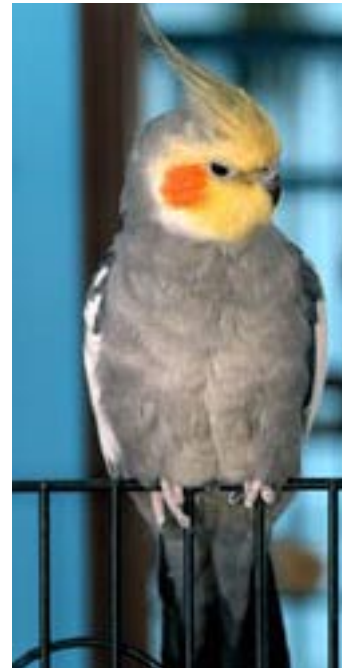


Before Adopting a Parrot

By Sharon St. Joan

Although parrots are truly fascinating animals, they can also be much more challenging than people anticipate. If you're thinking of adopting a parrot, here are a few things you need to know:

- Parrots are wild by nature. They are not domesticated animals like cats and dogs, who have been selectively bred for suitable "pet qualities" for quite some time. Whether captured in the wild or bred in captivity, parrots are at most only a few generations removed from their native habitats, and they retain many of the survival instincts and social behaviors of their cousins in the wild.
- All dogs are the same species, as are all domestic cats, but there are more than 350 species of parrots. If you adopt a parrot, you'll need to learn about that particular species' care and behavioral needs, and adjust your lifestyle accordingly.
- Parrots are highly intelligent; in fact, in some species, their intelligence is equivalent to that of a three- to five-year-old child.
- Small parrots, like cockatiels or parrotlets, may live to be 20–30 years old. Larger parrots, like amazons, cockatoos or macaws, may live to be 60–80 years old. So, adopting a parrot is truly a lifetime commitment. While adopting a dog or a cat is a commitment to the lifetime of the animal (generally 10–15 years), adopting a parrot is a commitment for *your* lifetime – and beyond. If you think your parrot might outlive you, you will need to arrange for a future home for your parrot after you are no longer around.



Caring for a Parrot

Here are some details about the care that parrots require:

- Because they are highly intelligent, parrots require a great deal of attention. You'll need to spend at least two to three hours a day interacting with your parrot outside his cage, and you'll need to provide some entertainment for your bird for the rest of the day, such as safe toys, radio or television, and contact with other family members or other parrots.
- Most people don't realize that parrots are messy. You'll be spending time cleaning his cage, around his cage, his play area, and any other areas of the house where he may play.
- A parrot requires a very complex and varied diet of pellets, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds, which you'll need to prepare every day.
- You'll need to be mindful of your parrot's wild heritage and try to simulate some of

a wild parrot's experiences in your home. For example, birds benefit greatly, both psychologically and physically, from free flight, so it's important to provide a safe area that will allow your parrot an opportunity to fly.

- You'll need to parrot-proof your house, both for the safety of your parrot and also to prevent damage done by the parrot. Many common household products and items may be hazardous to your bird.

If you already have other parrots in your home, you'll certainly have a head start in terms of knowing what to expect and what care is required. But, you'll need to ask yourself how the new addition to your family will affect the birds you already have and your relationship with them.

Characteristics of Parrots

Before you adopt a parrot, you should know about these characteristics:

- Parrots can be vocal and loud. In the wild, parrots use loud vocalizations to call the flock to a food source, to warn of danger, or just to keep in contact with flockmates. Providing your parrot with ample socialization and enrichment activities will help to keep the noise down, but all parrots will be noisy from time to time. While all parrots are vocal, many will not learn or choose to speak.
- In the wild, parrots are prey animals and, as such, are highly alert and easily stressed. They may have adverse reactions to objects or situations (like sudden movements or loud noises) that would barely affect dogs or cats.
- Parrots use their powerful beaks to eat, chew, preen and hold objects. They also use them to bite when they become frightened or agitated, or are defending their territory. Learning to read your bird's body language and understanding bird behavior will help you to recognize when your parrot needs her space.
- Parrots are extremely social and active animals. They have a very complex psychology, and can easily develop behavior problems, such as feather plucking, if they don't receive a great deal of daily interaction with humans and/or other birds.
- Because parrots have only very recently lived with humans, and they retain all their wild instincts, it is possible that the parrot you adopt may never really bond with you.

Incorporating a Parrot into Your Family

Having pre-set ideas that you expect your parrot to fulfill will most likely lead to disappointment for you and possibly to neglect for the bird. So, unless you and everyone in your household is prepared to accept, love and care for your parrot exactly as she is – cuddly or aloof, talkative or not, shy or outgoing, comical or reserved – it's best not to adopt a parrot.

Adopting a parrot for your child is only advisable for an older child or teenager, and only under certain circumstances. If your child is particularly kind, sensitive, and aware around animals in general, and is especially drawn to birds, a smaller parrot, such as a cockatiel or a budgie, may be an appropriate choice. Remember that you, not your child,

is entirely responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of the bird. When the time comes for your child to leave home, in all probability the parrot will be yours for many years to come, and will still require the same level of love, care and attention.

If you have cats, it's probably not a good idea to adopt a parrot. Having dogs and parrots together may work fine if you have considerable experience with parrots.

Adopt Instead of Buy

If you do decide to get a parrot, please adopt one from a parrot rescue organization. There is an overpopulation problem for parrots, just as there is for dogs and cats. Buying a parrot from either a pet shop or a breeder simply worsens the problem. Also, please don't breed your parrot. To find a parrot rescue organization near you, contact Best Friends, or go to the website for the Avian Welfare Coalition, www.avianwelfare.org, which provides a list of reputable rescue organizations, as well as a great deal of useful advice on many parrot-related topics.

Educate Yourself

Before you adopt a parrot, you should educate yourself thoroughly about all the things you'll need to know to keep your parrot happy and safe. The points mentioned above are only the tip of the iceberg. You should spend several weeks or months learning about parrots from books, magazines, and people. You'll need to read about parrots in general and about the particular species of parrot you plan to adopt. To start, here are two good articles from the Avian Welfare Coalition website:

“Ten Things To Know Before Adopting a Bird”

<http://www.avianwelfare.org/issues/articles/10things.htm>

“The True Nature of Parrots”

<http://www.avianwelfare.org/issues/articles/truenature.htm>

If you've never had a parrot in your life before, get to know some real parrots and learn how to handle and relate to them. If you have had a parrot before whom you no longer have, you may need to ask yourself some difficult questions: What is the reason you no longer have your parrot? Is your life stable and secure enough for you to make the required commitment? Are you knowledgeable enough to keep your parrot safe and well? Remember, a choice for a lifetime is not one to be made on an impulse.

If, having considered all of the above, you still want to adopt a parrot, you may find the most wonderful friend of your life – one who is intelligent, magical, whimsical, loving, entertaining, and endlessly fascinating.

Sharon St. Joan established Feathered Friends at Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and has cared for birds and wildlife for over 15 years. She now devotes her time to writing about birds and wildlife-related issues.

See also: [Educating Yourself About Avian Care and Behavior](#)