

WHICH BIRD?

The thought of owning a parrot may seem like a nice idea, but the question to answer is not only whether the bird is right for you but also, more importantly, are you right for the bird...?

Psittacine species differ not only in their size, dietary requirements and environmental needs, but also in their behavioural attributes. Before purchasing a pet bird, some thought should be given to the needs of the bird, as well as what is required from it as a companion. Alternatively, if the bird has already been purchased, it is worth reflecting on your bird's suitability to you and your lifestyle.

If the bird is required to be a talker then it should be obtained as young as possible. The younger the bird is, the easier it is to tame and the more agreeable it will usually become. This is due to imprinting, which in itself may result in behavioural problems.

Budgerigars

Being small and inexpensive these psittacines are very popular. Their cage size need not dominate the room and their mess is correspondingly less than larger parrots. With time and patience they can become very tame and very good at mimicry. As companionship goes, there is very little that the larger parrots can offer that these birds cannot. Their main disadvantage is probably that they are considered less exotic than their larger (less common) relatives. Their behavioural problems include regurgitation in males and excessive egg laying in females.

Cockatiels

These are very attractive birds but are not easy to tame or encourage to mimic. More so than most psittacines, they prefer the company of their own kind rather than being a solitary pet. Boredom and feather plucking are the major problems encountered in this species.

African Grey Parrots

These are popular pets. However, these birds are shy and suspicious and consequently can be hard to tame. They are highly intelligent and inquisitive and thus, if enough time is spent with them, they can become excellent talkers. Their powers of mimicry and personalities are the main reason for their popularity. Their vices include biting and feather plucking.

Amazon Parrots

These are more colourful than African Greys but can become aggressive when young, usually from 4 to 9 months of age. It is essential that these head strong birds are controlled at this stage to prevent the development of dominance associated problems.

Cockatoos

Cockatoos are very intelligent birds, but are also very demanding requiring constant attention from their owners. They are more suitable for owners with a lot of time on their hands. They are generally not very good talkers, being better at imitating other sounds than the human voice. They are lively birds that, if not given the attention they desire, are more likely to become screechers and suffer boredom related problems.

Macaws

These are the largest members of the parrot family. They are highly intelligent and easily imprinted towards their owner. They are playful but can be mischievous, raucous and rowdy. Imprinting occurs readily in these birds, often resulting in them becoming aggressive towards strangers. Due to size and strength of their beaks this can be a major disadvantage, and they have rightfully obtained the reputation of being nippy and unpredictable. One advantage is that they are less demanding on their owner's time than are cockatoos.

REFERENCE

M. P. C. Lawton (1988) Behavioural Problems. In: *Manual of Parrots, Budgerigars, and Other Psittacine Birds*. Ed C. J. Price. BSAVA, Gloucester p 163-170