

# Captive Exotic Birds: A Brief Introduction

## DID YOU KNOW...

- Parrots and other exotic birds represent the largest population of captive wildlife held in private hands in the U.S.
- Exotic birds are, by definition, any non-indigenous species to the U.S.
- Different types of birds are not different “breeds” like dogs or cats, but are actually different species.
- Birds are not domesticated animals like cats, dogs, or horses that have been selectively bred for the qualities that enable them to live harmoniously among humans.
- Even when bred in captivity, the physical and behavioral needs of birds (to fly and flock for example) remain intact. Deprivation of these natural behaviors causes many birds to suffer from captivity-related stress and other maladaptive behaviors such as excessive screaming, feather destruction, self-mutilation, phobic reactions, stereotypic behaviors, and depression.
- Most parrot species are sexually monomorphic or show very slight or indistinct dimorphic traits.
- Birds are prey animals whose behavior, experience, and perspective in the environment are shaped by the fact they must be vigilant in avoiding predation.
  - Fight or flight response triggered by a variety of incidents.
  - Caution and fearfulness ensure survival in the wild.
  - Instinctively mask signs of illness or injury
- Parrots are highly intelligent; they can be sensitive, emotional, and unpredictable.
- Large parrot species have long life expectancies, often outliving their caretakers:
  - Small parrots 10-25 years
  - Medium to large parrots 25-80 years
- Birds have extremely high metabolic rates and an average body temperature 103-106. Injured or ill birds require supplemental heat in order to maintain their body temperature and, in many cases, is a life-saving measure.
- Vocalization is integral to avian survival: singing, chirping, and loud calling out are the norm.
- Birds have very sensitive respiratory systems, making them susceptible to environmental pathogens and toxins: mold, fungus, and bacteria; fumes from chemicals, cleaning agents, cigarette smoke, car exhaust. Heated Teflon, Scotchgard, and other non-stick surfaces emit toxic fumes that can be fatal to birds.
- Nearly all birds experience some hormonal changes during the year; during breeding cycles, they can become aggressive, irritable, or territorial.
- Routine spay/neuter is not readily available for birds; it is necessary to understand procreative behaviors to avoid unwanted offspring.
- Captive exotic birds commonly sold in the pet trade or used for other entertainment purposes currently do not have specific protections under the Federal Animal Welfare Act, and they are often excluded from animal welfare legislation, pet shop regulations, and existing animal cruelty statutes.
- The most commonly kept species in captivity in the U.S.
  - Passeriformes – Canaries finches, mynahs, and Pekin robins
  - Psittaciformes – Parakeets, cockatiels, parakeets, conures, Quaker or Monk parrots, Amazons, cockatoos, lorries/lorikeets, Eclectus parrots, African greys, macaws, and many others.
  - Columbiformes – Pigeons, doves
  - Piciformes – Toucans

*While almost a third of the world's 330 parrot species are threatened with extinction due to pressures from collecting for the pet trade, combined with habitat loss, many of these same species end up at the doorsteps of animal sheltering facilities throughout the U.S.*

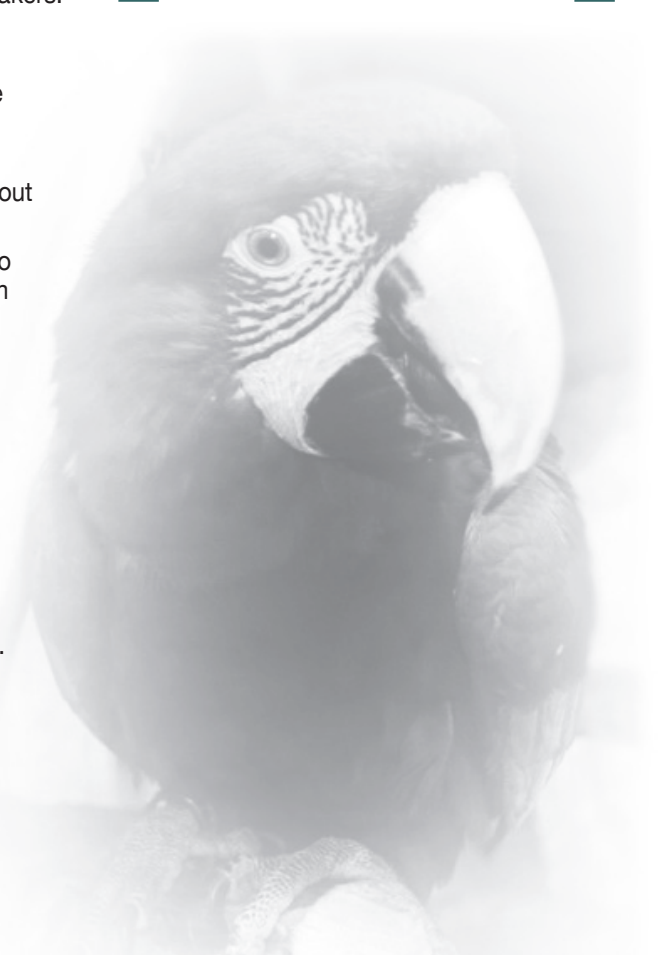


Photo: Foster Parrots