

Avian Placement Application Evaluation Guide

Because the adoption application is designed to encourage potential adopters to take seriously the responsibility of caring for a captive bird, some questions listed are purely educational and, as such, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. This evaluation guide is designed to help you, the evaluator, recognize potential misconceptions, situations, or expectations that may lessen the possibility that the applicant is ready to care for birds. This evaluation process can provide an opportunity to educate the prospective adopter in order to make the adoption a success.

Living Arrangement

- 1. Type of residence?** House Condo Apt Other
- 2. Do you:** Rent Own
- 3. If you rent, do you have the landlord’s consent to have a bird?** No Yes

The living arrangement of the applicant is an important consideration when placing a bird. Disrupting neighbors due to bird vocalizations (squawking, chirping, talking, calling, screaming) should especially be considered by those living in condos or apartments. Housing particularly loud birds such as conures and macaws in apartment/condo situations should be discouraged.

All potential adopters should be warned that birds can cause considerable damage to home interiors. Those who rent will likely be held financially responsible for any damage caused by the bird or risk losing their deposit if the bird destroys any portion of the rented property. It is also important that those who rent have permission from the landlord to keep a bird. If the applicant indicates that they do not have permission to have a bird they should not be allowed to adopt until approval from the landlord is obtained (you may want to ask for proof of approval, such as a copy of the rental agreement or the landlord’s phone number to ask directly). Failure to do so could cause the renter to lose his or her lease or other rental agreement, pay a fee, or lose a deposit, all of which could cause the bird to become homeless again.

Household Members

4. Do all parties in your household know that you are applying to adopt a bird?

It is important that all family members are aware of and support adding a bird to their household. Household conflicts concerning the bird can result in a stressful situation for the bird. The adopter may feel obligated to sacrifice the needs of the bird in order to satisfy disgruntled household members. Household tensions of this type are very often the reasons birds are surrendered in the first place.

5. Are you aware that exotic birds may carry diseases that can infect humans?

For public health and safety purposes it is important that prospective adopters understand that chlamydiosis (psittacosis) and avian tuberculosis (extremely rare) can be transmitted through the air from birds to humans. These diseases can cause significant illness, especially for people with compromised immune systems.

6. Does anyone in the household have allergies or asthma?

Many who have allergies to dogs and cats mistakenly assume that a bird will be ideal for their household. However, birds continually shed “feather dust” — particles of feathers, which may aggravate asthma in some people. Many homes with captive birds have HEPA-type air filters in rooms with birds to control allergies from bird dander. Some species (Cockatiels, African Greys, and all Cockatoos) produce a powder that coats the feathers; these species are not recommended for persons with allergies.

7. Does anyone in the house smoke?

Poor air quality due to tobacco smoke is a major concern and chronic exposure will cause premature death. Unlike humans, a bird replaces nearly all the air in her lungs with each breath. Because no residual air is left in the lungs during the ventilation cycle of birds, they transfer more oxygen and more pollutants during each breath. If there is a smoker in the house of the prospective adopter they should not be allowed to adopt a bird unless care is taken to ensure that all smoking is done outside and away from the bird.

8. Who will be the primary caretaker of the bird?

It is important that the individual applying for the bird is the primary caretaker of the bird. The application process is designed to educate the individual who will be responsible for the bird’s well-being. Adopting animals as gifts should not be allowed.

9. Who will care for the bird when the primary caretaker is away, either for business or vacation?

Many people mistakenly assume that a bird may be left unattended for several days as long as the bird’s food and water dishes are full. This is not acceptable. Many birds require regular social interaction and can become stressed or depressed when left alone for extended periods. In addition, birds require fresh fruits and vegetables that must be replenished daily with uneaten portions removed daily, cages need routine cleaning, and birds need time outside the cage for physical and psychological health.

Parrots are monogamous by nature and will bond to humans as their “mate,” so the absence of their caretaker for long periods can cause stress and depression from which they may never fully recover. A primary caretaker who travels often and/or for long periods of time should consider adopting two birds to provide constant companionship. Birds also like predictability — knowing who will be taking care of them and when.

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Time

10. Approximately how much time will the responsible person have available to spend with the bird?

11. How many hours a day would the bird be left alone?

Birds are gregarious flock animals who need lots of socialization to learn how to interact with their human family members and other birds; it is unnatural for them to be alone for hours at a time. Those who work full time or who will not have a lot of time to spend with a bird should consider adopting at least two birds to meet the bird's social needs or they should think about adopting a different animal that is not so socially dependent.

It is a myth that birds do not remain bonded to humans when there is another bird in the household. Even if the birds also bond to each other they will remain human-bonded as long as humans continue to interact with them.

Expectations

12. Why are you interested in adopting a bird?

Beware of applicants who indicate that they are looking for a low-maintenance pet, a unique pet, or want birds because dogs and cats are prohibited where they live. The desire to adopt a bird should not be based on convenience or novelty.

13. What are the most important characteristics you are looking for in a bird?

Beware of applicants who indicate that they want a bird who can talk, is entertaining, or affectionate. Not all parrots talk, not all parrots choose to bond with humans, not all parrots are tame, and not all parrots want to amuse and please people on command. The personalities and habits of the bird(s) in your care should be carefully evaluated to determine whether they match the interests of the applicant. Unreasonable expectations for a bird's behavior can lead to a disappointing, unhappy, negative situation for all involved.

Bird Care

14. What do you feed your exotic bird?

All birds need a wide variety of fresh and nutritious foods. Birds cannot survive on seeds alone. Prospective adopters should take time to learn the needs and preferences of the species they wish to adopt.

15. How will you provide daily exercise and entertainment for your bird?

Birds are active and inquisitive and must be provided with ample room to move about and play. An indoor or sheltered outdoor aviary or a flight safe room (windows covered, no cats/dogs, no ceiling fans, etc.) that will allow the bird(s) to fly is good for exercise. Birds with clipped wings can get exercise by climbing, swinging, and flapping (if provided with ample space), toys, and climbing structures. At the very least, birds need enough room inside their cages to flap their wings and climb about. They need toys for amusement and wood to chew.

16. Do you have any experience in keeping birds?

17. Would you be willing to attend a class on bird care if available?

Even if an individual has experience in keeping birds it is very important that bird caretakers stay on top of the latest information, especially since avian care advice changes so frequently. For example, grit, gravel, and oyster shell was widely recommended to feed to birds as little as ten years ago and we now know that it can be very dangerous (and even fatal) to some exotic birds.

Learning how to recognize the subtle signs of illness in a bird is especially important since birds will hide their distress until they are so compromised it may be too late for medical intervention.

Provide information on where to attend a bird education class. (If the shelter does not offer such classes and none exist in your area, recommend that the adopter purchase a current book on bird care specific to the species they are adopting.) Regardless of class availability, a "yes" answer indicates that the adopter is serious about providing good care.

19. Do you know an avian veterinarian?

It is important that prospective adopters understand that birds need veterinary care from a veterinarian that specializes in birds. New bird exams and diagnostic tests as well as annual well-bird exams are recommended by avian veterinarians.

20. Would you like us to recommend an avian veterinarian?

Recommend any number of local avian vets that the shelter trusts. You can also direct them to visit the Association of Avian Veterinarians search page at www.aav.org/vet-lookup/.

21. Have you made arrangements for your bird(s) in the event of your illness or death?

Since many of the larger species of parrots can live to 80 years in captivity, many parrots outlive their caretakers. It is important that prospective adopters realize that many parrots are a lifetime commitment — the equivalent of caring for a special-needs child for the rest of her life. The potential adopter should have a plan for who will take the parrot in the event of their death. The adopter should have specific family members or friends who will take responsibility for caring for their bird — the designated person should be identified in the adopter's will. If the adopter does not know anyone who can provide lifetime care for the bird, they should at least arrange to have the bird placed in the care of a bird rescue organization that will find the bird a responsible home.

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Bird Behavior

22. Are you aware that exotic birds might have or develop bad habits such as destruction of clothing, furniture, drapery, etc.; biting; screaming; dislike of strangers or certain household members; and leaving droppings everywhere? Are you aware that these habits can be difficult to break?

Since parrots are commonly surrendered for behavioral “problems,” it is important that the prospective adopter realize that birds are not low-maintenance pets and that many of their so-called problems are a direct result of the environment in which they are kept.

The average captive parrot spends 10–12 waking hours a day confined to a cage and is fed a monotonous diet of manufactured bird foods. Many are denied the opportunity to fly because their wings have been clipped to keep them “under control” and to prevent them from hurting themselves by flying into walls and windows, chewing on household objects, and getting into other hazards. Few are kept in groups with their own species. Eventually, the restriction of a parrot’s natural desire to fly and forage and to have the companionship of other birds can manifest itself in neurotic behavior such as excessive screaming, pulling out her own feathers, and even biting. Most people cannot cope with the long-term challenges and responsibilities of caring for these essentially undomesticated animals that are physically and psychologically adapted to live in the wild.

23. If your bird develops a bad habit what will you do?

One should never yell at or hit a bird. Birds have sensitive ears and may never trust the person who has struck him or her again. Birds don’t learn by punishment, they learn through patience and positive reinforcement for good behavior. A prospective adopter should be willing to seek advice from an avian behaviorist or specialist, local bird club or avian rescues which can be helpful in providing educational materials, advice, and referrals on bird care, housing, diet, behavior, and veterinary services. Sometimes a change in environment, diet or behavior modification can make all the difference in creating a happier living situation for a bird and his or her caretaker.

This Bird Adoption Application Evaluation Guide was prepared by Monica Engebretson, Senior Program Associate, Born Free USA and Eileen McCarthy, Co-Founder, Midwest Avian Adoption & Rescue Services, Inc. – please copy, distribute and utilize this document in its entirety for the benefit of all captive birds in your care.