be designed in such a way that it is impossible for birds to reach the bait or traps.

Handling

Unlike animals such as cats and dogs, most birds are not domesticated and must be tamed and this will take care and may take some time. However not all species like handling and these should only be handled when necessary.

Birds have very fragile skeletons and delicate respiratory systems. Squeezing them too much can cause broken bones, organ damage, and many other severe injuries. Small birds, such as budgerigars, canaries and finches, are particularly susceptible to shock and should be handled with care as any rough handling or squeezing may cause death within seconds.

A bird should not be held by a single wing or leg as may cause serious injury.

Quarantine

Newly acquired birds should be quarantined for observation before being released into housing with other birds. A period of 30 days is a guide.

GUIDANCE BEHAVIOUR

Birds are very intelligent and they require time and attention in order to keep them from becoming bored.

Companionship

Some birds are social and need companionship. If such birds are kept in isolation they are likely to suffer social deprivation and may develop significant behavioural disturbances.

Birds that would normally socialise in the wild should be kept in groups in captivity.

Socialisation

Not all species like to be handled, but those that can become accustomed to it, can develop a bond with an owner and benefit from that relationship and regular interaction with people can help to keep a bird entertained, prevent boredom and development of behavioural problems.

Incompatible species of birds should not be housed together.

Diet

A diet that is lacking in nutrition or variety can cause birds to act abnormally. If a bird is provided the same seed and pellet mix every day and not offered variety in may become bored with its diet. For many birds, food is a significant source of entertainment and joy.

Boredom and Frustration

Birds are intelligent and benefit from mental stimulation in order to thrive in captivity.

Enriching a birds environment can help to curb boredom. This can be achieved by providing toys, including feed releasing toys, and replacing them or rotating them on a regular basis, moving a cage to a different place, placing a cage by a window and allowing a bird to exercise outside of its cage.

In the case of some birds, such as parrots, the radio or television may help to relieve boredom.

Signs of stress

Signs of stress in birds include:

- a) feather pecking,
- b) screaming or excessive vocalising,
- c) biting,
- d) destructive behaviours,
- e) self mutilation,

- f) apathy,
- g) chronic egg laying, and
- h) toe pecking

This list is not exhaustive.

GUIDANCE - BREEDING

Breeding birds should be planned and owners should inform themselves of what is required and ensure that there is a home or a market for the offspring.

If an owner does not wish to breed birds, they should be kept in single sex groups.

Selection of Breeding Stock

Birds should not be bred until they are at least 1.5 years old. 2 years old is ideal.

Only birds that are adult, well developed, that are in good health and condition and with a favourable temperament should be used for breeding.

Some birds bond for life.

Care of Breeding Birds

Birds can like or dislike each other, some may be aggressive and they should be introduced with care. Breeding pairs should be housed separately from other birds in a cage which is large and new to both birds to avoid territorial aggression.

Breeding pairs should be on a varied and complete diet appropriate for their species and this might include vegetables, seed, pellets, whole grain pasta, sprouted seed and calcium supplements. Breeding formulas for specific species may also be commercially available.

Breeding birds should be provided with nesting material and some species require a nesting box which should be large enough for a nest and large enough to allow an adult bird to move around freely and to accommodate a clutch of eggs and growing chicks.

Hens should be monitored for egg binding (an egg stuck in the oviduct that cannot be expelled). An avian vet must be consulted immediately if it is suspected that a bird may be egg bound.

Signs of egg binding are:

- a) heavy panting,
- b) paralyzed legs,
- c) swelling in the vent area, and

- d) part of the intestine coming out of the vent.

Care of Eggs and Young

Eggs should not be handled unless it is essential to do so. Eggs must be handled with clean hands to avoid bacterial contamination.

When the young hatch, the nest should be checked regularly to ensure that the smaller chicks (those that hatch last) are not trampled by larger chicks and to ensure that they are also being fed. In the case of some species, young can be fostered if there are problems.

When the young start to grow feathers, the nest box should be cleaned and then cleaned regularly to prevent an accumulation of soiled nesting material.

GUIDANCE - TRANSPORTING PET BIRDS

Birds that are transported should be in good health and sick or injured birds should only be transported to a veterinary surgeon for the purpose of treatment or diagnosis.

Birds should be transported in a cage or strong container that should not be too large but should be spacious enough for them to move around and cages should be darkened (such as covered with a dark cloth during transport) with care taken not to obstruct ventilation. Larger parrots and cockatoos may chew through softwood so a substantial hardwood box or metal cage is necessary.

Cages or containers should not be packed in a vehicle in a manner which compromises ventilation, should not be placed in direct sunlight or next to the vehicle's heater and should not be carried in the boot of a saloon car.

Food should be provided during transport, especially for small or young birds. Water should also be provided in a non-spill container or fixed water container using cotton wool soaked in water.

The floor of a cage or container should provide a secure footing for the birds.

Birds should not be left unattended in a vehicle in hot weather unless the environment within the vehicle is maintained below 24°C air temperature in the shade.

This guidance is given by the Department with a view to securing the welfare of pet birds. It is additional to the Welfare Recommendations set out in the **Code of Recommendations for the Welfare of Pet Birds** made by the Department and available at [insert link etc.]. A breach of the Code may be relied upon in Court proceedings.