

Petware House

Your Neighborhood Pet Store

Parakeet (Budgerigar)

Melopsittacus undulatus

CARE SHEET

Parakeets; also called budgerigars are small member of the parrot family and the most popular species of bird in the United States. They are small and easy to care for. They can become good talkers or mimics.



Average Size 7 inches in length.

Life span 10-20 years with proper care.

Feeding Specialized pelleted diets are highly recommended and should consist of 60%-70% of the diet. If your bird is used to a seed diet, convert to pellets gradually; fresh pellets or seeds and fresh, clean, chlorine free water should always be available.

Give fresh fruits and vegetables daily; such as apple slices, grated carrots, raw broccoli and green leafy vegetables. Discard uneaten food before it spoils; finches appreciate quality and variety in their food.

Housing A cage approximately 18" W x 18" D x 24" H, with metal bars spaced no greater than 3/8" apart, makes a good home for your parakeet; as with all animals, it is best to provide the largest habitat possible.

Perches should be at least 4" long and 1/2" in diameter; a variety of perch sizes and materials to exercise feet and help prevent arthritis is recommended. A metal grate over the droppings tray will keep the bird away from droppings; line the droppings tray with cage paper or appropriate substrate for easier cleaning. To avoid contamination, do not place food or water containers under perches.

Maintenance Provide filtered, chlorine-free, lukewarm water regularly for bathing and remove the water when done; as an alternative, mist the bird with water or a grooming spray. Nails should be trimmed by a qualified person to prevent injury to the bird.

Clean and disinfect the cage and perches regularly; replace substrate or cage liner weekly or more often if needed; replace food and water daily.

Replace perches, dishes and toys when worn or damaged. Always wash your hands after touching your bird and cage.

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Temps Birds acclimate well to average household temperatures; be cautious of extreme temperature change; cage should be placed off the floor in an area that is well-lit and away from drafts.

Humidity No special requirements

Lighting Well lit rooms.

Water & Accessories

Install a bird bath, food and water dishes and a variety of perches. Also include toys for your canary to play with. Don't forget about adding treats and grit as well.

BASIC REPRODUCTIVE INFORMATION

Parakeets are fairly easy to mate, given a few simple conditions. The cage needs to be big enough, the room temperature should not be too cold (as a matter of course it should never be too cold, or a draft can give your birds a respiratory infection), about 70-80 degrees Fahrenheit, and a nesting box must be present. Unusual situations sometimes arise with breeding behavior. One parakeet of my own was so intent on laying that she laid eggs underneath her seed dish not long after she had hatched out a clutch of babies. These eggs were not fertile, though, and did not hatch.

Contrary to popular belief, parakeets don't usually mate for life, although they have been known to. When selecting a pair for breeding, make sure that the cock (male) is at least 10 months old, and that the hen (female) is at least one year old. When you have selected a breeding pair, put them together in a cage of their own, unless you have an aviary with lots of other birds. The ritual courting that parakeets go through is actually quite amusing. The male will "preen" (pick through feathers with his beak, using it like a comb) the female's head feathers, feed her, and "dance" for her, bobbing his head up and down rapidly and excitedly. This last act is sometimes performed when the birds are not mating, as an indication of excitement and immense happiness. There are birds who like to dance when music is playing, singing along and bobbing their little heads.

Wooden nest boxes are available at most pet stores, or can be purchased from someone who makes them. The nest box must be of the following dimensions, or the breeding pair will not use it: 8-1/2 inches tall, by 6-1/2 inches wide, by 6-1/2 inches deep. The opening of the box must be 1-1/2 inches in diameter, with a perch about one inch beneath it. Depending on the type of cage you have, the box can be attached to a special opening that the cage has for this purpose, or if the cage is large enough, you can actually put the box in the cage. Make sure you do not place the nest box either too high or too low. If it's too high, the babies could fall out and be killed; if it's too low, the female will not want to brood in it. Be certain that you have easy access to the flip top opening of the box to clean it occasionally and to check on the babies. If you put the nest box in the cage, make sure that there is still more than enough room in the cage for the breeding pair to move around.

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Nesting material is unnecessary, as the female uses the feathers that she loses when she sets to partially insulate and protect the eggs from breaking. Seed and water must be readily accessible to both the female and to the male; the male takes on the task of feeding the female when she stays in the nest box.

When the female is actually ready to mate, she picks up her head and lifts her tail. The male will then try to mount her, climbing on her back and leaning over her side, holding on by one of his wings and spreading the other one out for balance. If the coupling is successful, the female should lay a day or two after this. She will lay an egg approximately every day or two until she has a clutch of about three to five eggs, which may or may not all hatch. The eggs should begin hatching after about 18 days, in the order that they were laid. The female will hatch her eggs every other day if they are all fertile. You should try not to disturb the box or the female too much, as it will make her very angry and may cause her to abandon the nest. Try to only handle the box when cleaning it. With birds that are not too wild, you shouldn't have to worry about the female abandoning the nest, but take care--birds' instincts take over when they start setting and 'keets tend to be very protective of their eggs. With a little luck and a little patience, you should soon have an extended family. Newborn parakeets are ridiculous (nest-reared), naked and with eyes sealed shut when they hatch. They grow very quickly, though, and are ready to leave the nest as early as four weeks of age.

NOTES AND COMMENTS

Parakeets are talkers, but their little voiced are sometimes hard to hear. They are active and need daily time out of their cages to interact with the family. They enjoy a variety of chew toys are social and get along well with their own kind.

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