

Before You Buy a Parrot

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Parrots are one of the most rewarding pets any animal lover can have. Their beauty is unmatched, their intelligence nothing short of amazing. They are interactive, playful, lovable and responsive. Yet they are also one of the most demanding of pets to keep happy.

All parrots require a lot of time, care, love and attention. Never buy a parrot on impulse. These majestic creatures require a more complex diet than a dog or a cat, a diet that includes fresh foods daily. You will have a cage to clean, poop to scrape off of floors and walls, water dishes to clean sometimes four times a day, and you will have to invest a lot of money for toys. Parrots need stimulation and attention to stay happy and prevent behavior problems.

The most important question you can ask yourself is, can I commit my life to this animal for possibly up to 60 years? If you can honestly answer yes to that question, then it is time to do your homework on the species of parrot you want.

Avian science is still truly in its infancy. Simply reading a book on general parrot care will not provide enough information. Each species of parrot has its own special needs. Choosing the species of parrot that is right for you and will fit into your lifestyle is imperative. Finding the most up-to-date information on each species you are interested in will aid in your final decision.

The Internet has a wealth of information and misinformation on parrots. Determining whether the information is good or bad is a subjective process at best. The library and/or your local bookstore will be able to assist you in finding the most current articles and books. Joining a parrot web group and talking to other parrot owners is another way to educate yourself. "Parronts," as parrot owners call themselves, are always willing to help a prospective or new parrot owner.

When researching a specific species you should look for their dietary needs, the required cage size, appropriate toys and play gyms, the amount of time needed for one-on-one attention and possible behavior problems. Also research what foods are potentially poisonous to parrots. Another factor to consider is noise. Some species have much louder vocalizations than others, and this can be an important consideration if you live in an apartment.

Looking for a veterinarian specializing in avian medicine in your area should also be part of your research. The number of veterinarians that do not provide medical services to parrots or other exotic animals will surprise you. When you find an avian veterinarian, it is a good idea to make an appointment to talk to him or her about the species of parrots you are interested in buying. Some veterinarians will not charge for a consultation of this nature. Also talk to the veterinarian about required initial testing and annual testing costs. Parrots do not normally display obvious symptoms of sickness until they are quite ill. Most veterinarians will be happy to inform you about the "what to watch for" list.

There are general rules applying to all parrots that require you to adjust your household. Many household hazards can kill a bird quickly and sometimes without warning such as Teflon pots and pans, scented candles, stained glass, etc. It is vital to research other possible hazards. You have to be willing to modify your home to keep your parrot safe and healthy.

If after your research you are still committed to sharing your life and home with a parrot, CONGRATULATIONS! You will have a lifetime companion that will bring you hours of joy, love and laughter. There is almost nothing more precious than to have a feathered child, a.k.a. "fid," snuggled up asleep on your chest or giving you kisses. For every minute of love you give them, you get five in return.

Next month...choosing the right breeder, pet store or rescue. Until then, scratches to all!

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