

features

ANIMAL TALK

Feathered friends

Providing the best care possible for your avian companion

Emily Pringle

Animal talk



Birds are intelligent, sociable, inquisitive, and beautiful animals that can be excellent companions.

Without the specialized care they need, however, pet birds can develop significant physical and behavioral health problems such as malnutrition, feather plucking, excessive vocalization and aggression.

In the wild, seed-eating birds eat a wide variety of foods, which provides them with a balanced diet.

Wild budgerigar parakeets, for example, may eat as many as 60 different types of seeds. Pet birds fed only mixed seed diets often develop signs of malnutrition, since commercial seed mixes contain only a few types of seeds and birds may eat only their favourites. A diet lacking in essential nutrients may lead to obesity, poor feather quality, and a weakened immune system.

A pet bird should eat an appropriate pelleted diet - fresh fruits and vegetables and some seeds. Treats like plain, whole-wheat toast or cooked whole-wheat pasta can be offered in small amounts. There are many recipes available for homemade mashes and salads for birds. Before making changes, speak to your veterinarian or a reputable bird breeder.

Pet birds raised on seed diets may have difficulty accepting new foods and will need careful monitoring. Your veterinarian may recommend a vitamin and mineral supplement if your bird is only eating seeds. Avoid chocolate, coffee, tea, onions, garlic, avocado, artificial sweeteners, fruit pits (like peach,



PAM MAKER/ SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Niko, a Lovebird, was part of the Southport Animal Hospital team for 10 years.



KIRA KOZMA-ALLAIN/SPECIAL TO THE GUARDIAN

Mr. Bean, a mustached parakeet, developed lead poisoning in 2015 as result of chewing painted wood trim. He suffered from seizures and other neurologic signs. With prompt veterinary treatment he made a full recovery.

At a glance

— Pet birds often suffer from boredom and frustration. Provide mental stimulation and physical activity by creating a Foraging Tree. Follow this link: www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com/captive-foraging-video.

— Other good birding sites include the Eastern Canada Avian Association: www.ecavianassociation.com; Pet birds Lafeber Co.: lafeber.com/pet-birds.

plum), apple seeds, or foods containing high amounts of fat, salt or sugar. Among the potential hazards in a normal household, some may be obvious (ceiling fans), others may not (glasses of water). Birds are inquisitive by nature, and they will use their tongue and mouth to feel and investigate objects.

Supervise your pet carefully while it is out of its' cage and be mindful of the following:

— Nonstick cookware, air fresheners, scented candles and cigarette smoke can create potentially fatal fumes. Never keep your pet bird in the kitchen while you are cooking.

— Windows, mirrors and ceiling fans can all be dangerous to a flying bird. Lock the outer door to prevent your bird from accidentally being let outside.

— Standing water is another. Pet birds have drowned while trying to drink out of a glass of water by falling in headfirst and getting stuck.

See PROPER, B6

A happy ending

NANETTE JOHNSTONE/THE GUARDIAN

Nanette Johnston adopted Bones from the P.E.I. Humane Society in April 2015. Here they are getting their dog-carting certificate from Red Dog Training Services. Johnston says that after a couple of months of training they've become quite the team.

Proper care for birds

FROM B5

Keep the toilet lid down and don't leave dishes soaking in the sink.

— Lead or other heavy metal poisoning is a potentially fatal condition. Lead sources include painted surfaces, fishing sinkers and stained glass.

— Galvanized metals may contain high levels of zinc, which is also toxic. Chewing on electrical cords and fabrics can lead to electrocution or damage to the digestive system.

— If you are considering getting a pet bird, do some careful research to learn about the species' natural habitat, social interactions, behaviour, diet and life expectancy. Consider joining a bird club or going to a bird show to meet with breeders and their birds. Speak to your veteri-

narian about your pet's health care needs that will include routine physical exams, bloodwork and fecal analysis, as well as regular beak, wing and nail care.

Next month in Animal Talk: Open farm etiquette.

Dr. Emily Pringle is a member of the P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, one of the member groups of the P.E.I. Companion Animal Welfare Initiative (CAWI), the goal of which is to improve the welfare of owned and unowned companion animals on P.E.I. CAWI consists of the P.E.I. Humane Society, SpayAid, Cat Action Team, P.E.I. Veterinary Medical Association, P.E.I. department of agriculture and forestry, P.E.I. 4-H, and Sir James Dunn Animal Welfare Centre at AVC. For more information, see gov.pe.ca/agriculture/CAWI. Readers may send questions related to the well being of owned and unowned companion animals to askcawi@gmail.com