

# Elburn Animal Hospital Newsletter

June, 2010

## Welcome

This month we are discussing birds. We will go over some of the common types of birds kept as pets, the most prevalent problems we see in pet birds and how to prevent them. Any questions can be addressed to a member of our staff at (630) 365-9599, or you can contact us via email at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

## June: Pet Bird Month

### What Kinds of Birds are Kept as Pets?

There are many different kinds of birds available as pets. Dr. Cechner sees birds as small as parrotlets to ones as large as ostriches and swans, and many in between. She has treated birds as different as Amazon parrots and doves, and has even seen wild birds (which cannot be kept as pets but must be handled by a licensed wildlife rehabber). Birds are interesting and often bond strongly with their human "flock." They require a lot of time and dedication. Some types of birds live such a long life that they may outlive their owners! It is for this reason that we recommend carefully considering the type of bird you want to keep before adopting one. You should be sure you have follow-up care prearranged as your pet could exceed your life expectancy. Following is basic information about some of the most common birds we see as pets.

**Finch:** There are a wide variety of finches in the pet trade, including the canary. Different species come from different continents but all have relatively the same requirements for care.

They are small birds, weighing 10 to 30 grams, and typically live for 5 to 10 years. Many species prefer living in groups.

Finches are not known as particularly handleable birds, so it is always recommended to give them as large a cage as possible so they can get proper exercise and entertainment.



**Budgerigar:** Commonly called a "parakeet" in



reference to its long pointed tail, the budgie is originally from the grasslands of Australia. They are small parrots that come in many different colors from white to yellow to blue. Average weight for these birds is 25 to 40 grams, and the

average lifespan is 5 to 10 years, although 15 is not unheard. Budgies are gregarious birds and in the wild will live in flocks numbering in the thousands. In captivity they appreciate cagemates and will often bond strongly with human "flock" members too.

**Cockatiel:** Another highly social parakeet-type parrot from Australia, cockatiels are smart and often loving towards their human family members. They are curious and many times learn to whistle, sing and even speak. They generally live about 15-20 years but we have



patients here that are over 25! The average weight is 80-125 grams, with unusual color mutations tending toward the lighter side. This type of bird does best when

it is allowed to spend a lot of time with family members in bonding activities such as sharing healthy food.

**Conure:** This designation is given to a number of small to medium parakeets from Central and South America. Some species such as the Sun Conure are easily found in the pet trade; others like the



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White-Eared Conure are not seen as often. Their sizes range from 60 to 80 grams for smaller species like the Green-Cheeked Conure up to 130 grams for the Blue-Capped Conure. These are generally good-tempered and somewhat “goofy” parrots that enjoy a lot of interaction with their human family and can live from 15 to 35 years depending on the species and care given to the bird.

African Grey Parrot: This type of parrot consists of two types; the larger and more common Congo and the smaller Timneh variety. The Congo runs from 380 to 450 grams while the Timneh runs from 300 to 360 grams. Both types can live into their 60s. These are among some of the most intelligent and trainable birds found as pets. As such, they need an owner that has lots of time to give and lots of patience.



Amazon Parrot: This is another group of species of birds that are quite common as pets.



They are larger parrots from Central and South America, weighing in at under 300 grams for the smaller species such as the Lilac-Crowned Amazon and as much as 650 grams for larger types like the Double Yellow-Headed Amazon. An Amazon parrot may live from 50 to 100 years, and become very attached to their family members. They require an experienced owner, lots of attention and plenty of toys and space to play so they do not get bored and destructive.

Macaw: These are the largest parrots found in the pet trade. They range in size from the small Hahns (or Mini) Macaw at 165 grams to the much larger Scarlet Macaw at up to 1000

grams. Macaws originated from Central and South America and may live to be 100 years old!

There are many species available, but all require a lot of room and time to spend with their family.



They also require chewable toys that they are safe for them to destroy in order to prevent chewing on household furniture and other non-safe materials.

## Common Health Problems:

Birds are often considered delicate animals that may drop dead for “no reason”, as well as animals that are prone to behavioral problems such as biting and screeching. In reality, there are two underlying issues that contribute to almost every illness and undesirable behavior we see: poor nutrition and lack of mental stimulation.

Poor Nutrition: Many pet birds suffer the ignorance of well-meaning owners informed by pet store employees that a diet of seeds alone is healthy. Even birds that would eat primarily seeds in the wild cannot expect to have a healthy life in captivity if one type of food is all that is offered. In the wild, much of the content of their diet comes from sprouted seeds—seeds that are beginning to grow plants. These seeds have much more nutrition in them, and much less fat. On top of that, there are bugs on the plants and seeds the wild birds eat. This means they naturally ingest animal protein. Larger parrots require much more fresh vegetables, fruits and animal protein than they do nuts and other seeds. If fresh foods cannot be fed on a daily basis to pet birds in the home, a high-quality pelleted diet supplemented with fresh veggies and some fruit should be used to ensure the nutritional needs are being met.

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Seeds are used as a common staple food because they are easy to obtain and easy to maintain. But feeding only (or mostly) seed can result in many different medical conditions such as an overgrown beak, fatty liver, egg-laying problems and hormonal problems (which can cause or exacerbate behavioral disorders). If you are concerned about your pet bird's diet, speak with a technician or the doctor about how to switch to a healthier, more natural menu.



Lack of Mental Stimulation: Birds (excepting chickens) are not domesticated creatures. Even though most birds in the pet industry are now bred in captivity they still have the instincts and behaviors of their wild relatives. Most are either highly social or become highly bonded to one mate for their entire life. Many types are very communicative and intelligent. Once we understand this about our avian friends it becomes clear why so many tend toward behavior disorders such as screeching and feather plucking (which may lead into medical issues). The same characteristics that make pet birds interesting and loveable can also make them destructive and angry.



Giving your birds a variety of safe toys to play with will keep him entertained during the times you cannot be with him. Most parrots love to chew and can be given hard-shelled nuts such as almonds,



walnuts or Brazil nuts as a treat to stay occupied. Hard wooden toys are also a good choice. Many birds respond to bright colors and noises. Some people elect to leave the TV on for their pet birds while they are gone at work (but of course be careful about what they watch—they may learn to repeat things!). It is not recommended to allow a bird free run of the house without supervision—they have been likened to a 3 or 4 year-old child in mentality, so we can see why this is not advisable. But neither should most pet birds be confined to a cage for their entire life.

All the toys in the world will not replace the attention and love given by a human. Birds most often live in social groups—some will bond with one person as a “mate” (although we do not advise encouraging this type of behavior) while some species prefer to concentrate on the entire family as its “flock.” Either way, bonding time with your pet is essential to its mental well-being. Food sharing is encouraged as long as the food is healthy (without added salt, sugar or fat) and games are encouraged to help stimulate the bird. Many problems can be avoided or corrected by making sure your bird gets enough mental stimulation and loving attention from its family.

These are the two most common underlying causes for most of the problems we see in pet birds. The best way to help keep your bird as healthy as possible is to do your research before you obtain a bird as a pet, ensure you have the time to dedicate to these animals, and get regular veterinary care. We recommend an examination at least annually for all pet birds. These creatures are extraordinarily adept at concealing illness for as long as possible—sometimes until it is too late to help them recover. By visiting your veterinarian on an annual or semi-annual basis, conditions of illness may be found earlier, leading to a better outcome for your pet. Routine exams also allow us to discuss any behavior changes, which often are the first sign of underlying medical issues.

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Now check out our feature of adoptable pets found at TAILS Animal Shelter in DeKalb! TAILS has many puppies of all sizes and kittens of all colors!

Pepper is a purebred 4-year old Australian Cattle Dog rescued from a high-volume shelter. She's a smart dog who loves attention and to run, run, run, then cuddle!



Baxter is a 4-year old Beagle mix who will do almost anything for a treat! He's a happy dog who loves belly rubs and snuggles. Baxter is afraid of other dogs and would like to be your only dog.

Roxie is a loving 4-year old Pit Bull Terrier mix. She's a sweetheart. Roxie used to live with small children, cats and dogs. She didn't get along with one of the big dogs and was given to TAILS. She loved when the little children would throw a ball for her to chase. When they became tired, Roxie would toss a stuffed toy in the air and catch it. She knows many commands and would like to be a lap dog!



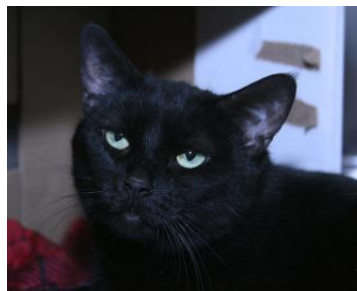
Jefferson is a mellow, purebred Basset Hound who loves people. He's 6-years old with lots of spunk. He's often at TAILS main desk greeting people when they're open. He came from a high-volume shelter and his time was up. TAILS rescued him because he has lots of love to give.



Parker was found frozen stiff in a park and TAILS revived him. He would love a home where he can be loved. He's 7-years old and an orange beauty who loves other cats.



Liberty is a 2-year old who was kept in a cage with pit bulls surrounding her when TAILS rescued her. She currently lives in Kitty Korner with many other cats.



Meg is at TAILS because one of her owners died and the other moved to a nursing home. She's just 3-years old and a Persian mix. She's apprehensive of strangers at first, but does warm up.



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CJ is just 10-months old who was found as a stray. He's a smart cat who loves other felines and lives in TAILS' Dancing Cat Solarium with many.

you would like more information about our practice, send us an email at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net) or give us a call at (630) 365-9599. If you would like to opt out of receiving our newsletter, please send an email to us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net).

**June Special:** Bring in a bird for a new patient exam and receive \$25 off your visit! ☺

Kayo has been at TAILS the longest: since May of 2009.



He's 1year and 8-months old and brought to TAILS as a stray. He also lives in TAILS

Dancing Cat Solarium with other cats. Kayo is a tabby cat and would love a quiet, calm home.

TAILS spays or neuters all dogs and cats before being placed for adoption. They have up-to-date vaccinations and been tested for illnesses. All have microchips and come with a free veterinary visit and one-month free pet insurance. Cats older than 6-months can be adopted for a fee of \$25; cats under 6-months adoption fee is \$95. Dogs under 6-months are \$350 which includes obedience classes (\$75 refunded if taken to an obedience class other than TAILS); dogs from 6months-6years fee is \$150 and dogs older than 6-years have an adoption fee of \$95.

Please visit TAILS soon to meet these and many more pets waiting for Forever Homes.

Next month we focus on caring for "pocket pets." We will include information on the types of small mammal pets we see at the clinic, the basic care of these pets, and how to tell if your pocket pet needs veterinary attention. If you have a question for us or if

**Upcoming Events:** We have several spots left for our **charity dog wash**. This year proceeds will again benefit the Fox Valley Wildlife Center, helping to offset the costs associated with caring for our wild neighbors. We are offering discounted bathing, nail trims, ear cleaning, and anal gland expression. The date is set for Saturday, June 12<sup>th</sup>, so reserve your space now.

Also mark the calendar for this year's annual **Open House!** Yes, we are hosting another open house at our office on Saturday, September 25<sup>th</sup>. We are featuring games, treats and area rescue groups.

Do you have an idea for a newsletter? A question you'd like answered about caring for your pet? Email us at [3lburn@sbcglobal.net](mailto:3lburn@sbcglobal.net) and let us know! We are always interested in what you have to say and what you want to know.