Caged birds

Scientific name: Various

Varietal range difference

These guidelines are suitable for the variety of birds commonly kept as caged pets such as budgerigars, canaries and finches.

Basic requirements

- accommodation designed to suit the birds’ physical characteristics and behaviours
- space enough to fly, roost and elude other caged birds
- shelter from draught, direct sunlight through windows and a capacity to control temperature, ventilation and lighting
- protection from menace or intimidation by predators
- feed and water to provide essential nutrients
- protection from disease
- regular surveillance to detect problems.

Environment

In the design of any bird cage, the ratio between the length and width of the cage, at right angles to each other, should not exceed 4:1 unless the shorter of these two lines is at least 900 mm long. The shorter distance should be at least twice the span of the wings of the largest bird to be kept in the cage.

Cage construction should be of strong impervious materials that can be thoroughly washed and sterilised. The interior of the cage should be free from any sharp points or edges.
Wooden perches must be provided and have a diameter and length that enable every bird in the cage to perch comfortably. Perches should not impede lines of flight or be placed directly above other perches or food and drink containers. Hanging decorations, toys and vegetation inside the cage should not be allowed to clutter the cage or impede lines of flight.

**Food and water requirements**

**Food**

Adequate food suitable for the needs of the particular species of bird should be available at all times. Containers used to supply feed should not be constructed or used in a manner that may cause injury to the birds. They should be situated in cages in a position where the food is least likely to be spoiled or contaminated by faeces.

A varied diet should be supplied, alternating regularly between fresh fruit, vegetables and seeding grasses, as appropriate to the bird species being fed. Mixed grit and a source of calcium should be available.

**Water**

Clean, cool water must be available at all times. Water containers should not be located in direct sunlight or placed in positions where they are likely to become contaminated by faeces. Containers should be kept in a clean condition, free of foreign matter, through regular washing with a low toxicity disinfectant and rinsing.

**Handling**

Birds should be conditioned to accept handling. They need to be handled calmly and with care. Training birds to accept transfer between cages on a daily basis ensures that they can be handled easily, provides a level of environmental enrichment and may ameliorate territorial behaviour.

**Normal behaviour**

A caged bird is normally alert with an erect carriage. Caged birds should be able to fly freely. The cutting of feathers or pinioning of wings, unless advised by a veterinarian for therapeutic reasons, must not occur.

**Disease prevention**

Disease control methods, and internal and external parasite control programs, should be developed in consultation with a veterinarian. All action should be documented in the appropriate records.

**Signs of illness**

Birds may show:

- changes in:
  - appearance of droppings
  - food or water consumption
  - attitude or behaviour
  - appearance or posture
  - bodyweight
  - rate or depth of respiration; or

- evidence of:
  - enlargements or swelling
  - vomiting, injury or bleeding
  - discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak.

A failure to thrive or grow is another sign of illness. If unable to identify and correct the cause of ill health, assistance from a veterinarian, familiar with caged birds, should be sought. Any signs of illness or injury, and treatment given, should be documented in the appropriate records.

**Euthanasia**

Where an animal becomes so sick, diseased or injured that recovery is unlikely or undesirable on humane grounds, then euthanasia must be arranged with a veterinarian.
Disposal

Caged birds can be sold privately.

Carcasses must be disposed of in accordance with local council regulations.

Suggested resources

Web sites

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Australia (AFFA)
www.affa.gov.au
(navigate through Animal and Plant Health to the National Guidelines for housing of birds)

University of Sydney (Faculty of Veterinary Science)
www.library.usyd.edu.au/VEIN/links/birds.html

Printed texts


Steele-Boyce, N. (ed.). *Australian Birdkeeper Magazine*.


Approved activities: birds

Please note:

The categories of activities are explained in Table 2, on page 16, in Part A of these guidelines.

The letters and numbers used in approved activities correspond to those detailed in Table 3, Description of Activities, on pages 17–19 of Part A of these guidelines.

A. Very low impact activity

- Observation of normal behaviour (Category 1)

B. Low impact activities

- Capture, restraint and handling (Category 2)

Only birds that have been conditioned to accept handling should be used for this activity. To avoid stress, birds must be held for the least time possible. Captures should not be repeated. Before a bird is released, it must be given a clear view of the release environment to avoid blind collision. Prolonged activity in one aviary should be avoided as all birds, not just the target one, will become stressed by the presence of people.

C. Non-invasive measurement of

6. respiration (Category 2)

Respiration should be measured by observation only and not by captive methods. Time the rise and fall of the breast region. Keep your distance and minimise noise.

D. Measurement of mild dietary effects

4. palatability (Category 3)

Palatability may be tested by offering a range of foods simultaneously and observing birds preferences or by comparing volumes of various feeds eaten. Timing the period taken for birds to investigate and begin consuming newly introduced feed types would be appropriate. High sugar feeds or other unsuitable feed types should not be given, nor should the bird be deprived of its regular diet.
Ensure that students are aware that foods that are suitable for humans may NOT be appropriate for birds. Chocolate, coffee and avocado are poisonous to birds.

E. Behaviour activities

2. taming/gentling (Category 3)

3. training (Category 3)

Because of the time involved in training parrots, it is unlikely that this activity would be carried out in schools. A teacher, using an already trained bird, may choose to demonstrate the principles involved. Parrots can be tamed and trained to perform a vast range of tricks and activities including speech. The birds should be rewarded for desirable behaviours, generally with food, but normal feeding must not be withheld or overlooked. Punishment, especially physical forms, should not be used as a deterrent for undesirable actions. Reward the bird’s spontaneous actions that approximate desired behaviour. Repetition is the key to success and it may take years to perfect the performance of a single desired action on command.

F. Collection of samples from livestock

1. feathers (Category 2)

Feathers found in the cage should be used rather than attempting to take feathers from the bird. Feather plucking involves stress.

G. Standard husbandry activities

1. administering treatments

   topical
   • spray (Category 3)

   oral
   • drench (Category 3)

   injection
   • subcutaneous (Category 3)
   • intramuscular (Category 3)

   It is important to maintain a program of parasite control for all birds. When treating for internal and external parasites, all birds should be treated at the same time. Vaccination should be carried out by a veterinarian unless an experienced aviculturist is present. All activities need to be documented in the appropriate records.

When using drenches, external parasite control chemicals or any other animal care chemicals, care must be taken to:

• read all labels
• maintain appropriate storage
• adhere to withholding periods
• determine the weight of animals
• determine the correct dose rate
• use protective clothing if required.

Oral medications such as worming compounds and vitamin and mineral supplements may be administered in the feed or water. Check the instructions. Water is generally withdrawn from birds overnight to increase the bird’s thirst prior to administering medications in the water. Avoid water withdrawal during the day particularly in hot weather. Drink containers need to be suitably anchored to prevent tipping.

It is possible to control mites and lice by hanging a pest strip in the area where birds roost at night. Only pyrethrin-based insecticides should be used in cages and only in accordance with directions on the labels.