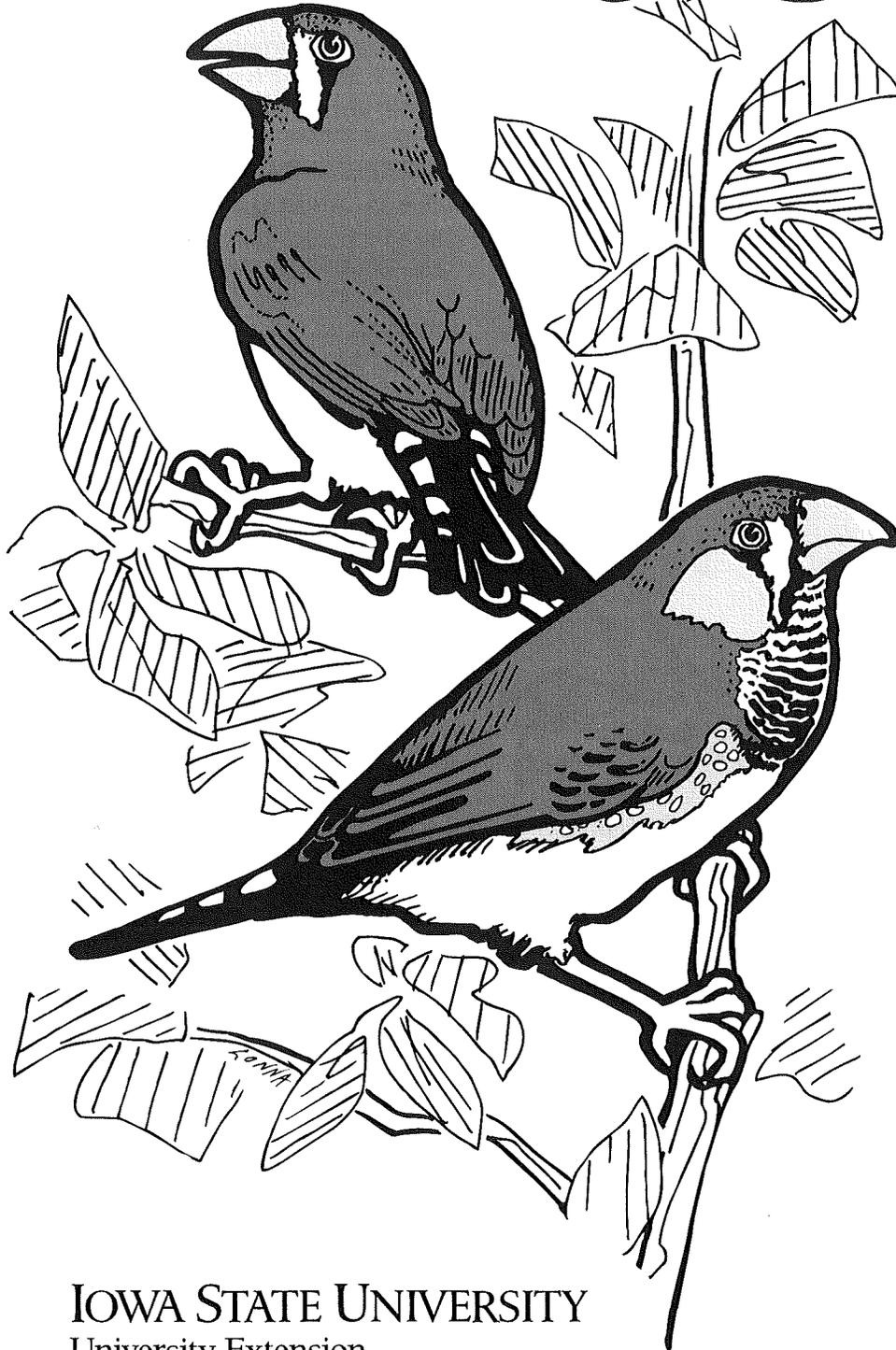




4-H Youth
Development

Birds



The 4-H bird project is designed to give you an opportunity to:

- explore feelings of caring, enjoyment, success, and interaction between you and your bird;
- understand the interdependence of people and animals;
- develop skills and attitudes needed to be a responsible pet owner;
- gain knowledge about the care of a bird including nutrition, health care, and housing;
- develop an understanding of animal behavior; and
- gain personal skills of decision-making, communication, leadership, and citizenship.

All bird project members are encouraged to:

- plan your project with the help of your leader or parent, and record your plans on 4H-94;
- read project materials, extension publications, books, and magazines about the things you want to learn in your project;
- give a presentation related to some phase of your project;
- participate in project visits, trips, and tours planned by leaders and members;
- evaluate your progress with your leader or parent, and record what you did and what you learned on 4H-94.

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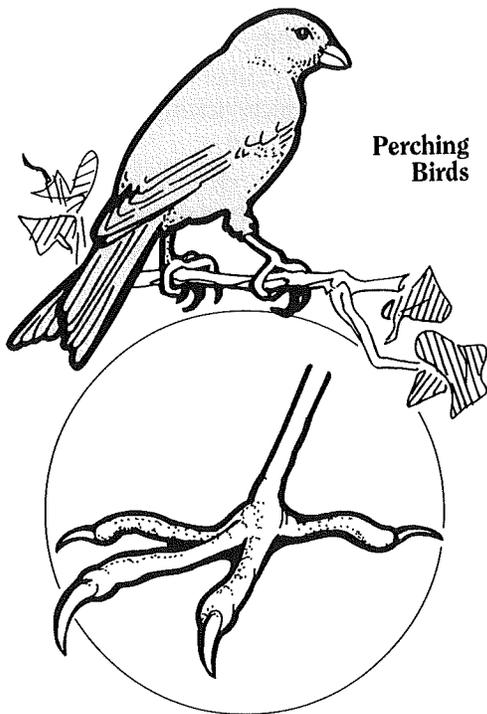
Birds

Birds are warm-blooded, air-breathing vertebrates with two unique features. They have the ability to fly, and they are covered with feathers. Their flight is aided by ultra-light bone structure, strong flight features, and quick muscle action.

Throughout the centuries, many species of birds have been kept for their beauty, their ability to sing, or their ability to talk. Birds were sold in the streets of ancient Rome and

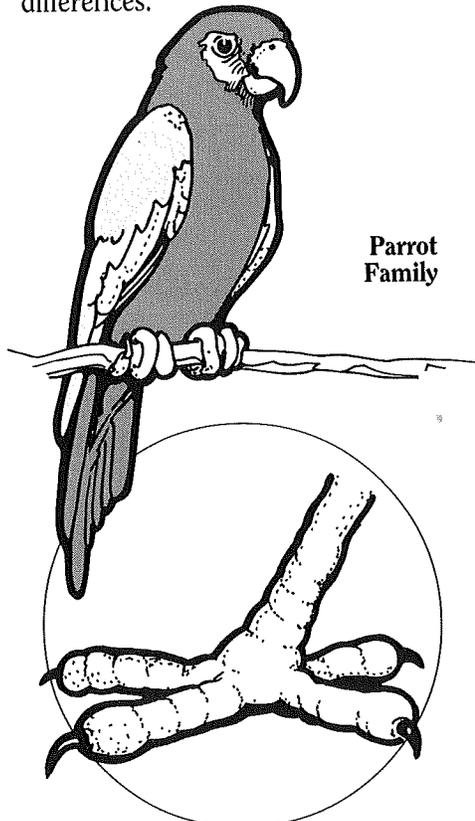
offered in the markets of medieval villages. They are favored pets in the Orient and many other parts of the world. Most birds kept as pets today come from two main families: perching birds (Passerines), including finches and canaries; or the parrot family (Psittacines), including parrots and parakeets (budgies).

Several major differences exist between these bird families. See below for an explanation of the differences.



Perching Birds

1. Three unwebbed toes in front
2. One toe in the rear
3. Ligaments tighten the foot around the perch in an unconscious effort.
4. Beak is hinged at the bottom.
5. Birds cannot use their beaks for support.
6. Can sing lovely songs
7. Are not often affectionate or willing to learn tricks



Parrot Family

1. Two unwebbed toes in front
2. Two toes in the rear
3. Jaws hinged at the top and bottom
4. Uses its beak as a third "hand"
5. Will imitate speech
6. Can be very affectionate and very jealous
7. Will amuse owners with numerous tricks
8. Can grasp objects and climb

All birds have four types of feathers. They are:

Covert feathers—cover the entire body and are the most numerous.

Quill feathers—use for flight.

Down feathers—provide protection from the cold.

Each of the above feathers has barbs. The barbs of a bird's feathers lock together forming a smooth surface, allowing the wings to cup air during flight.

Filoplumes—the hairlike feathers with no barbs. They help insulate the bird and are sometimes decorative.

Officially, the parrot family is below the passerine family on the evolutionary scale. This is because their nests are sloppy; their behavior is simple; and they do not sing their own songs. Their skill at imitating speech and their willingness to repeat behavior, however, can make them interesting pets.

To Do

Go to a pet show, a zoo, or some other place where you can observe birds. Compare and contrast their characteristics, including vocal behavior.

Draw a bird and label the crown, throat, tail feathers, primary and secondary flight feathers, leg, foot, nape, beak, and ear coverts.

Types of Birds

Birds are great family pets. Prices and appearances vary greatly—from a few dollars to many hundreds of dollars, and from very small to fairly large. Some are easy to cage and feed; others get sick easily or are hard to feed. For your first pet bird, choose one that is easy to care for.

Housing

All birds need exercise to remain healthy. Small birds should have cages that are large enough to fly around in. As birds become more tame, you can let them fly around a room. Be sure that all window glass and mirrors are covered and no doors or windows are open. Large birds, such as parrots, should be able to flap their wings in the cage. The ideal is to have a parrot perch, so your tame parrot can fly at will in a confined room. Just make sure you have plenty of tissues and soapy water with disinfectant handy to clean up droppings.

Bird cages should have several perches appropriate to the size of the bird's foot. Perches come in many shapes and sizes. You should provide several types so that the bird does not always have to stand on the same size perch. Another important thing to remember is that if you are purchasing a parrot, you will need **hardwood** perches. Parrots love to chew. It helps them keep their beaks trimmed. If you use soft woods, you will need a constant supply of perches.

All bird cages need food and water dishes. Your breeder or pet shop owner will show you those most appropriate for the type of bird you buy. Parrot dishes are not the same as canary dishes for obvious reasons. Parrots will require a larger, more sturdy dish. You may

want to purchase two types of dishes for your parakeet or canary. A covered dish helps keep seeds from being scattered. However, some parakeets will not eat from a covered dish so you may need to buy the uncovered type. For the first few days in its new home, scatter small amounts of seed on the bottom of the cage until your pet finds its food containers.

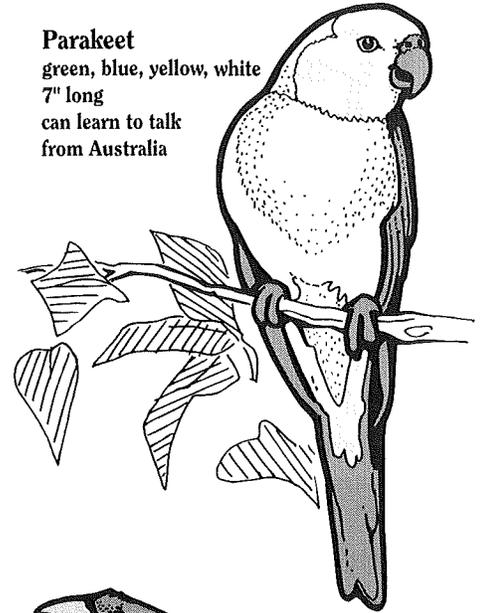
Birds' toenails grow all the time. To help your bird keep its nails trim, you can put a sandpaper cover on one perch. Although these do help keep nails trim, perch covers are not ideal because they can irritate the sensitive parts of the foot. If you would like to make special perches for your bird, follow these directions:

1. Buy a **nontoxic** white glue.
2. Apply glue to the **bottom** half of a few perches.
3. Dip the bottom of the perch into clean, fine, dry sand.
4. Dry thoroughly.

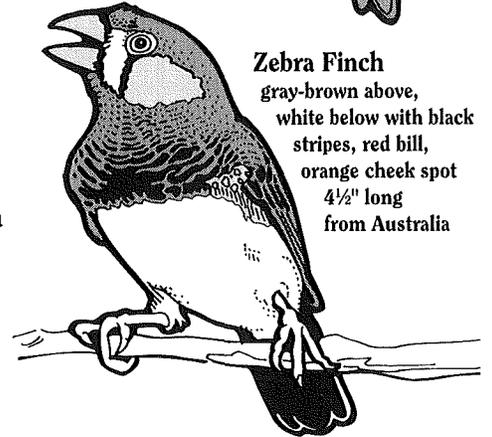
Now your pet can keep its nails trim without hurting its sensitive feet.

Another good idea is to find a sturdy, unusually shaped fruit or maple tree branch with rough bark. Put the branch in your bird's cage after disinfecting with any household disinfectant and drying it well. A branch will look pretty and help trim nails naturally! You can secure the branch to the cage by fastening it with twist ties you would use on plastic bags. There is also another advantage to using a branch. It will be thick in some places and thin in others. Now your bird can choose to land where it is most comfortable.

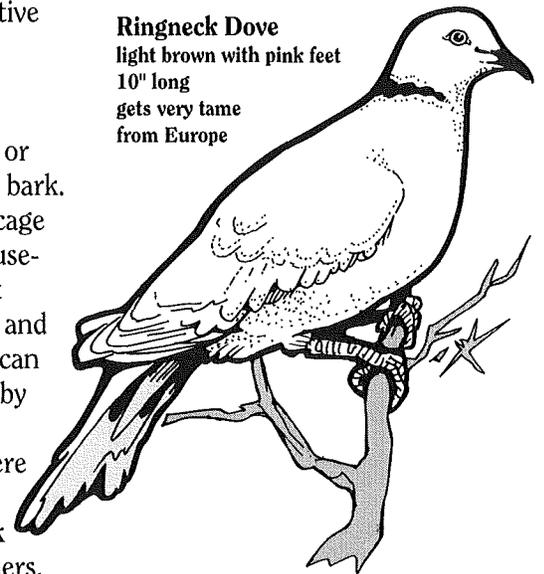
Parakeet
green, blue, yellow, white
7" long
can learn to talk
from Australia



Zebra Finch
gray-brown above,
white below with black
stripes, red bill,
orange cheek spot
4½" long
from Australia



Ringneck Dove
light brown with pink feet
10" long
gets very tame
from Europe



Birds' beaks have a thin layer of tissue similar to our fingernails, and this grows continuously. For small birds, a piece of cuttlebone attached to the side of the cage will provide calcium and minerals and help trim the beak. Larger birds, such as parrots, can chew special mineral bones that are more durable than those used for small birds.

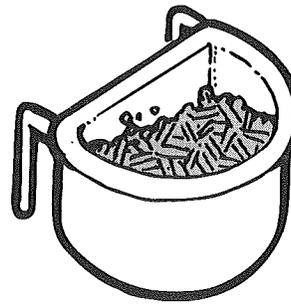
You can purchase several types of toys for your bird that will help keep it amused when you are away. These include bells, sticks, balls, and wooden sticks. **Do not use chains.** Your bird can get its toes stuck in them and break a leg. Ask your pet shop owner or breeder to recommend one or two toys for your type of bird. For example, larger birds may require hardwood toys.

To Do
Provide appropriate size cage, waterer, feeder, perches, and other equipment for your bird.

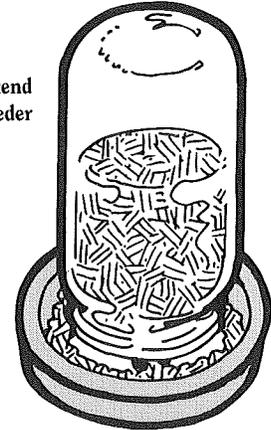
Cleaning
Make sure that you clean your bird's home at least twice a week for all birds except mynahs. Mynahs will have to be cleaned daily.

All pet shops sell bird cage paper that can be cut to the size of the cage. After cleaning the cage, line with paper and sprinkle on a generous amount of gravel. Buy gravel for birds at pet stores; it is a fine-grained material that has been cleaned. Birds have a digestive organ near the stomach in their intestines known as a gizzard that replaces teeth. Gravel is needed by the gizzard to grind food. If you like, you also can add a small amount of gravel in a seed cup.

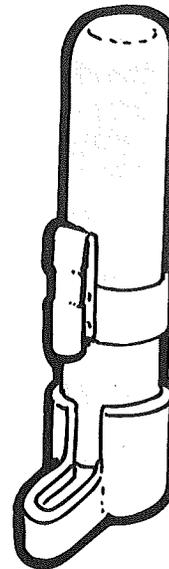
Bird Cage Equipment



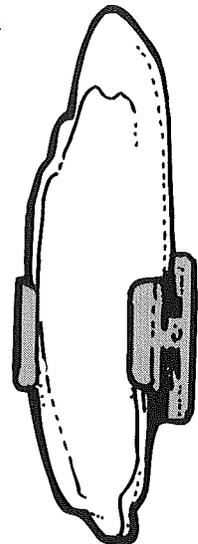
Seed cup or treat cup



Weekend bird feeder

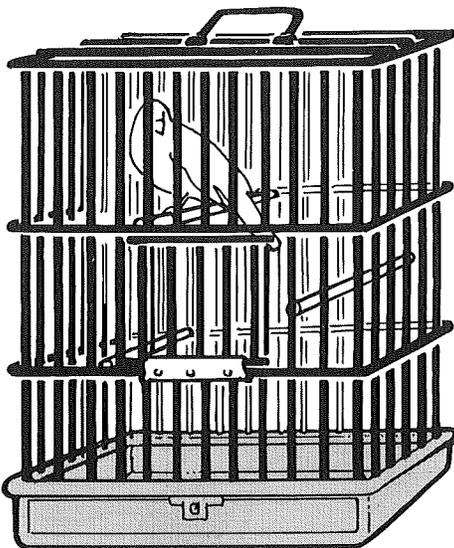
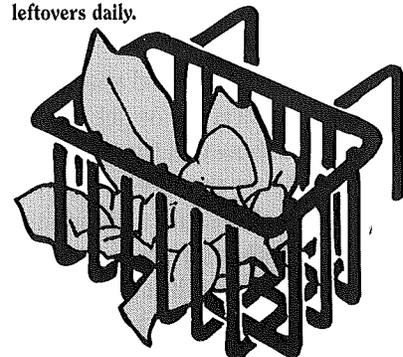


Gravity-fed water cup



Cuttlebone—Provides minerals and helps trim beak

Leaf holder—Fill with small amounts of fresh spinach and remove leftovers daily.



This bird cage is appropriate for small birds such as canaries and budgies.

Clean all perches well, either with a stiff brush or a plastic scouring pad. Wash the food and water dishes with warm soapy water, rinse well, and dry completely before returning to the cage. You should also plan on washing down the bars of the cage on occasion to remove any dust or waste materials. Of course, sweep the floor under the cage regularly to remove seed hulls that have fallen there. If your bird is messy, you can choose from plastic or cloth "seed catchers" that fit under the cage on the outside to help catch most of the hulls.

Where to Keep the Cage

Most birds that we see in pet stores are tropical birds that are now bred in captivity. You can tell when a bird is domestically bred by the leg band that indicates its date of hatching. These birds have been bred for life in our homes. Remember, native wild birds should remain free; do not try to capture them. They will never make good pets.

Since tropical birds are native to warmer climates, you should keep your bird cage in a relatively warm (70°F) room where it will be protected from drafts and sudden temperature changes. All birds enjoy bright light, but do not put them in direct sunlight. Small birds in cages cannot find shade and can overheat and die.

Another place you should not keep a bird is in your kitchen. It is unhealthy for your family and dangerous for your pet. Dangers include hot stove tops, scalding tap water, and sinks full of detergent. Birds also may carry zoonotic diseases (disease that can be shared between animals and people). For example, birds and humans are both susceptible to salmonellosis.

A special cover can be purchased at pet shops to fit over the cage at night or during times when you would like the bird to be quiet. A heavy towel or lightweight blanket also can be used. This will protect the bird from night drafts and help it feel warm and secure. Bird cages should be kept away from heat and air conditioning duct vents, and drafty doorways and windows.

To Do

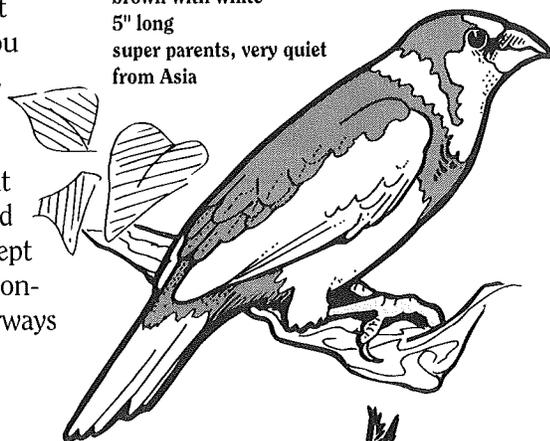
Have a family conference to decide where to locate the bird cage. Discuss both the bird's needs and your family's needs.

Feeding

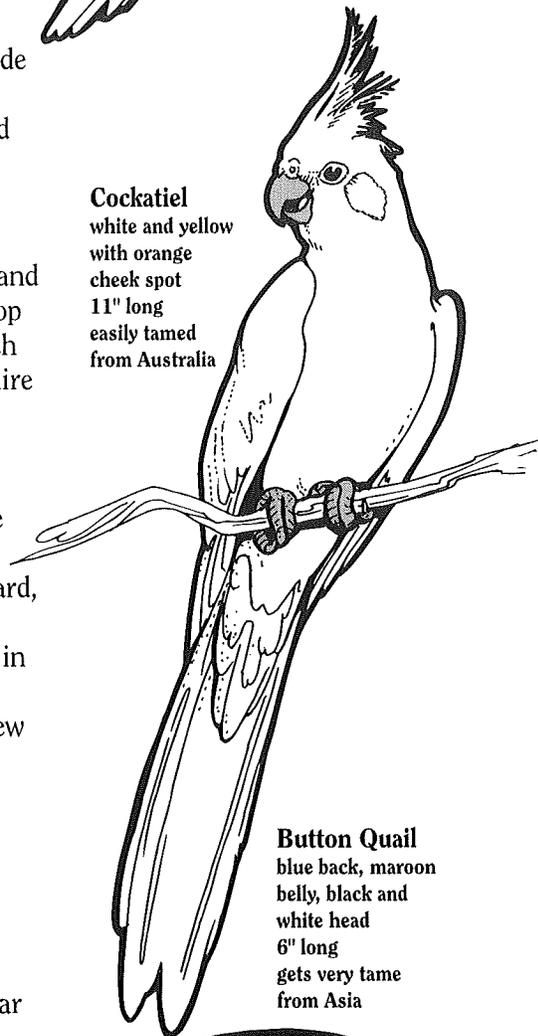
As with all pets, birds need food and water every day. Ask your pet shop owner about the special food each type of bird will need. Birds require a great deal of food for energy. Their body metabolism is very high, meaning they have a naturally high body temperature and need to eat often. If you are feeding wild birds in your backyard, you would make sure that they have food every day, particularly in cold weather. A small bird can freeze to death in a matter of a few hours unless there is sufficient food. If you have taught these outside animals to depend on you, it is your responsibility to care for them correctly.

Be very careful when you check your pet's food dish. It may appear to be full; yet if you blow on it gently, you may see that there is no food at all, only the hulls your bird has removed from the seed. For most birds, small amounts of fresh fruits and vegetables or hard cooked egg yolks are welcome additions to their diets. **Never feed your bird lettuce.** Use spinach instead, and make sure you

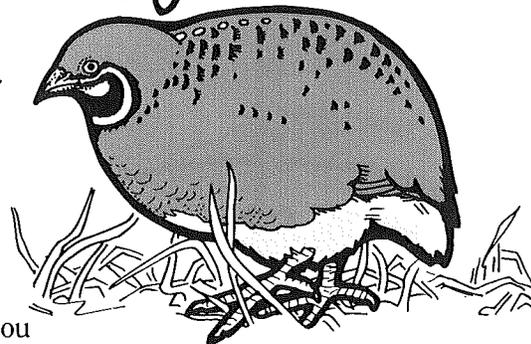
Society Finch
brown with white
5" long
super parents, very quiet
from Asia



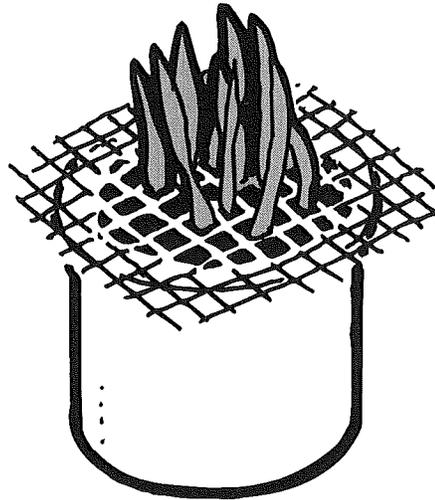
Cockatiel
white and yellow
with orange
cheek spot
11" long
easily tamed
from Australia



Button Quail
blue back, maroon
belly, black and
white head
6" long
gets very tame
from Asia



remove decaying food each day. An easy and appreciated way to provide fresh greens for your bird is to purchase a special sprouting cup that attaches to the side of the cage. Water the seeds, watch them sprout, and allow your bird access to as much fresh green food as it needs. Periodically mist the cup so the greens continue to grow.



Fresh greens cup—Plant a few seeds, place a screen on top, water, and watch them sprout.

Taming

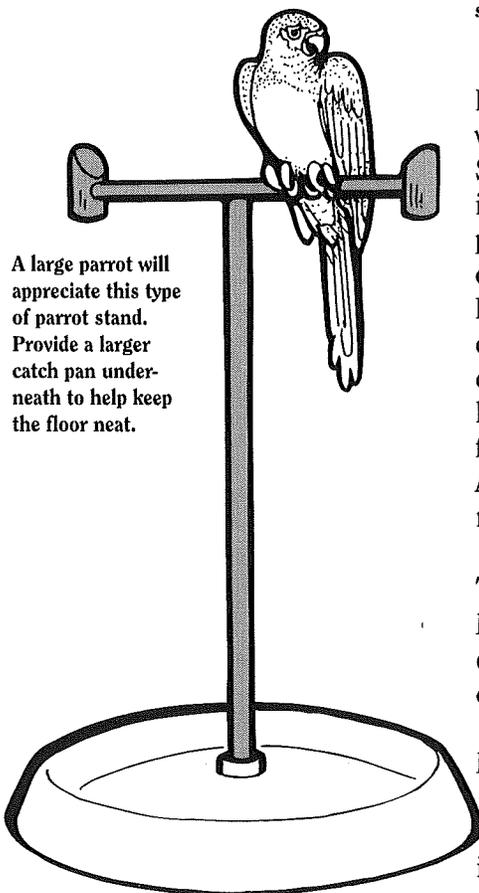
Taming a bird takes time and patience. You probably will not be able to tame your pet canary, but a male will learn to sing songs for you. Sometimes it is necessary to purchase a record of canary songs or leave your pet with a reliable breeder who has several singing canaries. Each bird's song will be individual, but very young birds learn by imitating.

Birds of the parrot family, including budgies, will learn to sit on your finger or shoulder. As the bird becomes accustomed to you, don't be surprised if it flies over and perches right on your head! If your bird starts to pull your hair through its beak, it is actually grooming you and showing you affection. The larger birds, such as parrots, will become jealous of any attention you show to other pets.

When you first bring home your new pet bird, give it a few weeks to become comfortable in its new home. Then gently introduce your finger to its cage. It will probably flutter around quite a bit. Move slowly away, and when the bird calms down, try again. If you practice this every day, within a short time your pet will soon learn to perch on your finger. Remember, because birds are sensitive and fragile, always move slowly and speak softly to them.

As your bird develops confidence in you, it will show you that it is happy and comfortable by coming to you in its cage and flying to you when outside the cage. (Don't forget to close all doors and windows!)

One of the easiest ways to help your bird learn how to trust you is to train it to take small pieces of seed



A large parrot will appreciate this type of parrot stand. Provide a larger catch pan underneath to help keep the floor neat.

Don't forget to provide clean fresh water in your bird's cage daily. Some small birds will try to bathe in their water dish. You can help prevent this by giving them an opportunity to bathe regularly. Bird size "bathtubs" can be purchased at pet shops. Also, plastic containers from home or spinach leaves sprinkled with water make fine bathing places for birds. All bath water should be at room temperature.

To Do

Make a diagram of the bird's digestive tract, and trace the path of feed through the digestive tract.

Make a list of foods for your bird. Tell about the source of each ingredient and why each is important for your type of bird.

from your fingertips. Again, always move slowly and speak softly.

Birds of the parrot family can be taught to talk. This process can become very involved, and you should ask an expert about the proper way to teach each type of parrot. Remember to start with one word and continue with it until the bird learns that word.

Diseases Common to Birds

By providing a clean and dry home, you will help your bird stay healthy. All birds may get "colds" or several other illnesses common to them. Should your pet show any of the following symptoms, consult a veterinarian who specializes in birds. Your local breeder or pet shop owner may know which veterinarians in your area to contact. Birds may become sick very quickly, so it's important to watch them continuously for signs of illness.

Signs of Illness

- Nasal discharge or crust on bill
- Change in eye color
- Swellings and swollen joints
- Ruffled feathers and shivering (indicates fever)
- Puffed out feathers and panting (signs of overheating)
- Soiled vent opening (diarrhea)
- Noises when breathing
- Scales on legs
- Poor feather condition or excessive preening (indicates mites)

Diseases

Pneumonia*

The complex respiratory system of birds includes lungs, air sacs, and airways that extend into the abdomen and bones. Pneumonia, therefore, is a particularly serious disease for them. Immediate medical care and treatment with antibiotics are required. May be caused by bacteria, viruses, or other infections.

Mouth Problems

Bacterial, viral, and other infections can occur in the mouth, but these are often complications arising from Vitamin A deficiency. So, nutritional diet and fresh clean water are important.

External Parasites

Includes mites and lice. Treat the cage and bird with a mite and louse powder available in the pet store. Clean cages frequently. Transmission also occurs from bird to bird, so watch and treat all birds.

Scaly Face/Leg

Crusty-looking beak and legs caused by small mites. Can be treated.

Diarrhea/Constipation*

Can be caused by incorrect diet. Make sure you feed the correct type and amount of food. Diarrhea also can be an indication of a more serious disease.

Avian Pox

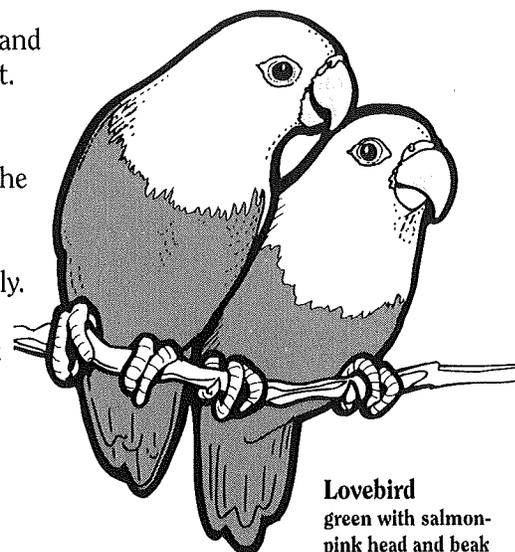
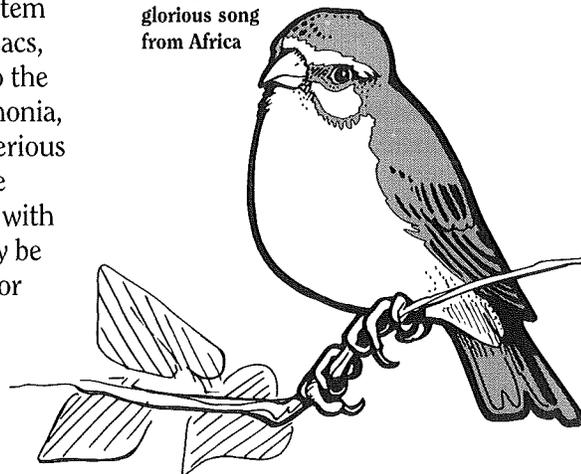
Usually causes lumps on the face. A viral disease difficult to diagnose, so consult a veterinarian.

French Molt

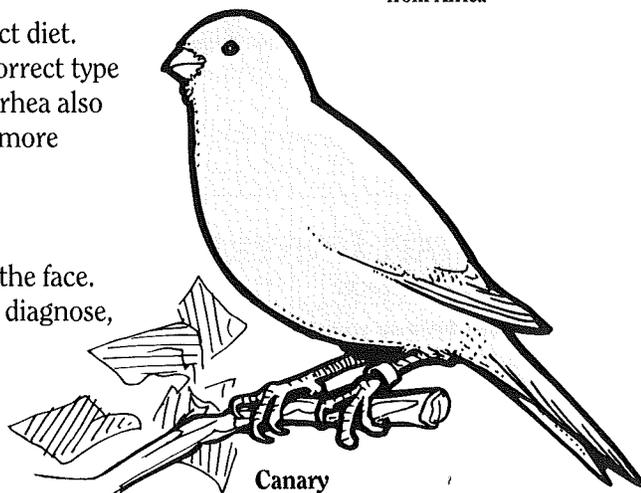
The bird loses its flight feathers first, then later its covert feathers. Little can be done about this disease. Sometimes the feathers may grow back.

Green Singing Finch

green above, yellow below, yellow eyebrow
5" long
glorious song
from Africa



Lovebird
green with salmon-pink head and beak
6" long
many varieties
from Africa



Canary
yellow, green, orange, white
7" long
for experts only, very nice song
from Europe

Aspergillosis*

A serious fungal disease causing lung growths; consult your veterinarian.

Pacheco's Disease

This is one kind of herpes virus infection birds can get. With Pacheco's disease, sudden death with few warning signs occurs. At other times, birds may first seem listless and vomit, have diarrhea, and drink a lot. Some birds may recover. Treatment may help.

Internal Parasites*

Many types occur and may be serious. Microscopic examination of droppings is necessary for diagnosis. Medicines are available for successful treatment.

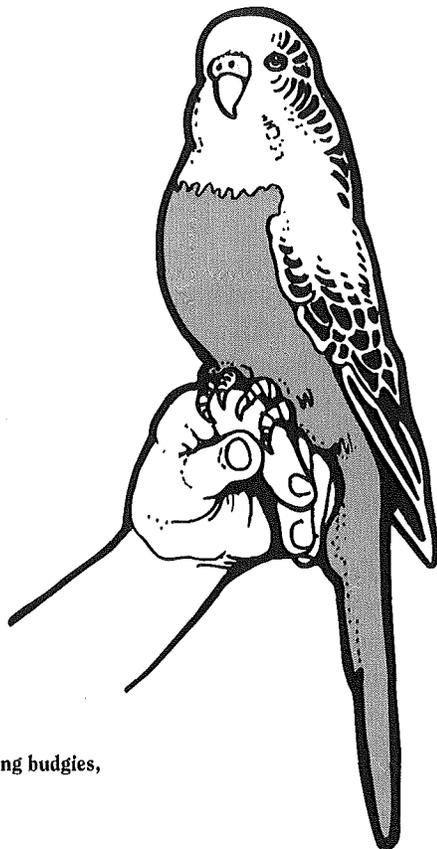
Teflon Toxicity

Vapors given off by Teflon coatings on pots and pans are toxic to birds.

***Important:** Whenever you take your bird to a veterinarian, bring its cage. Do not clean it since seeing the droppings, food and water, and being able to take samples are important for diagnosis and treatment.

Treatment

Many treatments are available to help your pet bird. Some can be put in the bird's water or food. Others you will need to place on the bird or in its mouth. Your veterinarian will describe how to do the treatments. Sometimes birds will need to be hospitalized for special treatments with fluids, injected medicines, and observation. Birds are very sensitive and need special care whenever you or the doctor treat them.



Birds of the parrot family, including budgies, will learn to sit on your finger.

First Aid

Immediately raise the temperature near your bird to 80°–90°F, but give the bird room to get away from the heat. A light bulb with a reflector is ideal. For very weak birds, put them in a box with a heat lamp or heating pad with a thermometer to be sure the temperature doesn't get too high. Sometimes heat alone will make a very sudden improvement in the bird, so be sure they cannot escape from the box.

To Do

Observe your bird daily for evidence of disease or parasite control. Use recommended prevention and control procedures or practices.

Visit a veterinarian's office to discuss bird health and procedures to follow in case of an emergency.

Prepared by Loren Will, former extension veterinarian; Deb Hall, extension youth development specialist; Melva L. Berkland, extension communication specialist; and Denise Braunhardt, University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension. Illustrations and publication design by Lonna Nachtigal.

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