



**CONCISE CARE SHEETS**

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**P A R A K E E T  
B U D G E R I G A R**

**INTRO**

Popularly known in America as parakeets, a term that is also applied worldwide to most long-tailed parrot relative (psittacine), budgerigars or budgies have long been adored as companion animal caged birds. Parakeets (budgies) are gentle and make very good pets as long as they receive a good deal of attention and love. They are highly social birds that demand companionship, and if they are to be left alone for extended periods of time are best kept with a mate. They are monogamous and pair bond for life, but will often pair with another if their mate has an untimely death. Well-cared for parakeets may live for 12 or more years and a 20 year lifespan is not unheard of.

The wild type parakeet is a greenish bird, but aviculture has produced about 100 color forms. They are often sold as green, blue or fancy, the latter including many variations and combinations of green, blue, yellow, purple, grey and white. Albinos and lutinos are commonly available.

Parakeets (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) have become such a fixture of the pet industry that people and have been domesticated for so long that some forget that they still exist in Australia. This slender 7-8" bird inhabits scrubland and grassland where it primarily feeds on a variety of seeds.

**GENERAL CARE & FEEDING**

Parakeets require fresh food and water daily. Offer non-chlorinated lukewarm water in a clean container that is scrubbed daily and disinfected each week. Although a seed-eater, today pelleted diets formulated to provide precise nutrition are favored. The biggest problem with offering seed mixes as a primary diet is that rarely do birds eat a healthy variety, but rather show a preference for fatty seeds to the exclusion of others and are malnourished as a result. Pelleted diets should provide about 70% of the parakeet's dry diet and fresh fruits and vegetables making up the other 30%. Seeds like millet spray and oats may used as an occasional treat, but never sugary or high fat foods. Every effort should be made to use a modern pelleted diet instead of the seex mixes of yesterday. That said, unlike many more omnivorous and frugivorous parrots, parakeets are true seed-eaters and many will thrive on a quality seed mix that is comprised of about 40% canary seed, 50% millet and 10% oats as long as it is supplemented often with fresh foods. Many modern parakeet breeders choose to use a dry diet that contains both canary seed and pellets.

Fresh fruits and vegetables should be regularly offered. Dark, leafy greens are packed with vitamins, and many budgies also enjoy grated carrots and broccoli. Common fruit favorites are apples (no seeds!), pears, melon and kiwi.

**CAUTION:** *It is important to remove any uneaten food after a couple of hours so that spoiled produce is not consumed and pests are not attracted. Avocado, cherry pits, rhubarb and apple or other fruit seeds are toxic and must be avoided. Chocolate, caffeine and alcohol are also deadly to birds, as are the fumes given off by overheated non-stick cookware.*

Cuttlebone and a mineral block are necessary for added calcium and to keep your parakeet's bill trim and should always be available to your parakeet.

**HOUSING**

Parakeets are active and playful and require a roomy cage. The largest possible habitat should be provided, with an 20" long x 12" deep x 18" high enclosure with 1/2" or smaller wire bar spacing the minimum for one bird. Whenever possible a larger cage (for example, 36" long x 20" deep x 36" high) should be used with larger flights needed for larger groups of birds. A variety of perches at least 4" long and 3/8" in diameter should provide access to different areas of the cage and horizontal cage bars are preferred as parakeets love to climb. Ensure that perches vary in diameter to exercise feet prevent foot arthritis. Using some natural hardwood branches as perches (e.g., manzanita, dragonwood) is beneficial for foot exercise and mental stimulation. Clean branches from oak or maple trees also work well and provide both climbing and chewing activity that helps

**QUICK TIPS**

- » 65-80°F, no drafts
- » Specialized pellets should make up 60-70% of diet, plus fresh vegetables, fruits and small amounts of fortified seeds.
- » Keep in pairs if unable to devote daily interaction time

with keeping both beak and claws trim. Do not use sandpaper perches as these can cause serious foot irritation and infection.

A grate on the habitat floor should keep the parakeet away from its droppings and the tray beneath should contain paper liner, newspaper or corn cob bedding that is changed daily. Weekly deep cleaning of the entire cage should be performed using warm soapy water that is rinsed well and allowed to fully

dry. If necessary the cage may be sanitized with a 3% bleach solution, but care must be taken to rinse and dry thoroughly.

Birds are most comfortable when they are your eye level or higher so ensure that the cage is on an elevated stand or otherwise placed in a high position. Parakeets will adapt to normal house room temperatures, but chilly drafts and temperature extremes including direct sun must be avoided.

A variety of toys are need to stimulate your parakeet and keep it healthy, when it is not receiving your attention and love. These toys should be replaced and/or rotated and moved around the cage periodically for mental stimulation. They also enjoy a shallow bath in their habitat. A flower pot saucer works well and should be filled clean lukewarm water and kept clean. Placing it away from perches and food dishes will help keep it from becoming soiled.

**HANDLING & ACTIVITY**

Entire books are devoted to bird training. Interacting with a new parakeet requires a very gradual process requiring great patience. You bird needs time to learn to trust you. Parakeets are talkers, but their soft voices may be difficult to hear. They cannot replicate the human voice like some parrots. However, many can become great wolf-whistlers or otherwise try to replicate your own words or sounds.

Parakeets do well with some free-flying time, especially if housed in an enclosure smaller than a flight cage. Some keepers have a veterinarian clip the wings (and trim nails) periodically for their safety, but many allow their budgies to have their flight feathers completely intact. Any free-flying activity must be confined to a bird safe room where doors and windows are closed and covered. Window glass presents a serious hazard to full-flighted bird, and any other potential hazards must be removed.

**HEALTH**

Loneliness and boredom are serious potential problems and often lead to self-destructive feather-plucking behavior. You must ensure your parakeet receives plenty of attention and love or instead decide to get it a mate. Toys also contribute to activity and mental health. Illness is most easily observed in birds by paying attention to their droppings and breathing. If feces becomes runny or discolored your parakeet should be examined by a veterinarian. Respiratory issues also receive prompt medical care. With a parakeet a third thing to pay attention to is its song. If your frequently singing and chirping feathered friend suddenly becomes mute a trip to the vet is advised.

**SEXING PARAKEETS (BUDGIES)**

At sexual maturity (8-12 months of age) parakeets may be sexed by the color of the cere. The cere is the band of waxy raised skin across the top of the bird's beak that encompasses the parakeet's nostrils. In most normal varieties the cere of the adult male is blue or purplish, whereas a female has a whitish to brownish cere that appears crusty. Generally, dark cere means male and light cere means female. However, it isn't as straightforward as some believe, particularly in some color varieties, and accurate sexing requires DNA analysis from feathers or blood.