



# Living with Companion Budgerigars



## Budgies As Pets

Budgies are tiny pets with big personalities! They are smart, trainable and can be very loving. The more time you invest in your pet, the greater the bond will become. Their species name is ***Melopsittacus undulatus*** and they are sometimes called parakeets. They are native to arid parts of Australia, and are the most popular pet birds in the world. Wild budgies are green, but selective breeding has produced many domestic colour varieties. They can be found in white, yellow, blue and green and combinations thereof.

Hand-raised budgies are the easiest to train, and are the best choice for those who have never kept a budgie before, but those that were not hand-raised can also make excellent pets. They will just require more time and patience from their owners.

## Description

Budgies are bright and happy

little pets with a sunny disposition. They weigh 30-35 grams and have a downward hooked beak for shelling seeds. They are about 20 centimeters long, from the nose to the tip of the tail. Each foot has four toes, with two pointing forward and two backward. It is important to watch the claws and to clip them if they grow too long or begin to spiral. Budgies have a white or yellow face and usually have a necklace of black dots that run across the neck under the chin. They have thin black stripes (bars) over their heads that recede as the bird reaches maturity. A young bird can be identified by a black tip on the end of the upper beak, by black bars over the entire head that begin very close to the nose, and by their eyes which are completely black (an adult budgie has a noticeable light ring around the pupil). There is little difference in appearance between male and female budgies except for the colour of their nose, or cere. Males have a blue cere, where females have a brown or tan cere. It is difficult to distinguish the sex of an immature budgie.

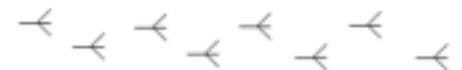
Budgies have a broad range of life expectancy, from 7 years to 20. They are highly social and are happily kept in pairs or even more. Keeping them in pairs makes it much more of a challenge to socialize the birds to humans though, and they will

require far more of a time investment than would a single budgie.

They are easy pets to keep, but do produce a bit of feather and seed-shell scatter around their cages. They are great pets for children and for the elderly because of their minimal maintenance and the strong sense of companionship they provide. A budgie is not a quiet pet, however, and approval should be sought from your landlord if you rent, and from family members before bringing home any new pet. A dark cage cover can be used to hush a budgie, and most people cover their birds at night so they aren't awakened early in the morning by their budgies' cheerful calls.

Budgies love noise and commotion, within limits of course. Place the cage in a busy part of the house, like the kitchen or living room. A vacuum or a running tap will have the bird chirping enthusiastically. When the bird is left at home alone, a radio or television can be left on to comfort him.

A well socialized budgie will be a true friend and companion for many years, and is one of the very few pets that can learn to say "I love you" back.





## Budgie-Proofing

A factsheet produced by the  
Canadian Federation of  
Humane Societies

September 2003

*The Canadian Federation of Humane Societies is a national body comprised of animal welfare organizations and individuals whose purpose is to promote compassion and humane treatment for all animals.*

Author

Jennifer Strong-Klefenz

Program Director

Shelagh MacDonald

Chief Executive Officer

Bob Van Tongerlo

*CFHS is a registered charity. Donations in support of our national animal welfare programs can be made by cheque, credit card or by calling our toll-free number.*

Charitable Registration #  
11830 884 RR0001



**Canadian Federation  
of Humane Societies**

30 Concourse Gate, Suite 102  
Ottawa, Ontario K2E 7V7

Tel: (613) 224-8072

Fax: (613) 723-0252

Toll Free: 1-888-678-CFHS

e-mail: [info@cfhs.ca](mailto:info@cfhs.ca)

Website: [www.cfhs.ca](http://www.cfhs.ca)

One of the most common causes of injury to pet birds is a ceiling fan. If you have ceiling fans in your home, be absolutely certain that they are off before letting your budgie out to fly, and it is best to restrict your budgie to a room without a fan. Often ceiling fans are balanced with lead weights, and if the budgie perches on the fan when it is off, chewing at the lead weight can be toxic. Another danger is an open door. Budgies will often perch on the top of a door, or try to follow their owners out of a room. Take care that the bird does not get caught in a door being pulled shut, or blown shut by a breeze. Unscreened windows are an escape route, and once outdoors a frightened budgie may be impossible to retrieve.

Many budgies are avid chewers so it is important to monitor them while they are out for exercise. Seeing what preferences your budgie has for chewing will help you to choose an appropriate exercise room for the bird. Some nibble paper, others wood. Remove furniture, lighting, or any ornaments that you are concerned about from the bird's room, or choose another room for your bird.

Oscillating fans, a pot of boiling water on the stove, hot water running from the tap and the presence of a cat are also dangers to be aware of. A safe

room for a budgie should have window screens, no vanity mirrors (they give the illusion of access to another room and budgies will sometimes fly into them), and a door to close to prevent access to parts of the home that may not be monitored. Budgies will often perch on the top of curtains or tall pieces of furniture. If this is not desirable, build a wooden perch with small mirrors, toys and food that your budgie can play on.

Whenever your budgie is out of his cage be sure to let other family members know so that greater attention can be paid to opening and closing doors and windows. Even if you use a safe room to play with your budgie, someone may inadvertently open the door giving the bird a chance to get out to the rest of the house.

## Training and Handling

Hand-raised birds have imprinted on humans and readily accept interaction. If you choose to buy a budgie that was not hand-raised try to get a young bird and after a few days of quiet adjustment to the new home, provide the budgie with plenty of gentle attention. Begin socializing your bird without opening the cage door. Allow him to get used to your voice and your face. When he seems comfortable with your close presence you can open the door and place your hand inside. He



will likely flutter around a bit, but remain calm and still and resist the impulse to jerk your hand out of the cage. When the bird accepts your hand in the cage (this may take up to a week) you can draw your finger up horizontally to the bird's breast and if he allows it, press your finger gently above his legs. If he steps onto your finger, use the perch to steady your finger and remain still, speaking gently to him. After a short time allow him to step back onto his perch and withdraw your hand.

When he has learned to step onto your finger readily, you can consider allowing him out of his cage. The first few times he is free a budgie will be frightened and disoriented. Be sure the room is budgie-proofed and that the door and windows are closed, and there is no ceiling fan or vanity mirror in the room. The bird may refuse to stay on your finger as you draw him out of the cage door. If this happens, be patient. Wait until the bird is ready. If he does come out of the cage, he will probably leap from your finger and circle the room until he tires. He may land on the top of the curtains, or he may flutter to the floor. Don't chase him; let him rest and explore for a while. When it is time to return him to his cage, approach him quietly and slowly and see if he will climb onto your finger. He will probably fly away and circle the room a few more times, but when tired he should be fairly easy to catch. If you are unable to catch him, dim the lights and

he will be more reluctant to fly. When caught he may become frightened and bite. Budgies are capable of giving a sharp pinch, but will not break the skin. If you have sensitive hands you might wear light gloves to catch the bird when returning him to his cage, but this is usually not necessary. While holding the bird, be sure not to compress his belly or you will suffocate him. A finger and thumb placed on either side of his head can restrict his movement and prevent him from nipping.

Eventually the bird will look forward to being taken out of his cage and will learn to associate your presence with play time. A well socialized budgie may learn to come when called, will eagerly jump onto your finger and will affectionately nibble your eyebrows and forehead when held up to your face. To entertain your budgie you can make yourself a necklace out of bright, colourful plastic beads of different sizes and textures and your budgie will play with it while sitting on your shoulder.

Budgies sometimes have their wings clipped to reduce their flying ability (note that this does not always prevent them from flying) and this can be used as a training aid. A veterinary clinic can provide this service if you are unfamiliar with the procedure. If the flight feathers are clipped too close to the skin they will bleed. A bird does not have a lot of blood to lose so this must be avoided. If a clipped or broken

feather bleeds, pull out the remaining quill of the feather to stop the flow. Do not attempt to clip feathers without clear direction from an experienced person or a good book.

Budgies are highly intelligent and can learn tricks like performing tasks or displaying their wings on command. This is made especially easy if you identify treats that your bird enjoys. You can teach your budgie to say words and phrases by repeating them over and over. You can make a tape recording of the word or phrase and play it for the budgie in your absence as well. They have the capacity to learn a broad repertoire of words and it may even surprise you to hear your budgie say something that you did not mean to teach him.

## Housing

For a single budgie the size of cage should be a minimum of 18 inches high, one foot deep and two feet long. Rectangular cages are preferable to round or cylindrical cages and horizontal is better than vertical. The cage bars should be no more than a half inch apart to prevent the budgie from getting his head stuck between the bars. Do not buy a wooden cage, as budgies will eventually chew through the bars. The best perches for a cage are actual sticks and branches. The variation in texture and diameter lets the budgie avoid discomfort from



## Diet

constant pressure on his feet caused by cylindrical perches. A budgie will chew on his perch, so avoid wood like cherry branches that may contain toxins in the bark, and be sure to sand down any sharp points on the branch before placing it in the cage so the budgie cannot injure himself on them. Sandpaper perch covers should be used on only one perch, as they are too abrasive for a budgie to stand on all day and night. Be sure the sandpaper perch is not on the preferred location in the cage.

Cages usually have seed and water cups that attach from the outside. These are easily removed to be cleaned and refilled daily. The cage bottom should be lined with paper and changed daily to prevent the buildup of feces and bacteria. The cage should be disinfected weekly with soapy water.

You can hang mirrors, swings and plastic toys in the cage for your budgie to play with. They enjoy plastic budgie-shaped toys and toys with bells that jingle when nibbled on. Toys and mirrors will also need to be cleaned when disinfecting the cage.

A shallow birdbath large enough for a budgie provides messy but amusing entertainment. If the cage is not large enough for a full bath, or if the budgie dislikes the idea, try using a plant mister spray bottle to lightly wet the bird. Budgies should have or use a 'bath' 2-3 times per week.

Budgie seed mix can be obtained at any pet store and most grocery stores. This mix is composed mainly of canary seed and millet. Rape seed, sesame seed and oats are often added, and this can be further supplemented with Niger seed, flax seed and slices of fresh fruit and vegetable, including dandelion greens and carrot tops. A vitamin supplement powder is available at pet stores that can be sprinkled on their food in the seed cup. It is best not to mix it into the drinking water as it spoils quickly and might deter the bird from drinking. A third cup should be provided that contains gravel or grit to help the budgie break down their food in the crop. Empty the seed cup daily and refill it with fresh seed mix. Because the seed husks accumulate in the cups they will appear full even when there are no intact seeds left.

## Health

A healthy budgie is alert and active with clear eyes and smooth flat feathers. Normal droppings are usually seen as a ring of solid green matter with a tiny puddle of white liquid. A budgie with its feathers fluffed up, huddled with closed eyes, shivering and with clear and watery droppings is a sick bird. Budgies can contract "Scaley-face" which is a disease caused by a mite infestation. This gives the appearance of a flakey, rough

cere and may cause feather loss on the face around the cere. Budgies may become egg-bound when an egg cannot pass through the cloaca. When egg-bound, a budgie will often be found sitting on the floor of the cage with ruffled feathers. Unfortunately, budgies seem to get more than their fair share of tumors, so if a lump is found; or if any abnormality in behaviour or condition is noticed the budgie should receive veterinary attention.

The beak continuously grows, and may overgrow if the budgie is not provided with surfaces like a cuttlebone to gnaw on. In these cases the budgie may lose the ability to feed and will need to have the beak trimmed back to its normal length. Claws can also overgrow if not kept trimmed. Ask your veterinarian to show you the proper way to trim claws.

Teflon is the trademarked name for Tetrafluoroethylene. Non-stick pots and pans coated with this can release toxic fumes that will kill small birds when heated beyond 230 degrees Celsius. The danger occurs when a pot on the stove is forgotten and boils dry, allowing it to overheat. Most normal cooking temperatures are low enough that this is not a threat.

## Budgies and Other Animals

Budgies are small fluttery



animals that often attract unwanted attention of cats and some dogs. It is not recommended to allow predatory pets access to a pet bird.

Budgies are curious and inquisitive and are often intrigued by small pets like hamsters, mice and aquariums with fish. Some budgies may be gentle, while others may be less so. Never allow your pets to interact without supervision.

### Before you Make the Commitment...

- ✓ Have you planned in your budget for emergency medical care?
- ✓ If you rent, have you checked to be sure you will be allowed to keep a budgie?
- ✓ What will you do with your budgie during vacation time?

- ✓ Budgies generally live to be 7 to as many as 20 years old. Are you prepared for this long-term commitment?
- ✓ Children should be supervised while interacting with their budgie. Do you have the time to spend with the children and their pet? Will you teach them to handle the bird gently and carefully?
- ✓ Do you have other pets to consider before taking a budgie home?
- ✓ Budgies moult. Are there allergies in your family?
- ✓ Will a budgie fit into your home and lifestyle?

### Checklist

#### Housing

- Roomy cage with wooden perches at different heights

- Paper to line the cage bottom
- Food dish
- Water dish
- Toys and small mirrors
- Budgie-proofed play/exercise room

#### Food

- Budgie seed (a mix of primarily millet and canary seed)
- Fresh raw fruit and vegetables
- Cuttlebone to chew on to keep the beak trim
- Grit or gravel, containing crushed oyster shell

#### Supplies

- Toenail clippers
- Old towels for a cage cover
- Radio to leave on for your budgie
- Good book on budgie care
- Bath dish or plant mister

#### Vet Care and More

- Emergency medical care
- Vacation care

## MORE PUBLICATIONS FROM CFHS...

Other publications available from the Canadian Federation of Humane Societies:

 *A Common Sense Guide to Selecting a Dog or a Cat*

 *Living with Urban Wildlife* factsheets

- Raccoons
- Squirrels
- Skunks
- Mice & Rats
- Pigeon

 *Happy Indoor Cats* factsheet

 *Giving Your Cat a Safe and Happy Home*

#### Other companion animal factsheets in this series:

- Living With Companion Hamsters
- Living With Companion Cockatiels
- Living With Companion Ferrets
- Living With Companion Captive Finches
- Living With Companion Gerbils
- Living With Companion Guinea Pigs