

Scope and Nature of Bird Care

Lesson Aim

Discuss the nature and scope of aviculture and develop networking with others involved with aviculture.

INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of reasons for keeping birds captive and some types of birds are more likely to be found in captivity than others.

- Some people keep birds as pets, largely for companionship.
- Birds of prey have been kept and used for hunting throughout history (i.e. falconry)
- Some birds are kept for conservation breeding or display purposes (e.g. zoos, private collections)
- Some birds have been farmed for meat, eggs or other products
- Some birds are trained (e.g. pigeons for racing, parrots to mimic the human voice).

There are thousands of different varieties of birds. They range in size from large Ostriches and Emus down to tiny Wrens and Finches. In the free range system birds can be pinioned (permanent surgical clipping of the primary and secondary flight feathers) to prevent flight, although this practice is illegal in some areas. Usually water fowl are the only birds that are pinioned, as they are not susceptible to predation if provided with a large expanse of deep water and a number of islands on which to roost and nest.

Eagles, cockatoos, parrots, lorikeets, pigeons are displayed in a wide variety of aviaries to prevent them from flying away. Therefore, they must be protected from as many detrimental outside influences as possible:

- Diseases transmitted by wild birds landing on the aviary
- Internal and external parasites introduced by wild birds landing on the aviary
- Predators such as carpet snakes, rodents, butcher birds, etc.
- The elements of rain, wind, cold and sun.

The aviary must closely resemble the natural habitat and more than one species can be displayed in each aviary so long as the species are compatible. It is not a good idea, for example, to put small birds in an aviary with prey birds.

In the past, birds have been kept both in small cages indoors and in larger cages out of doors.

The popularity of small indoor caged birds has declined in some countries due to:

- Psittacosis - an avian virus which can be transmitted through the air, from birds to humans, causing pneumonia in people
- Welfare - Concern for the welfare of birds that are restricted from flying as they would in nature.

Nevertheless, small cages are still very popular in many places.

The most popular caged birds include:

- Canaries
- Finches
- Budgerigars
- Small Parrots

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SELECTION

Whether you obtain a bird from a pet shop, a breeder, or a friend; make sure it is in good condition, with sleek plumage, bright eyes and an alert manner. Examine the bird's cage for evidence of diarrhoea. Normal droppings are target like with a centre white (urine) and outer dark brown section (faeces). Check the cage for signs of moulting. If a bird is 'fluffed up', it is likely to be sick, particularly if it is on the cage floor.

It is best to get a bird when it is young, so it becomes attached to the owner. After the first moult, which usually occurs at 12 months, it is difficult to determine age. Older birds tend to be fatter and their plumage is less smooth and sleek. Sexing of birds is difficult unless the plumage and the iris (eye) of the male and female of the same species are a different colour.

Any bird locked in a small cage will get bored, and this may cause health problems, necessitating a trip to the veterinarian. Include toys such as swings, chains, mirrors bells and also fresh vegetation, in the cage. Above all, birds require company, so place the enclosure in an area where there is plenty of human activity. Place out in the garden with wild birds for a change of scenery but beware if you have aggressive wild birds in your area, as some will attack and/or scare pets, even if they are caged. Also be careful of local cats which may be able to bat at a pet bird if the cage wires are far enough apart.

Birds can also be trained, using a reward system, to do various tricks -usually vocal. Most canaries are bought for their singing, and parrots in the hope they will talk. Such training will require time, patience and a lot of repetition. Birds kept outside in aviaries should be drenched, as necessary, particularly if not kept in fully roofed aviaries, as wild birds may defecate through the netting introducing parasite eggs.

Birds do not need vaccinations. In fact most birds, if kept in hygienic conditions with regular food and clean water, lead a healthy life without ever needing veterinary attention.

GROOMING

In general, your bird will not require any grooming, as they keep themselves clean. However, if your bird becomes soiled, pure water spray is best.

If you need more, a gentle shampoo (such as baby shampoo) can be used to gently clean soiled feathers and it should be followed by thorough warm water rinsing and drying, to prevent the bird becoming chilled. Keep your bird away from air pollutants such as cigarette smoke, which can not only stain their feathers but could cause more serious illness.

Some other grooming which can be done include:

- Wing trim – to prevent flight (birds will still fly short distances). Your veterinarian can show you how to perform this properly and how to best restrain your bird to prevent injuries. If you have never trimmed feathers before, do not attempt to 'have a go' you may cause serious and irreparable damage to the wing.
- Nail trim – if your bird's nails appear to be overgrown you can trim small amounts off frequently. Take care not to cut too short as the bird will bleed profusely if you cut the quick. Always have styptic powder on hand to stem any bleeding. If you have supplied natural perches this should not be necessary.
- Beak trim – should not be necessary if your bird has sufficient material to chew on. If the bird's beak does appear overgrown, consult your veterinarian to see if it needs trimming and purchase some more chewable toys and perches.

HYGIENE

Hygiene is a concern for bird keepers, particularly if you keep birds in a large, earth floor outdoor aviary. Birds can become infected with a variety of parasites and can become ill easily and sick birds can die suddenly. The

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bird droppings should be removed from a large aviary at least once a week and from cages and small aviaries at least twice a week. This can be done by hosing (if water laws and regulations permit in your area) or by simply sweeping and raking out the bottom of the aviary – it may be a good idea to wear a moth mask whilst doing this.

In a small cage, place a removable tray with several sheets of newspaper, kitty litter or similar on the floor. Ensure there is a mesh/wire barrier between the tray and the bird so they don't walk in their faeces.

LEARN THE TERMINOLOGY

There are a lot of words that you may not be 100% familiar with that are used in Aviculture. It can be important to know the terminology, so here are some of the more important terms you may need to know.

A

Aftershaft: a supplementary feather towards the base of a shaft of a feather in birds.

Air sac: not belonging to the lungs but anatomically attached and involved in respiratory processes. Most commonly nine exists, certain species have more.

Alarm call: calls to signal danger or a threat to other birds.

Albino: total loss of pigment (red or pink eyes).

Allopreening: mutual preening by one bird to another, usually to diminish aggression or to increase bonding in a mating pair.

Alula: a small group of feathers on the "thumb" of the wing which help control air flow over the wing.

Anisodactyl: a common foot arrangement in birds with three toes facing forward and one hind toe.

Anting: the behaviour where birds open their wings and allow ants to cover their plumage. The purpose for this behaviour is to reduce parasite numbers through the release of the ants' formic acid.

Axillary: these are feathers found at the base of the under-wing.

B

Barb: tiny branches found on the central shaft of the feather.

Barbule: minute side branches interlocking the barbs on the central shaft.

Bill: made of bone with a covering of keratin, makes up the birds jaw.

Binocular vision: an overlapping field of vision useful for judging depth.

Blood feather: any feather which still has a blood supply.

Breeding Plumage: used to describe the plumage of adult birds displayed when they are in a breeding pair.

Brood: (verb or noun): brood (vb) to sit on nestlings to keep them warm; brood (n.) refers to a group of young birds from a single clutch of eggs.

Brood parasitism: this phenomenon occurs in some avian species, fish or insects and it generally occurs when offspring are raised and fed by other species.

Brood patch: an area of thick, featherless skin on a nesting bird's breast, abdomen or sides, containing a higher concentration of blood vessels in order transfer the parent's body heat to the incubating eggs.

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C

Call: bird sounds that are generally shorter and simpler than songs. May convey a specific message such as alarm calls or contact calls.

Carpal joint: the 'wrist' of a bird, forming the bend in the wing, between the arm and the hand.

Casque: a helmet-like structure, such as that on the bill of a hornbill.

Cere: unfeathered area incorporating the nostrils above the bill which is a characteristic of parrots.

Churring: a low trilling sound made by birds.

Chromosomes: A male bird has two Z sex chromosomes and a female one has Z and one W. Under microscope these chromosomes can be used to determine the sex of a bird.

Cites: (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) a body that regulates bird trade between various countries.

Clay Lick: clay banks rich in minerals such as calcium that are visited by seed eating birds such as parrots and macaws who would otherwise lack these minerals in their diet.

Cloaca: common opening at the lower end of the avian tract for the digestive, excretory and reproductive systems. In birds faeces and uric acid are excreted together via the cloaca.

Close banded: Closed ring of metal on a young bird that shows proof and age in small birds it usually stays on 8 – 10 days – in larger birds between 2 – 4 weeks.

Clutch: a complete set of eggs laid in an uninterrupted sequence by the same female.

Cock: a male bird.

Collar: a coloured ring around the neck of a bird.

Comb: fleshy, erect structure positioned longitudinally on top of the head of a bird often with a serrated margin (like a hair comb) as in domestic chickens.

Contact call: a sound produced by a bird that appears to inform a nearby bird of the caller's location. It is often made by a male and female when foraging close together.

Contour feathers: feathers with well-developed barbules and hooklets that make up the exterior surface of the bird. Includes the wings and tail and help streamline and shape the bird.

Convergent evolution: the process whereby organisms not closely related, independently evolve similar traits as a result of having to adapt to similar environments or ecological niches e.g. the wings of insects, birds and bats.

Crest: a tuft or growth of feathers on the head of a bird.

Crop: a pouch in a bird's throat where food is stored or prepared for digestion.

Crop milk: milk-like fluid produced mainly by doves, pigeons and flamingos to feed young.

D

Dabble: a foraging technique used by some ducks in which the bird moves the beak rapidly along the surface of the water to pick up aquatic animals and plant material.

Dawn chorus: the great volume of bird song heard at dawn; it may be to establish territory.

Decurved beak: a beak that curves downwards at the end.

Dimorphic: Distinct visual characteristics between the sexes.

Distraction display: a display in which a bird may feign injury, for example a broken wing, to divert a predator's attention away from a nest with eggs or young.

Diurnal: active during daylight.

Down feathers: an under layer of soft fine feathers which aid insulation in birds.

Drake: a male duck.

Drumming:

1. Sequence of non-vocal sounds produced by woodpeckers banging on trees or other resonant objects with their beaks to proclaim territory or attract a mate.
2. A series of accelerated muffled 'thumps' produced by male Ruffed Grouse to proclaim territory. Made by bringing the wings forward and upwards so creating a sound wave.

Dust bathing: to squat in dusty soil and fluff dust through the plumage, probably performed to combat ectoparasites.

E

Ear tuft: each of a pair of tufts of longer feathers on the top of the head of some owls. They are unconnected with the true ears.

Eclipse plumage: the dull plumage developed in some brightly coloured birds after the breeding season which may last over the winter.

Egg tooth: growth on the bill of the young chick that it uses to break its way out of the egg.

Endemic: found only in a particular region e.g. kiwis are endemic to New Zealand.

Eye ring: a marking circling the eye.

F

Facial disc: a concave gathering of feathers around some birds eyes.

Feather tract: areas of a bird's skin where feathers are attached.

Fledgling: a young bird that has recently fledged or left the nest.

Fledging period: the time it takes a bird to be ready to leave its nest or when it becomes independent of parental nourishment.

Forewing: usually the upper-wing coverts (or at least the foremost of these) on the 'arm' of a spread wing.

Frugivore: a bird that feeds mainly on fruit.

G

Gamebird: a bird, such as a pheasant or grouse that is widely hunted for sport.

Gizzard: the lower part of the bird's two-part stomach which has a tough lining and thick muscular walls which grinds and softens food, sometimes with the aid of grit or pebbles swallowed by the bird.

Gular Sac: upper part of the throat just below the chin. By opening the bill wide and vibrating the thin expansive membranes of the sac, the bird is able to dissipate heat.

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Assignment 1

Question 1

In your own words, write a brief outline the reasons for keeping birds in captivity.

Write up to 200 words.

Question 2

Demonstrate your understanding of basic bird care by describing how to carry out 2 *daily* tasks.

Write up to 100 for each.

Question 3

In your own words summarise the term “responsible bird ownership”.

Write up to 250 words.

Question 4

Describe appropriate factors to consider when a selecting a suitable bird as a pet.

Write between 150-250 words.

Question 5

Submit the information on your set task activity.

Congratulations on finishing this

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