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Amazon Parrot Care

Basic Information

Amazons are among the best-known parrots kept as companion birds. There are many species of Amazons, but only a few are available to the average bird owner. Many species are endangered, kept, or imported only by special permit, or kept in closed breeding facilities or zoological parks.

Young domestic-bred birds may readily be obtained. Purchasing an Amazon should be from a breeder so that you can see the parent birds, or from a reputable store that offers closed-banded domestic-bred birds. Purchasing a wild-caught bird is not advised because of the potential for disease and loss to the wild population. Smuggling a bird into the US is a federal offense and can result in prison and/or confiscation of your property (vehicle, house, etc.).

Obtaining a Baby Bird

Inexperienced bird owners should not purchase an unweaned bird. In general, the sale of unweaned birds is discouraged because there is great risk of death of the bird from inept handling. The training necessary to hand-raise a parrot should not be practiced on a real parrot.

Those wishing to hand-raise a bird should volunteer to serve at a wildlife rehabilitation facility or a veterinary clinic that sees wild birds, to learn food preparation and how to feed immature birds under close supervision of a professional. Success is much more likely once these skills are learned. A bird eating on its own and hand-raised by a skilled caretaker will be just as tame and readily bonded to the new owner as one that is not yet weaned.

Cage and Diet

Amazons have varied dietary requirements; a diet of seeds is lacking in nutrients and is far from their natural diet. Amazons in the wild feed on whatever is in abundant supply-vegetarian, fruit and occasional animal protein. A diet of carried green and yellow vegetables, fruit, sprouts, a small amount of meat protein and some grains or legumes is a good start. Avoid fatty or junk foods. There are also formulated diets designed for birds. Ask your veterinarian to recommend a diet.

Boredom and Entertainment

Amazons have a tendency to become obese with inactivity. To prevent this from happening, offer the bird toys and interesting foods, keep the bird in a room with family



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activity, and give it time out of the cage. This helps keep the bird from developing bad habits and becoming overweight. Ask your veterinarian for an AAV brochure on *Enhancing your bird's life.*

Taming and Training

Amazons can form lifelong bonds with their owners. Some Amazons are friendly to everyone they meet, while some only like a few people. This is normal behavior, and forcing the issue to change is often fruitless.

The key to taming is persistence. If the bird is tame when obtained, daily handling will ensure that it remains tame. If the bird is not tame, daily taming sessions of 10-15 minutes will gradually accustom the bird to being handled.

Keep the bird's wings trimmed can contribute a large part to successful taming. Make sure to have your veterinarian trim the wings so that they are trimmed correctly and the bird does not associate you with the wing trim.

Breeding and Seasonal Aggression

Amazons customarily begin to seek mates and breed from January through April. During this time, they may become possessive or aggressive towards their owner, depending on how they view that person in their life.

If the bird is overly aggressive towards its owner during this time, some suggest that another person temporarily take care of feeding and cleaning the bird, so the bond with the primary owner is not compromised. Forcefully trying to control aggression in a sexually mature Amazon may not be the best choice. Let the bird get through this period with minimum disruption, and it will likely return to its old self once breeding season is over.

Some species of Amazons are relatively simply bred. You need a positively identified male and female (ask your veterinarian how to identify the sex), a cage large enough for short flights (4-6 feet long by 5 feet tall is adequate, but you can go larger), a large, sturdy nest box, proper diet, and patience. Light periods are also important for breeding. If the birds cannot be kept outside, full-spectrum light can be provided with a timer to simulate natural daylight hours.



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Illness

In addition to avian diseases, Amazons are subject to many of the same diseases as people. These include obesity, malnutrition, tumors, and respiratory diseases. Some of the avian diseases Amazons are prone to include Pacheco's disease, papillomavirus, papovavirus, psittacine beak and feather disease, and pox. Consulting with your avian veterinarian will help you understand which diseases can be vaccinated against and how some of the other diseases can be recognized or prevented.

Birds tend to hide signs of illness, so the best way to ensure your bird remains in good health is with an annual checkup. If you suspect that your bird is sick, immediately take it to a veterinarian. Birds are often critically ill before the owner notices. Many veterinarians recommend that you keep a gram-scale at home and weigh the bird on a regular basis to check for unusual weight changes.

Next to proper veterinary care and diet, the most important aspect of bird keeping is sanitizing the cage and feeding utensils. Water and food should be given fresh daily, and the cups should be cleaned and sterilized. A good rule of thumb is if you would not drink out of the cup or taste the food, it's too dirty for the bird as well. Perches should be scrubbed often and the cage bottoms should be cleaned daily as well. Birds in the wild do not have to contend with unclean living conditions, and birds in captivity should not be forced to do so either.

Talking or Screaming

Amazons can be excellent talkers. Many trainers recommend that you do not teach your Amazon to whistle because it's so easy and fun that some birds resist learning new words once they learn to whistle. Repetition is the key to teaching your bird to talk. Some birds begin to talk very early, and that become excellent talkers may start much later in life. It can take several weeks for a bird to learn a word or phrase (they will also practice when they're alone), but once learned, it is never forgotten. Be careful what you teach!

Amazons are artful screamers and prefer to vocalize in the mornings and evenings. This is a natural pastime for Amazons, and trying to discourage it can do more harm than good. Learn to love your Amazon's cheerful noisemaking, as it is a sign of contentment.