parrot care
visit our website at www.parrotcare.com

parrots
breeding parrots in aviculture
parrot incubation procedures and
hand feeding
your pet parrots

John Wragg
Contents

1. Parrotcare history and philosophy
2. Diary of significant events
4. Parrotcare advertisement in the “Parrots Magazine”
5. Picture of the author with Molly my pet parrot
6. Introduction to aviculture as a boy
7. Breeding Parrots in Aviculture
8. Rosemary Lowe with the author at Palmitos Park
9. Purchasing Parrots and compatibility for breeding
10. Compatibility continued and Diet
11. Diet - continued
12. Australian parakeets, Lovebirds
13. Larger parrots, Macaws and Cockatoos
14. Aviary sizes and mesh gauge for various species
15. Breeding Amazons and Macaws
16. Breeding African Greys and Eclectus
17. Specialization i.e. breeding from several pair of the same species
18. Front cover of our first "Parrotcare" brochure
19. Parrotcare book reviews by "The Bird Keeper", "Parrots" magazine by John Catchpole and the editor "Cage and Aviary birds"
20. Pictures of Jeanette and John Wragg with babies
21. Incubation Procedures and hand feeding
22. Pictures of Jeanette Wragg and babies
23. Introduction to the egg
24. Increasing production and calcium
25. Seasonal breeders and egg laying cycle
26. The Incubation Room
27. Equipment and Candling
28. Incubation temperatures, turning eggs, cool eggs, the hatcher
29. Disinfecting the chick and introduction to handrearing
30. The nursery, designing a nursery, brooder temperatures and cleanliness
31. Chick identification and close ring sizes
32. Keeping records, types of brooders, brooding
33. Formulas, temperature of food, digestive system
34. Day old chick, weight gains
35. Problem solving and weaning
36. Conclusion to incubation and handrearing
37. Your Pet Parrot
38. Parrotcare 2nd brochure front cover
39. Purchasing a Parrot, pet shop or breeder
40. Noise and chewing, selecting a Parrot
41. Heading home with your new companion, wing clipping
42. Cages and Diet
43. Identify your Parrot, illness, stopping boredom
44. Training your pet Parrot, toilet training, intelligence
45. Training your pet Parrot, toilet training, intelligence - continued
46. Feather plucking, play time
47. Feather plucking, play time - continued
48. African Greys, Eclectus, Cockatoos
49. Amazons, Macaws, smaller parrots & Do’s and Don’ts
50. Do’s and Don’ts continued
51. Pictures of babies with customers
52. Pictures of babies with customers
53. John and Jeanette with parrots

Back Cover – John Wragg with parrots
Dear Reader,

In 1974 when we first started to breed parrots, available information on the subject was scant and learning by way of your own mistakes was the norm. I can honestly say we made many mistakes but unfortunately it is the only way to gain experience and learn to avoid pitfalls. As breeding parrots is not rocket science, practical experience aligned with a receptive and flexible mind provided the best breeding results. Parrot breeding is best summed up in three words, compatibility of the pair, diet and accommodation. If you get them right after that you only need luck and maybe you will be saying those magic words “its hatched”.

We often say if a pair of parrots are desperate to go to nest you can not stop them breeding, but pairs like that are the exception and not the rule. Most parrots require the right partner, the correct supplements and vitamins added to their balanced diet and an aviary or cage where they will feel secure enough to attempt to nest and raise a family.

Being pro-active rather than reactive is the art of producing the best results in parrot breeding. The result of our experience has assisted in the production of this book. In three sections it looks at breeding parrots in aviculture, incubating parrots eggs and hand rearing their babies and some of the delights and pitfalls of buying, training and the behavioural therapy of sharing your home with your pet parrot.

I would like to thank my wife for all the kindness and patience shown throughout this project.

As this is the 3rd addition of my book I have added original reviews by The Parrot Society, The Bird Keeper, The Cage & Aviary Birds and The Parrots magazine. I hope you enjoy the book.

John Dragg
Diary of Significant Events

1960
Started with a pair of Peachfaced Lovebirds reference page 5. Built my lovebird collection containing Masked, Madagascar, Nyasa [easily available at the time] Mutations were yet to appear.

1966
Purchased first pair of Australian Parakeets, Redumps which bred prolifically. Adding most of the others over time my particular favourites were Barrabands, Princes of Wales, Pileated and Redvented Blue Bonnets.

1980
Added some of the new mutation lovebirds, my favourite was the lutino peachface a little gem. Also continued to maintained a large collection Australian parakeet. Started to add the incredible Lory family of parrots.

1990
By now I had switched almost entirely to Lories breeding from seven different species - Ornate - Blackcap - Goldie - Greenape - Stella - Swainsons - Dusky. I am still very proud of the achievement.

During one of my many visits to Loro Parque in the Tenerife and subsequent meeting with Rosemary Lowe at the time curator of birds at Palmitos park on Gran Canaria I started to expand my collection to the larger parrots - Macaws - Amazons - African Greys - Eclectus adding the smaller Senegals - Meyers - Jardines and Conures. During this period I was inspired to write this book on Parrots.

2002
My son John joined my wife and myself, he and I produced what we hoped would be the definitive parrot website www.parrotcare.com including this book. My daughter Julie printed and produced the book, making it a complete family affair

2012
Still breeding parrots and handrearing, well adjusted, happy, babies into the 3rd generation who make perfect pets for their human companions.
3. Your pet parrot

It has an excellent range of full colour pictures that compliment the highly informative text. The common sense approach that John has applied to the challenges that face the breeder gives this publication the important dimension that educates the reader in the real world tasks that we have to confront when keeping these highly intelligent birds.

It would be unfair to single out one of the three sections as ‘the best’ but I was particularly impressed with the amount of detail in the ‘Incubation procedures and hand feeding’ chapter. When you read this you understand that John has built up an immense knowledge of this area of aviculture and we are most fortunate that he has decided to share his knowledge with all of us. Writing a book is no small task especially if you are not a professional writer, I am sure he has spent many hours over the manuscript and the taking and selection of the many quality pictures that enhance this publication.

There are numerous statements in the text, one that particularly stood out for me were the words ‘As humans we are lucky to be custodians of some of the most beautiful creatures in the world it is therefore incumbent on us to ensure that they remain mentally and physically healthy throughout their long lives’.

A signed hard copy of this publication can be obtained for £9.99 plus postage and package at www.parrotcare.com the business run by John Wragg and family.
Established for 35 years, Parrotcare is a family run business

Ring or email for current availability of our hand-reared baby parrots

Email: parrotcaresales@sky.com

VISIT THE LARGEST AND MOST REVISITED PARROT WEBSITE IN THE UK

www.parrotcare.com

Shop Tel: 01670 530731  Mobile: 07946 391435
Introduction

Every romance has to start somewhere and mine with nature started with long Sunday morning walks by the river banks, woodland and fields with my grandad Alf Blair and my brother Brian eighteen months my junior.

I was about eight or nine years old when passing a sign outside the Miners Institute in Blyth, it read "Bird Show" my Grandad asked if I would like to go in, my reply was an eager yes. He paid the "two and a half pence" for a child and in we went. My vivid memory of colourful finches, parrots, softbills, canaries and budgies will live in my memory and started my life time interest in breeding exotic birds.

It was not long before the £3 was saved and I purchased a pair of Peachfaced Lovebirds, an aviary had already been constructed and the Heath Robinson nestbox hung at head height, it would have been helpful if I had built in an inspection hatch to view the content but the hatch was forgotten in all the haste. Luckily I didn’t need an inspection hatch and out popped four healthy lovebirds more by good luck than any kind of management. With this encouragement, and bursting with the feeling of success I continued to adding to the collection as funds became available. I hope this short introduction might help other budding aviculturist step into the world of breeding parrots.

John, Pauline and Stephanie with friends.
breeding parrots in aviculture

parrot compatibility
housing and nestboxes
breeding
diet
The rights of John Wragg to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted, in any form or by any means without the prior permission in writing of the author

Images courtesy of Parrotcare
Contact Parrotcare.com
Copyright Parrotcare.com
All rights reserved

John Wragg and Rosemary Lowe, Curator at Palmitos Park - Gran Canaria and Loro Parque - Puerto De La Cruz, Tenerife.

An inspiration for me to write this book.

During the past 42 years we have bred at Parrotcare from Macaws, Cockatoos, African Greys, Jardines Parrots, Senegals, seven species of Lory’s, Amazons, Conures, Eclectus, a large number of Australian Parakeet species and various Love Birds.
**introduction**

Initially this book is intended for the beginner, providing information especially concerning breeding of parrots. For the more experience parrot breeder, it may be useful as the booklet provides an opportunity to compare their own experiences with those of PARROTCARE.

This booklet covers the general subjects of acquisition of birds, compatibility, housing, nutrition and diet, management and breeding of parrots. Hopefully the experience gained over 42 years of parrot breeding by the writer will produce benefits for those less experienced.

**purchasing parrots**

The first problem facing the parrot breeder is to obtain reliable and healthy birds. Many disappointments in parrot breeding are met in the initial stages and this can cause the abandonment of the hobby too soon. A bad start often means, because of the financial consequences, the end of their interest in parrot breeding. It is often advisable for the beginner to purchase young birds as their history is obviously documented and probably have more virtues than vices. Older birds may be purchased if the reputation of the seller can be established.

The question arises which species to begin with. It is often the best policy to purchase inexpensive and fully acclimatised parrots initially. By doing so, the opportunity to gain experience without huge financial loss will derive benefits.

Once the choice has been made and a pair of parrots has been selected, it is better to collect, even if this means a long journey. An experienced parrot breeder will have little difficulty in diagnosing that a bird is healthy. Those new to the hobby may not find it quite so easy. A parrot should initially be observed from a distance to ensure the bird does not feel under threat. All parrots viewed at close distance tend to sit tight even if feeling ill. A healthy parrot should always be feather tight and active. Handling your perspective purchase is also advisable but often quite difficult. The condition of a bird can be judged by feeling the breast bone which should not protrude sharply. Further inspection of the eyes, which should be round and bright, as eyes in parrots can be susceptible to inflammation. The loss of toe nails is not a major drawback in breeding parrots, although it is beneficial for the male to have these attributes for gripping when copulation takes place. Droppings should not be thin and watery and if the bird is in a cage and fresh paper has been placed under it for your benefit take great care that it has not been done for some hidden reason, i.e. the droppings are thin and watery and the seller does not wish you to be alarmed. The surrounding feathers of the vent area must be dry and clean.

**compatibility**

In the days before the advent of surgical sexing and the more recent and safer option of using DNA to establish a parrot’s sex, the only way to know whether you had a true pair was via fertile eggs. Many aviculturists in those days had “true” pairs of birds that mimicked perfectly the happy family, i.e. male and female but were in fact either two females or two males. Copulation often takes place between two males and the only clue to the fact that they are two males was when the supposed female suddenly takes up the male’s mating position.

Love birds where male plumage is identical to females has precisely the same principles now as it did 30 years ago. Hens lay eggs, cocks don’t. This may seem a rather flippant remark but in love birds hens are capable of laying eggs when only 6 months old so therefore it is fairly easy to establish a true pair certainly within the first 12 months. The pelvic bone test in love birds I always feel is inappropriate, as breeding hens about to lay an egg obviously have pelvic bones which are substantially further apart than cock birds but by the time this is evident the hen has invariably built a substantial nest and is about to lay eggs. In Peachfaced love birds, females tend to carry material to build the nest which is an incredible structure dome shaped within the nest box. Cock birds are often noticed attempting to tuck strips of willow in their tail feathers to carry to the nest but never succeed to accomplish the task. In sexually demorphic parrots sexing is simple as the cock’s plumage is different to the hens, this is generally the case in Australian parakeets such as Barabands, Red Rumps and Many Coloured Parrots.

In some of the larger parrots such as Macaws, Amazons and African greys it is essential to establish whether you have a true pair as soon as possible. DNA feather sampling is an ideal way to obtain a result. A number of establishments who will analyse blood samples taken from feathering or merely a single breast feather which has been freshly plucked and placed in a zip locked bag now exist. An alternative method but certainly more stressful is to have your parrot surgically sexed. This
entails the parrot to be anaesthetised and a laptoscope entered into the bird to establish whether ovaries exist. This method is obviously invasive and it has been known for some birds to die in such circumstances, although this is extremely rare.

Once you have purchased two birds of the opposite sex, you must then test for compatibility. Introductions can be quite traumatic. It is wise to allow the hen to establish her territory within the aviary prior to placing the cock bird with her. It is also good policy to allow the cock bird to be placed in a smaller cage attached to the aviary or alongside the existing aviary so that they can view each other from a distance prior to introduction. Sometimes it can be love at first sight, but in my experience it tends to be somewhere in between that and total dislike. A high degree of apprehension normally prevails at the first introduction. I have found that if you can get the two birds together in the hen’s aviary for a couple of days or so then move them to an aviary in which neither bird has previously been. Because of the strange environment the only comfort they can gain is from each other. I have found this to work on many occasions and sometimes in the most difficult pairings. With larger birds such as Macaws and Cockatoos where they have volatile personalities, it is essential to remain vigilant and don’t go too far away before you are sure that either bird is in danger from the other. It’s worthwhile having a net and gloves available if you are required to intervene.

Parrots notoriously difficult to pair up are adult Eclectus, where if the female has been widowed after a number of years in successful breeding with a male, it is almost impossible to pair her up with another male and expect successful breeding. Introductions in Eclectus should be made at the earliest possible stages in their life, certainly within the first 6 months. Many Australian parakeets have male birds which are dominant to females. The Rosella family in particular has males that will harass the females almost to death if they are not in breeding condition simultaneously. Male cockatoos that come into condition before their females also can cause devastating injuries on the females, sufficient to cause death. Specially designed nest boxes can be made to ensure that the female can escape from a lower exit hole. When buying a “true” pair, if after a few months you are suspicious that the pair may be of the same sex you must unfortunately go through the ritual of establishing the facts before you can move on.

On buying a pair of birds from my fellow bird keepers I have been told they are a breeding pair only to find after wasting many months and sometimes years they turn out to be either two cocks or two hens and yet when I purchased the birds I have been given sometimes quite graphic detail of how many babies they have reared. The morals of a number of parrot keepers need to be carefully looked at. If you have got an incompatible pair, and those are birds that normally have little to do with each other but don’t necessarily quarrel continuously, just have a stoney indifference. It is worth looking for an exchange with a local breeder or if necessary travel to see any birds in which you may be interested. It is always advisable to go to the inconvenience of visiting and viewing any birds before making the final transaction. Receiving birds through a courier can cause considerable disappointment when they arrive and they are not as described by the vendor. This problem occurs continuously with dealers of wild caught parrots and buyer beware is one of the best phrases in these circumstances.

diet

Educating parrots to eat the correct diet can be difficult. Most parrots that have come into my possession tend to eat or have eaten very little but dried sunflower seed with the possibility of a little fruit and clean water. Parrots are remarkably hardy and can sustain life on that diet and although they will look physically good will find it extremely difficult to build up the necessary reserves to breed. I would say that you need to be relatively brave but no overly stubborn when it comes to changing your parrot’s diet. Some parrots will almost go to the extent of starvation rather than change. It doesn’t really matter whether it takes days, weeks or month to change the diet but be patient until you do. It is not possible to simply cut off a diet which has been consumed for years overnight. In all aviaries (with the exception of Eclectus), we have 3 feeding bowls. One contains fresh water changed daily during the winter unless soiled, and twice daily during the summer. The second bowl contains an excruded pellet diet, which has been designed specifically by the manufacturer for a particular type of parrot, i.e. Amazon, African grey or Macaw. All species of parrots have been catered for and their assumed needs have been produced via the excruded pellet. I believe to supply only the diet in a pellet form would be extremely boring for the bird. Also it would be true to say that pellets for parrots are a relatively new innovation, certainly in the UK. A pellet diet for hand-reared babies in the USA has been the standard for much longer. I would still say that it is early days and the jury is still out on a diet consisting purely of pellets as aviculturists cannot yet be completely aware of the long term effects on a parrot. Poultry have been eating pellets for many years now bearing in mind that poultry very rarely live more than 2 to 3 years their life expectancy is nothing in comparison with that of an African grey. In the third bowl we have a good quality parrot food ie. Comprised mainly of sunflower seed with diced fruit and vegetables.
The juices from the fruit and vegetables will make the mixture moist and therefore it is possible to add powdered vitamin and minerals with relative ease. It is found that all parrots will consume the fruit and vegetables and parrot seed prior to consuming pellets. A portion of this mix is fed to each breeding pair in early morning. The portion is only sufficient to last until Midday or early afternoon. Once this has been consumed, the diet then switches to the extruded pellets for the remainder of the day. This ensures that the bird's diet consists of entertainment value as well as nutritional value. The reason why I excluded earlier the Eclectus from the 3 bowl feeding principle was that hens can occasionally deprive the male bird of food and therefore it is necessary to double up in the case of these birds. Two feeding stations in the aviary is advisable. I would also recommend this principle for newly acquired birds that appear to be not completely compatible. Once you have observed that both partners are able to feed without aggression, then it will be possible to bring it back to a 3 bowl principle. When feeding multi-vitamins or additional protein it is advisable to stick wherever possible to manufacturers instructions. Overdoing in this area can cause more harm than good. An example would be in Cockatoos if the male comes into condition earlier than the female due to additional vitamins over and above that recommended, there could be disastrous consequences for the female. Liquid calcium supplements can be added to both the water and the fruit and vegetable mix as required. Breeding hens obviously have a need for calcium at the point just prior to egg laying. If administered correctly egg binding should be a thing of the past. In the case of larger Macaws, it is essential to provide a range of nuts as they require these in their diet to ensure sufficient protein. It is essential that your birds are never without food and that is the reason why pellets should be in the aviary on a continuous basis. One major drawback in regard to feeding in the way I have just outlined is the existence of vermin, i.e. rats and mice. Traditionally parrots are kept outside and therefore it is essential to either clean up on a daily basis any food that is dropped to the ground and therefore you require cemented floor aviaries or you only feed parrots indoors where the area is vermin free. If rats or mice can get at a continuous supply of food, it will not take long before they will completely over-run your aviaries and instead of feeding parrots you will be feeding the rats and mice of the entire county. Obviously any excreta or urine that gets into the parrot food is likely to cause disease and subsequent death. Cleanliness and hygiene in this department is critically important. Many parrots like the additional supplements of digestive biscuits. Eclectus, Amazons, Cockatoos relish these items and I always take the trouble to feed them this item in the early evening. All the effort involved in feeding your birds and ensuring that they have the correct diet will derive benefits once the breeding season is upon you. I never feed soaked seed. I find that the seed can so easily go off if not maintained and washed continuously. It can be difficult to get love birds to take a pellet diet, although pellets are produced in various sizes to accommodate all species from love birds to Macaws. When endeavouring to persuade your birds to go onto the new diet, don’t be dogmatic they are all different and they take time to adapt. I find that if I put half consumed amounts of the fruit and vegetable mix into a pair that currently is not consuming these items then they tend to feel that someone has been in there to eat already and they will tackle the objects which previously were ignored. Instead of putting whole pellets into the mix put a few ground pellets in that have been consumed by other parrots. By using a little psychology then it is possible for humans to outsmart parrots to the parrot's ultimate benefit. Remember all of the water containers and food container with fruit and vegetables in must be washed minimum every 24 hours so it is advisable to have running water in your aviaries so that this can be achieved without moving many bowls long distances. It has taken a number of years for me to come to the conclusion that this diet is the best and visits to other major parrot breeders and parrot parks have convinced me of its necessity. If it is your intention to keep your birds in perfect healthy condition and breed many chicks then this type of diet is unavoidable. By adding natural yoghurt to your fruit diet it will add beneficial bacteria and promote optimum conditions within the digestive tract for healthy gutflora. There are a number of food which are bad for your parrot and should be avoided at all cost. Advocado certainly falls into this category and unfortunately is not reported sufficiently in parrot journals. I am aware of a number of parrots who have died from this source of food. It is highly toxic and death can ensue rapidly. Rhubarb, even after cooking, contains excessive acids and can retain properties of toxin. Olives have a salt and oil mix that can be dangerous. Aubergines or egg plants contain solanin can cause digestive upsets or worse in parrots but is completely harmless to humans. Stomach upsets can be caused by asparagus. Theobromin is contained in chocolate and although much loved by humans is associated with respiratory and cardiac problems and is toxic in parrots. Coffee and tea also contain caffeine which may cause hyperactivity and in large quantities cardiac problems. Butter fats, creams and milks in large quantities cause digestive problems. Bearing in mind the number of good things to eat it is important to be as careful as possible if you are unsure.
**australian parakeets**

Having acquired your compatible pair, they need to be housed in an appropriate aviary. Your parrots may find your view of an appropriate aviary is not the same as theirs. Often an aviary which is large and spacious is not the one they would choose to raise a family. They are looking for seclusion and privacy and this is often not afforded in the largest and most exposed aviaries. An ideal breeding set up is a large aviary surrounded by smaller breeding aviaries. Birds can be released to build up stamina out of the breeding season in the larger flight and then confined to the smaller aviary for breeding success.

Australian parakeets have swift and direct flight and require aviaries as long as possible. Aviaries 25 or 30ft long would be desirable for parakeets like Kings, Crimson Wings, Barrabands, Princess of Wales and Rock Pebblers. They will of course breed in aviaries shorter than this but a minimum length of 12 to 15 ft is desirable. Australian parakeets are seasonal breeders and in the UK this is between March and July. Many are double brooded even when allowed to raise their own chicks. Nest boxes should be hung in the spring after the early frosts. Leaving nest boxes up throughout the entire year may cause problems with egg binding if the hen goes to nest before the warmer weather. Clear eggs are often caused by hens nesting before cock birds are in condition to breed.

A mistake often made is nest box size. The surface area of the nest box base should be as small as possible to allow the hen to feel secure and comfortable. It is amazing how many chicks can be brought up in a very small space. Chicks close together tend to keep each other warm and it is the norm for Australian parakeets to stop brooding their young at approx. 10 days. If the weather is cold then it is possible for the chicks to become chilled and die. As a rule of thumb when deciding the size of the nest box base ignore the tail length of the bird and make a nest box no wider than the body length of the bird in question. All nest boxes should be constructed in such a way that eggs or chicks can be checked without entering the aviary. The access hole should be low down and on the opposite side to the nest box to the exit ladder and bob hole. The entrance hole to the nest box should be only sufficient for the cock or hen to squeeze through. A way of achieving this tight fit is to nail a very thin piece of timber over the entrance hole with a 1” diameter hole drilled in the timber, locating to the bob hole. This will allow the birds to chew the soft material until the bob hole is a size acceptable to them. If very thin pinewood is used then even the smallest birds can chew through in a matter of days.

Whenever you are constructing the aviaries remember that parakeets are extremely agile and capable of flying through the door when you are entering. Make all entrance doors low down and a maximum of 3 ft high. There should also be a security passageway to ensure that even if a bird does escape it can be caught again and returned to the aviary. Aviaries should have a frost-free shelter for each pair and care must be taken to ensure vermon cannot enter the feeding area. This can be done by using thin metal sheeting or perspex to surround the entrance hole even if this is only a few inches wide vermon will be unable to climb across the smooth surface.

Perches in Australian parakeet aviaries should be as far as apart as possible, one perch either end is ideal, this will allow for maximum exercise. Nest boxes can be placed outdoors but it is essential to ensure that they are waterproof and weather-proof. A timber construction with a minimum wood thickness of 1” is necessary. At PARROTCARE we hang nest boxes in both positions externally and internally. This affords the pair the choice of nest boxes and increases the likelihood of successful breeding. At the commencement of the breeding season it is essential to increase the level of calcium additives to avoid egg binding.

When parakeets are kept outdoors they are prone to worm infestation. This is due to wild birds droppings being eaten from the aviary floor. Wild birds invariably have worms. It is necessary, therefore, to deworm Australian parakeets twice per year. Once before the breeding season and again approx. 6 months later. Under no circumstances should Australian parakeets be dewormed while chicks are in the nest. To deworm correctly, parakeets must be enclosed in the shelter to ensure that no fluid can be consumed from rainfall. The only guaranteed way to ensure deworming is successful is by catching the parakeet up and placing the deworming fluid directly into the crop. Your local avianvet will recommend the product and provide it in the correct dilution.

When the chicks emerge from the nest they are invariably flighty and find it difficult to control their flight pattern. At this early stage it is possible for the babies to break their neck on the end of the aviary as they cannot see the wire mesh as they are hurtling towards it. Hang willow branches at the end of the flight and this will reduce unnecessary injury. Babies will beg for food from their parents for up to a fortnight but may be independent before that date. Once they have been seen to be feeding themselves, it is safe to remove them. They may be attacked by the cock bird if he wishes his mate to go to nest again.

**lovebirds**

Love birds require much shorter aviaries and a size of 6’ high, 6’ long and 3’ wide is more than ample. Many love birds breed in cages which I believe are far too small.
Nevertheless, they manage to produce chicks year after year. Very few breeders now keep pure strains of love birds and the norm is to possess more mutations and various colour varieties. These can be very attractive but I still prefer my parrots in natural colours. Love birds build some of the most intricate nests, which can be extremely difficult to inspect. Fishers and Masked love birds produce the most complicated structures completely domed filling the entire nest box with nesting material. Peachfaced love birds build a cup nest and do not have the dome. The most suitable tree for nesting material is the willow. Remove all leaves as they may be toxic if eaten in large quantities. It is a great delight to watch a hen love bird building her nest and starting from scratch a complete nest can be constructed in a few days. Eggs will soon follow. Both Australian parakeets and the love bird family relish seeding grasses and weeds to raise their young. It is, of course, essential to ensure any wild vegetation has not been contaminated by insecticides and even where you are positive of this fact you should wash and rinse before offered to the birds. The large clutches are often reared by Australian parakeets and love birds sometimes up to 6 and 7. Kakarikis from New Zealand have been kept and bred at PARROTCARE and in one season a pair raised to maturity 21 young in 3 clutches. The amount of food consumed was predigious and the industry of the parents was to be commended. All of the young survived and that is certainly a record that I doubt will ever be beaten at PARROTCARE.

### larger parrots

One of the most important considerations when breeding the larger parrots is the volume of noise which they can generate. If you live in a built up area then it may be impossible to keep larger parrots where you live. An option available is to maintain your breeding stock indoors. At PARROTCARE we have larger parrots in both indoor and outdoor accommodation. Birds maintained indoors breed as well as if not better than those kept outdoors. Providing the correct level of vitamins and minerals are maintained to compensate for the loss of natural sunlight, it is possible to breed healthy chicks from birds kept indoors. Other benefits of maintaining your breeding stocks indoors is the reduction in the likelihood of problems from vermin and predators. Also losses due to night fright and broken necks are substantially reduced. So if this is the only way you can keep the larger parrots do not be put off.

When considering aviary structure it maybe beneficial to consider breeze blocks as a dividing structure between aviaries. Although once erected, it is somewhat inflexible, it is reasonably cheap and provides a substantial barrier for privacy and those gnawing beaks. Swivel feeders are also essential as a tame Macaw out of the breeding season can be quite amusing, but when they have eggs or chicks in the nest, then the problems of attack are imminent and must be guarded against, swivel feeders obviously prevent an aggressive bird from seriously damaging the hand of their carer.

We have noticed at PARROTCARE that Macaws tend to enjoy nest boxes that are extraordinarily large. For example, Blue and Golds and Green Wings like 50 gallon whisky barrels, either turned on their side or upright. These should be placed as high up as possible in the accommodation and it is often beneficial to give the option of two nest boxes initially until a decision has been reached by the pair as to which box they prefer. It is not necessary to have small entrance holes into the nest box for Macaws as they appear to prefer a large entrance where they can easily enter and vacate the nest box.

Protection should be provided around the nest box entrance as without reinforcements it won’t be long before your whisky barrel is in splinters. It is often a difficult decision to make when to replace a nest box but bear in mind if they go to nest in an unsafe situation only to find that the box collapses half way through incubation or rearing, then the decision was obviously left too late. In these circumstances, it is best to be safe rather than sorry and replace early.

Perching for Macaws should be rustic poles in the order of 3 inches diameter. Entertainment can be provided by hanging hemp or sizel ropes from the aviary roof. If an appropriate apple or pear tree branch can be found, approx. 3” in diameter with a right angle curve, then it will be possible to hang this branch via a hook onto the aviary roof enabling the Macaw to perch while the branch rocks back and forward. This is something they appear to enjoy greatly. If it is possible to have a small outside aviary attached to a large indoor aviary then the opportunity can be given for the Macaws to get out into the sunshine and rainfall at an appropriate time when this will not upset the neighbours. One must remember, that even though Macaw aviaries are built from the sturdiest of materials they can nevertheless escape if you don’t check regularly areas where they may be able to exit. If they do get out they may cause havoc with the rest of the stock and any structures not protected from their heavy beaks.

Cockatoos obviously fall into the same category as Macaws in terms of their ability to destroy and upset the neighbours with their loud voices. We have found at PARROTCARE natural logs are the best option for...
breeding Cockatoos. Natural logs to suit the size of the cockatoo can be purchased quite readily at major parrot shows where specialists have hollowed out tree trunks and cut the appropriate nest box size hole and inspection door. Although rather expensive they can be highly beneficial in encouraging a difficult pair of Cockatoos to nest. Unfortunately many female cockatoos have been trapped in the nest box by an over-amorous male and vicious attacks have taken place. This problem has occurred at PARROTCARE and is difficult to avoid. Wing clipping of the male has been recommended and is probably a reasonable precaution, but if the female is in the nest box then the male can still trap the hen regardless of his inability to fly. Roseate cockatoos or Galahs enjoy taking nesting material to the box and they benefit from hanging willow from the aviary roof as this can be stripped of the leaves and used for lining in the box. Cockatoos and Amazons both benefit from aviaries with a minimum length of 15 feet. As mentioned previously, housing parrots in the garden can cause considerable problems in terms of noise creation and it would be worth spending a little time discussing the various levels of volume from different species. You may spend many hundreds of pounds constructing a garden aviary only to be forced by neighbours to look at alternative housing. Australian parakeets are by in large quieter than many of the South American species, Grass parakeets like Splendids Turquoises and Bourke’s parakeets will not cause offence to any neighbour. Rosellas and Cockatiels can have a pleasant song although the Crimson Rosella or Pennants at the beginning of the breeding season may present a problem. Other Parrolets and Parakeets such as Yellow Faced, Celestial and Lineated are extremely quiet. Conures tend to fall into two categories, the noisy Aratingas and the quiet Pyrrhurias such as Maroon Bellied are perfectly suitable for anyone’s back garden. Our Aratinga Conures can be extremely persistent and excitabile and relentless when a stranger is in the garden. Lories, particularly the larger variety such as Black Caps and Yellow Backs, are irritating whereas Stellas and Goldies are completely innocuous in terms of volume. Often noise and destructiveness go together in a parrot. Very rarely do you get a quiet parrot that is extremely destructive and vice versa. I have often read that it is advisable to construct aviaries in a way in which they can be moved if either the site is found to be unsuitable or the owners move to a new home. PARROTCARE has moved a number of times over the past 30 years and found that it is extremely difficult to move aviaries to a new site and expect them to continue their life. We have found that it is better to simply write them off and proceed to construct new aviaries. A guideline on strength of mesh and aviary length for various categories of parrot has been listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parrots</th>
<th>Gauge of mesh</th>
<th>Length of flight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Macaws and Cockatoos</td>
<td>12 gauge</td>
<td>18 - 20 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian and Asiatic</td>
<td>16 gauge</td>
<td>11 - 20 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parrots</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amazons and African</td>
<td>16 gauge</td>
<td>10 - 15 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greys</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lories Lorikeets and</td>
<td>16 gauge</td>
<td>8 - 12 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass parakeets and</td>
<td>19 gauge</td>
<td>7 - 12 ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockatiels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parrots and Love birds</td>
<td>16 gauge</td>
<td>6 - 9 ft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Obviously aviaries should be situated in such a way in the garden to provide the most attractive setting where birds can be seen easily from the house. Most pleasure can be derived from this form of housing. It does not mean that the best breeding results can be obtained by this type of exposed aviary. Aviaries situated under trees have two disadvantages:

1. Birds roosting in the trees will deposit droppings into the aviaries and create a greater chance of worm infestation.
2. During stormy conditions branches may break off and cause damage to the aviaries.

Also you must consider the piping in of electricity and running water. It may be necessary to provide artificial lighting during the winter or some form of heating particularly under nest boxes where parrots may have laid eggs out of season. If water has to be carried any distance, it becomes extremely hard work and nauseating after a period of time. It can also affect the overall cleanliness of drinking water and bathing water if it is not readily available. Aviaries scattered around the garden look more attractive than those in blocks, but remember the further apart aviaries are the longer it will take to feed and water the birds each day. In most cases, you will not require planning permission to erect an aviary, but it is often worthwhile checking this out with your Local Authority before proceeding. If the property is leased you may also be in contravention of the agreement.

You may wish to purchase a ready made aviary and there are a number of excellent manufacturers who produce aviaries in both wood and steel. I have always found these to be prohibitively expensive and have avoided them. One of the most important and most often neglected area of aviary design is a damp course. All wooden or metal structures should be clearly separated from the ground by a substantial damp course that is not breached in any part of its structure. If damp from the soil is allowed to contaminate the aviary structure wood will rot and metal will rust. A damp course will extend the life of an aviary for many years. Pressure treated timber is better than treating your aviaries with preservative after they have been constructed.

Security is an important issue. When designing your aviary it is essential that a double door system is always in operation. It is the easiest thing for a bird to escape through the first door and disappear over the horizon if a safety corridor is not constructed. 30 years ago I had a pair of Fisher’s love birds escape whilst removing their nest box to another aviary. Their flight was amazingly rapid and direct as they disappeared. Believing that I would never see these birds again I was obviously feeling very depressed. Three days later I was visiting a
near neighbour when I noticed my Fisher’s love birds sitting on his roof. I immediately ran back home to fetch a cage with another pair of Fishers love birds. A spare cage was also brought. During that afternoon the birds were coaxsed to feed in the spare cage next to the Fishers lovebirds. The trap door was set and the birds had been recaptured. This occurred in the height of summer and obviously the birds were able to feed in nearby woodland and none the worse for wear the birds took up where they left off in the new aviary and continued to breed. Unfortunately, this story is the exception to the rule and more often when birds do escape they very rarely ever recaptured.

breeding parrots

Since 1971 the Parrot Society of the UK has published 14 breeding registers. Individual members contribute to the results and provide breeding details for parrots held in their care. Unfortunately due to a level of apathy the numbers of members contributing to the register does not reflect the total membership. Nevertheless it is the only source of reliable information available for birds bred in the UK. Only one third of all members made a contribution in 1998 although this is against 26% in 1994. A total of 200 species were bred in 1998 which indicates a steady climb from the 97 species bred in 1976. As with most things in this life parrots are also subject to fashions and fads. Lovebirds, Australian parakeets, lories and cockatiels appear to be on the decline in terms of breeding results. Notable increases in species such as African greys, Conures, Amazons and Eclectus is noteworthy.

amazons

The above results are the living proof that if aviculturists set their mind to a task or a particular species to target breed then it is possible to achieve impressive results. A particular notable achievement in breeding results is those of Amazons. In 1975 only 3 were bred and 1998 - 891. Although this is probably not the true number it does reflect the amazing increases. The true number of Amazons bred will probably never be known.

One of the main reasons for the increase in Amazons bred is reflected in the availability of wild caught specimens in the early 90s. Obviously a number of pairs were obtained by breeders which have allowed them to rotate birds to produce compatible pairs. A number of tips for breeding Amazons would be firstly to alleviate boredom as Amazons do enjoy a change of aviaries periodically. If a pair fail to produce young for two seasons in a row, then it is time to make a change of either aviary or partner. At PARROTCARE we have bred Amazons in both suspended cages and full size aviaries. A number of the pairs appear to enjoy suspended cages. If a male Amazon appears to be uninterested in the female by introducing another male in the aviary adjoining it often stimulates the partner to take more notice of his hen. Once this has been accomplished it is wise to move the single male.

A parrotkeeper, if given the choice to purchase a “breeding pair” or unrelated youngsters more often than not will purchase the breeding pair. Personally, I think that young birds should be purchased as Amazons are capable of breeding at 3/4 years old. Breeding pairs may not always be what they are advertised as and should be treated with suspicion unless the history is firmly known. One of the greatest feelings in aviculture is to introduce young birds which go on to become successful breeders. It is advisable to remove Amazons nest boxes at the end of the breeding season as when they are reintroduced in the Spring great excitement is generated. This often leads to the commencement of the breeding cycle which may not have occurred had the nest box been left in place throughout the year. At PARROTCARE we have a number of Amazons which choose to nest in 4 ft deep boxes, 12 inches square at the base. Amazons cannot breed successfully on a seed diet. If they are maintained in this way breeding results from even the best pairs will gradually subside to zero. It is essential that a diet of mixed pulses, fruit, vegetables and sweet corn are fed alongside the basic parrot mix. At PARROTCARE each pair has a digestive biscuit as part of their evening treat. It is not advisable to run Amazons in adjacent aviaries without screening to ensure no visual contact with other breeding pairs.

macaws

Statistics on Macaw breeding also make interesting reading as in 1995 a total of 23 specimens were bred and in 1998 this had increased to 462. As with Amazons probably many more were bred but not recorded. Many years ago I made a visit to a Macaw breeder who had no problems in coaxing his pair to breed. His original purchase was the male Blue and Gold Macaw as a pet. After owning the bird for some 5 years, he married his fiancee and proceeded to have children. He felt the Macaw was being neglected due to other family commitments and arranged to purchase another Macaw of the same species. Unaware of the sex of either bird, he merely bought the second Macaw as a companion for the first. The birds were housed in a “wash house”
attached to the kitchen area. A 50 gallon steel drum was placed in the aviary as he thought the birds might like to play in it. From day one both Macaws were allowed free access to the home under supervision. After a few months they became extraordinarily interested in the steel barrel and wood chippings were used as nesting material. The female? then commenced to lay and over the following two years through a combination of parent and hand rearing a total of 30 Blue and Gold Macaws were raised. The only previous experience that this aviculturist had was a colony of cockatiels. The moral of the story is that if a pair of parrots wish to go to nest it almost impossible to stop them. It was certainly not because of some magical expertise on the part of their keeper which induced these birds to breed.

**african grey**

Of all the larger parrots bred at PARROTCARE, African Greys have probably been the most successful. The key to breeding African Greys is compatibility and seclusion. Of much less importance is the size of the aviary and the shape of the nest box. Many pairs of African Greys retire immediately to the nest box when the attendant nears the aviary for feeding or cleaning purposes. This is often the first sign that a pair are compatible and ready to breed. Occasionally, clear eggs are laid by the female, which usually indicates the male is too young to fertilise them. The diet, as mentioned previously, is relished by African Greys. Those at PARROTCARE have a minimum of 75% complete diet (pellets). African Greys make excellent parents and on no occasion have we ever had a female desert their eggs or chicks after a nest inspection. If it is the intention to sell the babies as pets, it would be necessary to remove them from the nest at approximately 4 weeks. At this stage, a brooding temperature of 31°C will be necessary. African Greys also enjoy a move of aviaries occasionally and this often stimulates them to go and breed again. Often birds kept in the same situation over a number of years gradually lose interest in breeding and the stimulus can be provided with a new aviary and nest box.

**eclectus**

At PARROTCARE we breed two types of Eclectus, Vosmaeri and Polychloros, more commonly know as the Red Sided. At approximately 5 weeks, baby Eclectus can be sexed by the colour of their head feathers, green for males and red for females. Eclectus are best purchased as young pairs made up in the first year of their life. By doing so, breeding success is almost assured at 3-4 years of age. Birds that have lost a partner late in life can be extremely difficult to make up into another breeding situation. Only two eggs are laid and occasionally one. Unusually, certain pairs of Eclectus tend to have a dominance in babies of either one sex or the other. An example of a breeding pair of Vosmaeri Eclectus, for the first 7 chicks all were females. Maybe this is superstition on my part, but it does seem to be an extreme coincidence. Females are dominant to males and I have never seen a male Eclectus enter the nest box. He is often to be seen peering into the nest box but his inquisitiveness stops there. In the diet of Eclectus it is essential to provide a greater percentage of fruit and vegetables. A high level of calcium intake is also necessary as once a hen Eclectus begins to lay she is difficult to stop and therefore the breeding cycle encompasses both summer and winter. As mentioned previously in the text, pairs of Eclectus should have two feeding stations, even if the birds are completely compatible. Females become protective over a food source and therefore the male must resort to feeding at the other station.

**specialisation**

For most parrot breeders it is essential to have a number of different pairs in their collection. From the point of view of visual interest, it is more important to have different species of varying colours. So in most collections of 10 pairs there may be as many as 8 different species. In the longer run, it is providing a greater service to aviculture and satisfaction to the individual breeder to specialise in one or two different species. When a collection has a large variety of species, it can be difficult to replace a suitable mate if one of a breeding pair should die. Even when a replacement is
found, that bird may not necessarily be compatible with the bird already in your possession. The search then goes on to find a compatible partner. All this effort is time wasted and in the long run to the detriment of the species.

Occasionally, the opportunity arises to purchase maybe 4 or 5 pairs of one type of parrot. Importers do occasionally bring in a species of parrot that is relatively infrequently imported, that is when the opportunity will arise to specialise to greatest effect. From the introduction of say 10 individuals, it is possible to make up compatible unrelated pairs of breeding age and within a short period of time maybe 2 of the 5 pairs are raising chicks. From then on it is possible to retain a number of youngsters and pair these back to unrelated imported birds or unrelated babies that have been bred from another pair. The eventual outcome is that productivity is high, the contribution to the species as a whole is beneficial and the opportunity to sell unrelated youngsters at reasonable prices is a distinct possibility. Whatever the depth of your pocket, it is possible to find a species that needs the help of a dedicated aviculturists. Indiscriminate collecting of several different species is a common mistake by the modern aviculturist. Most parrot breeders see it purely as a hobby and not as a way of advancing the species. On every continent there are parrots either inexpensive or hugely priced that require man’s assistance to increase their numbers. To name but a few there are the Black Cheeked Lovebird from Africa, the Yellow Backed Lory and Palm Cockatoo from Indonesia, the Yellow Faced Parrolet and the Blue Throated Conure from South America, New Zealand has the Kea and Kakapoe and in Australia the Blue Eyed Cockatoo. Not all of the birds mentioned are obtainable and there are many more not mentioned here that require the expert attention of a dedicated aviculturist. The story of the Echo Parakeet from Mauritius is heartening and shows what can be done with the assistance of modern veterinary science and the experience gained over the past 30 years in avicultural techniques.
PARROTCARE
Everything for Your Parrot

- Specialists in hand reared African Grey babies for over 27 years
- FREE information booklet "Your Pet Parrot" attached
- Hand reared in a family environment
- Weaned onto a complete nutritional diet
- See the babies on our website picture gallery
- Full after care service
- Cuddly tame
- Ring for availability

Full insurance
Parrot holiday home
Door to door delivery
Birth certificate

PARROTCARE SALES HOTLINE 01670 530731 or 07946 391435
MAIL ORDER SPECIALISTS - VISITS WELCOME - PLEASE PHONE
Help at hand with Parrotcare booklets

BIRD experts often call on people who sell birds to make sure that potential buyers have all the information they need about their new pets.

Parrot breeder John Wragg not only makes sure people are aware of the commitment they are taking on, but he has also produced three booklets to help them. These are Your Pet Parrot, Breeding Parrots in Aviculture and Incubation Procedures and Hand Feeding.

You can buy a hard copy of each book for £8.99 or you can get a copy delivered by e-mail for £2.99. Each booklet contains all the information you need to know to get started in each subject, and if you are still stuck you can contact John by telephone or e-mail.

Parrotcare also sells a fairly wide range of parrots and can look after your birds when you go on holiday for a cost of £3 per night.

For information on what hand-reared birds are available, contact Parrotcare at the address below or visit the Website.

Parrotcare
54a Front Street, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 8UA. Tel: 01670 530731 (10am-5pm) Web: www.parrotcare.com
E-mail parrotcaredales@sky.com

Parrot Care
Three new booklets with specialist advice on parrots have been written and published by John Wragg of Parrotcare, based on his 25 years’ experience.

Your Pet Parrot covers buying your first parrot, the right cage, diet, training and general care.

Breeding Parrots in Aviculture covers buying parrots, compatibility, keeping parrots, rearing, nest boxes and specialisation.

Incubation Procedures and Hand Feeding covers many areas of breeding and raising parrots, including identification, teaching, weaning and eating.

The booklets take the reader from first steps in parrot keeping to more advanced care and procedures.

For details contact Parrotcare at 54a Front Street, Bedlington, Northumberland NE22 8UA. Tel: 01670 530731 or website: www.parrotcare.com

SHOP TALK
The latest products and details for bird keepers

Parrotcare.com

Three Parrotcare booklets are available. To order your copies, visit the Parrotcare website or contact John Wragg directly.

John Wragg is a qualified aviculturist and has been breeding parrots for 25 years. In addition, he has travelled widely and seen many species of parrot in their natural habitats.

John Wragg recommends that all parrot keepers should read these three booklets to ensure they have all the information they need to keep their birds healthy and happy.

For more information on the latest products and details for bird keepers, visit the Parrotcare website or contact John Wragg directly.
Jeanette with some of our African Grey babies.

Jeanette and our Quakers.

John and our Blue and Gold Macaw babies.
incubation procedures and hand feeding

setting up an incubation and hand feeding room

incubation - temperature, humidity, techniques ans problem solving

nursery management
Jack, one of our Macaw babies

Jeanette Wragg with two baby Eclectus females
introduction

As a practical parrot breeder, over the last 37 years, it has on many occasions been necessary to incubate eggs and hand rear the resulting offspring. These procedures have been used throughout the world and particularly in the past 10 to 15 years have been perfected to produce better results. Parrot breeding in captivity has increased mainly due to avicultural techniques and an approach which is more scientific than in the past. Surgical sexing has revolutionised the breeding of monomorthic species. Diseases in parrot-like birds have also been revolutionised and a greater understanding of psittasine nutrition has been a major development in the husbandry of parrot-like birds. To increase the number of breeding successes, there has been a greater use of artificial or surrogate incubation. Surrogate incubation being the movement of fertile parrot eggs under pigeons or poultry. A substantial amount of data is available via practical experience within PARROTCARE and the breeding successes of various species such as Macaws, Conures, African Greys, Lorys, Love Birds, Australian Parakeets, Cockatoos and Amazons has provided a depth of practical knowledge which may be the equal of most aviculturists in the world.

the egg

An egg, to the uninitiated observer, may seem a simple reproductive method. An egg nevertheless is an extremely complicated structure and contains many intricate parts which collectively enable the egg to hatch through incubation processes. It is, of course, essential that an egg contains all the nutritional requirements necessary to allow a growing chick to hatch, if all these ingredients are not present, then obviously the chick will fail to hatch and the common term ‘dead in shell’ will prevail. It is therefore important that birds have an adequate diet to ensure that this phenomenon is reduced considerably. As there are adequate descriptions of structure of an egg in other avicultural books, I will not cover the subject here and will concentrate on the practical aspects of incubation. Parrots lay eggs with no colour, i.e. white. It is generally felt the eggs are white because parrots lay in hollow trees which tend to be dark areas and she can see the eggs when entering the nest. The egg shell is formed in such a way that it is difficult to enter from the outside but relatively easy to exit for the chick from the inside. The egg shell contains pores that allow moisture and gases to escape. Unfortunately, it is also possible for bacteria to enter through the same pores if the shell goes through a series of cooling. Egg shells also can be accidentally punctured by the hen’s nail or cracked by a descending blow when the hen enters the nest. These eggs will invariably fail to hatch as bacteria will enter. The albumen or egg white consists of three proteins. Globulin, mucins and albumen. The egg yolk contains proteins and fats which will be consumed by the growing embryo and will form the main source of nutrition. The embryo begins to develop before the laying of the egg.

From experiences at PARROTCARE it is not necessarily so that larger eggs take longer to incubate than smaller eggs. Our Green Wing and Blue and Gold Macaw eggs take less time to hatch than our African greys and Eclectus. The Macaws take approximately 2 days less than the smaller parrots. From only a few days into incubation it is possible to see the small heart beginning to pump and the cardio-vascular system developing. In week 2 of the incubation cycle blood vessels and veins can be distinctly seen supporting the chick by inspecting the egg through a bright light. As incubation progresses the body of the chick obscures the light while candling and the end of the egg opposite to the egg sac becomes dark and only blood vessels are visible at the air sac end. As the hatching time nears, the chick’s head moves towards the air sac. This movement of the chick causes drawdown on one side of the egg. At this time the chick will puncture the air sac and external pipping will be noticed almost immediately after as the egg tooth which is located on the end of the beak punctures the shell. During the whole of the incubation period, it is critical that temperatures and humidity are maintained at the correct levels otherwise variation in hatching times may occur and in cases where they are incorrect will cause either a weak chick at the point of hatch and it may even find the process impossible to achieve. Incubation is the application of heat to an egg which perfects develops of the embryo. Hens are by far the best at this process and humans have yet to achieve anything like the success rate. We feel it will be a long time before the ideal incubator has been produced.

We have noticed at PARROTCARE that weight gains for chicks brought up by their parents in the nest box are better than those for hand reared chicks, although at the end of the rearing period both chicks tend to be of a similar weight. Success in maintaining parrot-like birds in captivity must be measured by the number of fertile eggs laid and ultimately the number of chicks reared. If the eggs laid are fertile and yet do not hatch then little success has been achieved. The value of incubation and brooding equipment is not the most important aspect of purchasing. Because you spend more does not necessarily mean that you achieve greater success. We at PARROTCARE feel that the procedures outlined in this booklet will assist any aviculturist to increase his overall production of young parrots.
increasing production

The main advantage of artificial incubation is to increase the number of youngsters bred per year. By taking the first clutch between 14 and 21 days it is possible to encourage the parent birds to further lay. This procedure is not cruel, as in the wild often nests of eggs are eaten or destroyed by inclement weather conditions. It is the normal instinct for the parents to continue in their endeavours to raise young. The second clutch of eggs should be left with the parents and the ensuing youngsters also be reared by them. By adopting this method it will ensure that only the strongest and fittest birds are produced and in greater quantities. By allowing parent birds to raise their second clutch there will be a provision for breeding stock into the future. Another important reason for artificial incubation is to save the clutch of eggs that has been deserted by the parent bird. Occasionally a single egg is laid and the hen fails to incubate. There is still a reasonable chance that the egg may be fertile and by artificially incubated a chick is often reared that would otherwise not have been. Avian viruses and disease are less easier transmitted in the hand rearing room and through artificial incubation than is possible when parrots raise their own chicks. It is essential to acquire fertile eggs in the first place to have a male and female in the same aviary. It is surprising how many aviiculturists maintain two birds in an aviary simply on the assumption that they are a true pair. It is obviously essential to have birds surgically sexed or chromazone feather sexed to achieve breeding success. Two females will set up home and behave as a true pair even going through the ritual of copulation. Once eggs are laid they will even take turns at incubation. With parrots what you see is not always what you get.

calcium

The next thing you need is a suitable cage or aviary. As this subject has been covered in another booklet by PARROTCARE - Breeding parrots in captivity I will not dwell on the subject here. Diet and nutrition are also areas covered in the previously mentioned booklet and will also not be covered here in any depth. Safe to say that the only way in which an egg can get the required minerals and vitamins is via the diet of its parents. The parents diet relates directly to hatchability. Calcium in the parents’ diet ensure that egg shells are strong and also the bone structure of the chick in such a way as to ensure rickets is not present in the new born youngster. In days gone by, it was believed that sufficient calcium could be derived from cuttle fish bone alone to ensure the breeding birds needs. This is now known to be incorrect and numerous high density liquid calcium products exist on the market. Providing these calcium products are given on a routine basis egg binding should be almost eliminated. Most of these calcium based products also contain Vitamin D3, which is essential for birds kept indoors without their main source of sunlight. Providing these products are administered as prescribed, no danger will be caused to the birds from over-dosing. Relying totally on the parents to incubate and feed their babies through to conclusion is fraught with dangers and therefore it is an insurance policy to own at least one incubator and brooder to cover eventualities in the case of a disaster. There are numerous reasons why a clutch of eggs should be taken from the parent birds. The hen who fails to incubate correctly. This habit sometimes carries on after the first clutch and for some unknown reason she may never be a bird who will sit throughout the incubation period. If regular checks are made of the nest cavity, it may be possible to discern whether eggs are correctly incubated by their temperature. If eggs are found to be cold after the first few days of incubation, then the hen is obviously not sitting correctly. It is worth taking these eggs and placing them in the incubator as even eggs that have been incubated for a short period of time by the hen and then left to cool will still hatch if caught early enough. Parents may break the eggs by either descending too quickly into the nest box or simply eating them. In this case it is possible to put dummy eggs under the parrot until they learn not to break them. It is sometimes easy to forget that birds are on a steep learning curve at this stage in their lives and can be forgiven mistakes, as this is often the way they will learn. Occasionally a parrot may lay an egg directly from the perch and not in the nest box. In my experience this is
usually a one off and more often than not the egg is broken. It is also possible to use other species of parrots who are laying simultaneously to be used as surrogate sitters for those birds that are not able to do it for themselves. Remember it is always better that a parrot should incubate her eggs for the longest period of time possible even if it is the intention to remove the eggs at a later stage. It is not possible to leave eggs under the surrogate parents if they are not in the same breeding cycle chronologically of the pair the eggs have been taken from. For instance, if eggs were to hatch at an earlier stage than anticipated by the sitting hen, she would find it difficult to cope with the situation. Likewise if eggs were about to hatch after her own eggs would normally, the hen may desert the eggs and there would be a subsequent loss of potential chicks. For those parent birds who eat their eggs, it is advisable to check nests just before dark as parrots lay their eggs in the early evening.

**seasonal breeders**

Some parrots are natural seasonal breeders, i.e. they lay eggs at the same time each year. Those falling into that category are Australian parakeets, Amazons and Cockatoos. Many others are not seasonal breeders for instance Eclectus and African greys. We have found at PARROTCARE that these birds are capable of laying eggs throughout the year. When removing eggs it is essential that easy access is obtained into the nest box and therefore all nest boxes should be situated in the aviary in such a way that inspections can be done without inconveniencing the parent birds. If every time you require to check the eggs in the nesting cavity you cause major disruption to the breeding pair then you are negating any benefits which may be derived from artificial incubation. Living in the northern part of the UK winters can be extremely cold but I have nevertheless found that eggs left with the parents in nest boxes with the appropriate construction have not come to any harm in temperatures even below zero.

**egg laying cycle**

The importance of sufficient insulation and construction of nest boxes is critical. It is also important to know precisely when each egg is laid as the hatching time is totally dependent on this information. Without the guidance of egg laying date confusion can be caused at the stage of hatching in the incubator. Parrots eggs tend to be laid every other day although we have found at PARROTCARE that this is not always the case and there may be a 3 day difference between laying of one egg and the next. Parrots tend to have considerable behavioural changes when they are about to go to nest, often tame birds become extremely aggressive just prior. Obviously the disappearance of the male or female bird into the nest box is a trigger to the nesting cycle. In order to maximise productivity, it is possible to take the first clutch of eggs from the parent birds. This will almost certainly encourage the pair to lay another clutch. In the wild clutches of parrot eggs are often destroyed by snakes, inclement weather conditions, trees being blown over etc. Therefore in the wild state it would be necessary to double clutch to ensure the survival of the species. Another way of increasing productivity is to take the second egg from the nest. The hen will invariably attempt to build up the pre-requisite number of eggs in her clutch by taking eggs up to three or four times it is possible to double the clutch of parrot like birds. A word of caution at this stage. If you persistently attempt to take eggs from the parent bird or remove clutches it is possible for the hen to deteriorate under the strain and also the quality of parrot chicks is reduced and a number of chicks will be bred that are not up to the required standard. The female parrot usually commences to sit on the second egg of a clutch and not at the end of the clutch as it is in other birds. This means you have a progression of chicks usually the first two within a few hours and then others following at 48 to 72 hour intervals. If left in the nest occasionally the youngest chick fails to survive. This is due to the older chicks obtaining all the food available. At PARROTCARE we have found the clutch interval between laying if eggs are taken at about 21 days the cycle is normally in the region of 28 days before the next egg is laid. This is obviously considerably variable and smaller birds like Senegals appear to reclutch earlier than birds the size of Macaws.

I have read some of the most incredible rubbish when it comes to the egg bound female parrot. From using lubricant jellies to assist the hen to lay and using excessive heat. The main reason why a hen becomes egg bound is because of a lack of calcium and this is the critical factor. If you have followed the procedures outlined in PARROTCARE book on Breeding Parrots in Captivity and your application of a liquid calcium has been a regular feature of your management, then egg binding should be a thing of the past. Female parrots laying their first clutch of eggs are the most vulnerable...
and if this has occurred then it is essential to remove the hen from the aviary and bring her into a comfortably warm environment. At that stage it is critical to either give a calcium injection or where liquid calcium is available an eye dropper in the side of the beak is often sufficient to release the egg within a few hours. The reason for egg binding is the lack of calcium in the muscles which expel the egg. The calcium has been drained from this area and used in the egg shell. By replacing this either intravenously or through the walls of the stomach it is possible to put the calcium where it is needed rapidly. If this is not done with some haste the egg laying process may cost the hen her life. Once eggs are removed from the nest it is advisable to candle them immediately to evaluate whether they have fine hairline cracks. If these are noticed it is essential to seal them off at the earliest possible moment. At PARROTCARE we find that a very thin layer of nail varnish will be sufficient to stop air and bacteria entering the egg and therefore causing the eventual death of the developing chick.

All eggs should be handled with clean hands and therefore it is advisable to wash them before any procedures that entail handling. I have heard that sterile rubber gloves should be worn when handling eggs. This never occurs at PARROTCARE. I find it difficult enough to handle eggs safely with bare fingers and thumb without the added disadvantage of gloves. When parrot females incubate their eggs in the wild or nest boxes the egg is obviously heated only on the top by the hen sitting therefore the sides and the bottom of the egg are cool relatively speaking. In the incubator when artificial means are used this is not possible as the temperature of the egg is the same throughout. If the heat in the incubator is distributed via a fan the heat throughout the incubator is evenly distributed. Humidity generated in the wild and in nest boxes is also an important factor in hatchability and this must be simulated in the incubator to provide similar conditions. When you are removing the eggs from the nest box to the incubator it is important that you carry them in an appropriate container, one containing either wood shavings or small seeds ensures that eggs are not bumped together while being moved.

At PARROTCARE we immediately candle the eggs prior to putting into the incubator to establish the oldest egg from the youngest and also mark the eggs with an HB pencil in order of final hatching. At this stage we also check for cracks or holes in the eggs and do the necessary repairs. Parrot eggs have a greater success of hatching if left for a minimum of 10 days or more with the parents. I prefer a period of up to 21 days if this is achievable.

At PARROTCARE we have three incubators. No.1 is the main incubator. No.2 has been adjusted for larger eggs such as Macaws and the third incubator doubles up as a hatcher. These machines are left running 24 hours per day, 52 weeks per year. It is also possible to have varying degrees of humidity in each of the incubators. The three incubators are of the same model - Matador Professional. I have made many modifications to the basic box, but things I like most about them is the all round visibility and their ability to maintain accurate temperatures. I personally have little faith in digital thermometers and prefer the old fashioned mercury variety. As the majority of the box is unused I find that by placing the mercury thermometer directly above the eggs being incubated I get an extremely accurate reflection of the temperature. Even mercury thermometers of a medium evaluation can be inaccurate up to 1/2°. If this inaccuracy is allowed to continue over a period of days then it will affect the hatchability of the eggs. It is therefore important to have at least one thermometer which is calibrated and reliable in terms of temperature. The incubator is also a moving tray. This means that the egg is rolled across a metal tray by steel wires attached to a motor. A minimum number of turns within a 24 hour cycle is in my view 48. In addition to these turns it is also advisable to rotate the egg by 180 degrees two or three times a day. At PARROTCARE we adopt this procedure as a matter of routine. In the event of a power failure, thankfully this has not occurred at PARROTCARE yet, we nevertheless have on hand hot water bottles which can be filled and wrapped with a towel and eggs could be laid on these in an attempt to maintain temperatures
of approx. 100°F which will keep the eggs alive while the power is restored. Whilst this procedure is being followed take great care to ensure that eggs are not damaged. To reduce the overall vibration in the incubator cabinet it is advisable to have them situated on solid tables as low down to the floor as possible. It is amazing how easy it is to knock a table while passing and subsequently destroying the eggs. Even small continuous vibrations on unstable surfaces can cause a reduction in hatchability. The floors in our incubation room are solid and the benches on which the incubators are placed are relatively low down which allows easy viewing of the eggs as well as reduction in vibration. The incubator which has been modified to use as a hatcher has merely had the bars removed and additional humidity can be applied to the egg by flooding the floor area. Cleanliness of incubators and hatchers is essential.

At PARROTCARE we use a prepared diluted disinfectant which is ideal for this purpose. Whenever the incubator is empty disinfecting takes place before any new eggs are placed in it. Routine maintenance is also an area not to be neglected. If a motor begins to sound the worse for wear take the precaution of having sufficient spares to ensure the incubator will continue to function in the event of an emergency. The benefits of sticking with one type of incubator when purchasing a number of units is that spares and parts are interchangeable thus ensuring that in a crisis you can still maintain at least one or two incubators in working condition while the third is being repaired.

The ambient temperature in the incubation room is critical and must be maintained at a stable level otherwise the equipment in the room will find it difficult if not impossible to maintain accurate temperatures. An example would be a room in which direct sunlight is able to penetrate and therefore cause wild fluctuations in the temperature. An ideal room for incubation purposes is a one without windows and protected from direct sunlight by another larger building. An example of an ideal incubation room would be a cellar or air conditioned room where the temperature could be maintained within a degree and therefore have the least temperature fluctuations that may affect the incubator. I have spoken to a number of parrot enthusiasts who believe their incubator is at fault due to its inability to maintain temperatures only when having a thorough discussion is it realised that the problem is not the incubator but the high fluctuations in ambient temperature in the room in which it is kept.

Good cleanliness practices should be enforced in the hand rearing and incubation room. It is essential that viruses, fungus and other bacterial are not brought into the room by shoes and clothing which have been worn elsewhere. All equipment used in the incubation room should be disinfected and sanitised daily and all equipment which will come into direct contact with a chick or an egg should be sterilised after each procedure. The equipment I find indispensable in the incubation and hand rearing room are:

- tweezers
- small scissors
- HB pencil
- candler
- spotlight
- scales
- cups
- Infra red heat lamp
- small microwave
- paper towels
- cotton buds
- nail varnish
- various sizes of needles
- spoons various sizes
- wound and skin cleaner
- knob varnish, swivel chair on castors
- various sizes

**Candling**

Candling and repairing eggs is an important part of incubation procedure. As I have already mentioned, eggs should be candled immediately after removal from the nest. By doing this, you become aware of any eggs which are dead in shell, clear and at what stage incubation has progressed. If you are unsure as to when the first egg is laid it is critical to identify an approximate age of the eggs at this stage and number the eggs in order of age. They are then placed in the incubator so that they can be visually identified in age. Any cracked eggs are made good at this point. As I have mentioned clear nail varnish has been used at PARROTCARE to good effect. A pair of Eleanor's Cockatoos in our care break eggs routinely. Fortunately, these are usually hairline and if removed early enough and repaired the eggs will continue to progress and eventually hatch. Remember whenever varnish is placed on an egg that area will be less porous than the remainder of the egg and therefore if large areas are covered in varnish the chick is unable to reduce its water content at the necessary rate. Also if repairs have taken place over the area where the egg would normally pip and the chick rotate then an aided hatching will be required. Therefore any eggs that have been repaired cause a greater risk to
hatching. Candling an egg can tell an experienced aviculturist a lot about the progress of the chick. A critical time is at drawdown. If the age of an egg is unknown it is worthwhile drawing a fine pencil line around the visible joint of the air sac and the membrane.

This line can be clearly seen when candling. By doing this any drawdown which takes place over a number of days can be seen by the observer. Once the speed of drawdown increases it is essential to remove the egg from the incubator and place in the hatcher. If this is not done and the egg is allowed to rotate while drawing down and pipping the results will be disastrous and the chick will die. At PARROTCARE we always put a small needle hole in the egg shell to relieve any pressure build up that may have occurred during incubation. This procedure is done with a disinfected needle which is proportionate in size to the egg. The hole must obviously be in the air sac otherwise anywhere else on the egg and the chick would die. The egg is then laid on a flat smooth surface and allowed to find its own centre of gravity. Once this has been achieved the egg is laid on tissue in a ceramic bowl and placed in the hatcher. Within 24 hours the chick should have pipped on the membrane and almost simultaneously internally pipped the egg shell. The temperature in the hatcher should be approx. .5°C or 1oF less than the temperature in the incubator.

**incubator temperatures**

The correct temperature for incubating parrot eggs is 37.5°C. A temperature fractionally lower than this say 37.2°C would be considerably safer than a higher temperature. Any temperatures above 37.5°C are considerably more dangerous than lower temperatures.

At PARROTCARE we have a dozen or more mercury thermometers. By trial and error I have established a control thermometer, from which all other thermometers are calibrated. Even the most accurate and expensive mercury thermometers can be out by up to about 1/2° which can cause the eventual failure of the egg during incubation. I have modified the incubators at PARROTCARE to ensure that the thermometer is directly above any egg being incubated. Maybe I am old fashioned, but I do not trust digital thermometers for this task. Whenever in the incubation room the first job is to check temperatures in both incubators and hatchers for accuracy. Any changes from the norm are registered and rectified. A temperature of say 38°C, i.e. 1/2° higher than is recommended, will not kill the embryo immediately, but eventually weaken the embryo where it will fail to hatch or die. A lower temperature can be rectified provided it is noticed within 2 days of the problem occurring. Changes in temperature during the first part of incubation are often more critical than in the latter stages. It is therefore recommended to leave any eggs with the parents for at least 21 days if possible. In the early stages of incubating eggs at PARROTCARE I used to routinely sterilise all eggs. I have ceased to do this in the past 10 years as on one occasion I am sure that the embryos were destroyed by the disinfectant. Once an egg is disinfected, it has no resistance to the entry of bacteria or fungus. I would not recommend the disinfection of parrot’s eggs and prefer to leave them with the natural resistance which has been built in by the hen.

At this stage it is worth mentioning that whenever you set up an incubation and hand rearing room it is based on the approximate number of eggs and chicks which you anticipate breeding in one year. If you find that the volume of eggs and chicks is doubled during that period of time, the set up is normally only capable of efficiently processing the estimated number. It is at this stage then that infection and bacteria can take hold in the incubation room and therefore any overloading of the system must be compensated by rigorous disinfection and cleaning of the area on a regular daily basis.

**turning eggs**

There is a general impression that providing eggs are turned approximately once per hour throughout the day and night they will eventually hatch. We have found at PARROTCARE that the advisable number of turns required by a parrot egg in a 24 hour cycle is nearer 48. If your incubator will only turn the eggs at a lesser rate than this, it would be advisable to turn the eggs manually a number of times each day. As a rule of thumb, if the turning is correct in the incubator then eggs should have complete vein coverage at about 60% of the duration of the incubation period. As parrot eggs are easily candled, it is possible to monitor vein coverage throughout all stages of the incubation.

**cool eggs**

If eggs are checked in the nest box and found to be cool to the touch, it will obviously be essential to place them in the incubator for them to progress further. Under no circumstances should a cool egg be placed immediately into an incubator at 37.5°C. This may cause a sudden shock to the system of the embryo and eventually cause death. It is better to take the egg temperature up in stages over an hour or two. This can be done by placing the egg in a brooder that has a temperature of say 25-30°C then gradually move it up to the required incubation temperature. This procedure is particularly applicable to eggs that have just been laid in the nest but found to be cool.

**the hatcher**

As already mentioned, the hatcher is a Matador incubator with the turning mechanism removed or Octagon 20 in conjunction with the parrot rearing module. A calibrated
thermometer is placed directly above the hatching egg, which has been placed in a ceramic bowl with tissue to rest on. The hatcher is flooded to ensure humidity is increased to over 80%. Prior to placing the egg into the hatcher ensure that it’s natural centre of gravity is allowed to take place. This can be done by placing the egg on a smooth surface and allowing it to naturally turn until the chick’s body weight is at the bottom of the egg. Over the next 24-48 hours the chick’s centre of gravity will change again slightly and it will be necessary to follow the aforementioned procedure again. Providing the chick is healthy within 48 hours a new chick will emerge from the egg. It is at this time when the breeder may become anxious and feel that the chick is not capable of extricating itself from the egg. Be patient, it’s amazing how 90%+ of all eggs are capable of going through this procedure unaided. Once hatching actually begins and the chick rotates in a clockwise direction the whole procedure can take as little as 15 minutes to chip off the top of the egg and emerge. Occasionally a chick will pip on the wrong side of the egg, i.e. the opposite side to the air sac. This indicates that the chick is upside down. It is not necessary to panic in these situations, as more often than not the chick is perfectly healthy and will require some assistance to hatch. The equipment needed to assist such a hatch is a high humidity hatcher without the forced air. Forced air hatchers will dry out any membrane that has been opened up by removing the shell over the air sac. Once the membrane has dried out, it is almost impossible for the chick to force its way out. The equipment I use for this purpose is a Curfew 105 High Humidity hatcher. The malpositioned chick must be allowed to take in air through the small puncture hole on the incorrect side of the egg which it has made. To allow this to happen it may be necessary to slightly enlarge the hole. Great care must be taken at this stage as blood vessels will still exist around the chick. This procedure is normally done with a very small pair of tweezers and a sterilised needle. Place the egg back in the ceramic bowl with tissue ensuring that the egg is allowed to centralise and maintain its centre of gravity. At this stage remove the egg shell over the air sac to expose the membrane. By delicately using a small paintbrush and sterilised water, preferably warm, it will be possible to put a small quantity of water on the membrane and this will make any blood vessels easier to see. As long as blood vessels are evident in the membrane the chick is not ready to hatch. With a malformed chick, such as one described, the feet of the chick are usually just under the exposed membrane. Once the blood vessels have disappeared and the chick is ready to hatch it normally punctures the membrane with a foot. It will then be possible to help the chick from the egg, but do not attempt this procedure until all blood vessels have subsided. Over the years we have had a number of chicks at PARROTCARE with this problem and all have been successfully hatched and reared. I do believe that these eggs been left in the nest they would have been unable to hatch themselves.

**disinfecting the chick**

Immediately the chick has hatched, it will be necessary to remove it from the hatcher and disinfect the navel area. It is essential to follow this procedure as the navel area is the most likely place for bacteria to enter the chick at this early stage. I do this with cotton buds that have been sterilised with boiling water before allowing to cool down and disinfectant administered to the chick’s navel. It is essential to be extremely gentle at this stage as any undue pressure in this area could cause serious problems for the chick. The chick is then immediately placed into a high humidity brooder (not forced air) at 37 °C for the first 7-8 hours.

As a rule of thumb, I follow the temperatures outlined below from hatching through to eventual independence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Days</th>
<th>Temperature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 - 6 hours</td>
<td>37°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 hours - 4/5 days</td>
<td>36.5°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4/5 days - 14/15 days</td>
<td>35°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14/15 days - substantial chick feathering i.e. not to be regarded as naked babies</td>
<td>34°C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowering the temperature gradually until the chick is placed in a play pen with heated floor at about 25°C</td>
<td>25°C</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**introduction to hand rearing**

Domestic production of hand reared baby parrots will become more important as the importation of wild caught birds draws to a conclusion. Current legislation and deforestation of natural habitat will eventually cause the complete cessation of imported parrots. More and more pet shops and parrot owners will come to rely on the breeder and hand rearer to provide pet parrots in the future.

Two methods are currently available to aviculturists for increasing production. One is to remove eggs from the nest and artificially incubate, the other is to remove chicks from the nest at an early age for hand rearing. Both of the above methods will ensure that the parent birds continue in their breeding cycle and therefore increase the overall production. Hand reared parrots make far superior pets to wild caught birds. This is due
to the activity of imprinting when hand reared birds become completely humanised. The bonding that takes place between a pet parrot and its owner can be life long and the experience extremely rewarding.

the nursery

Offspring by their parents in the nest often show a greater level of disease than those babies that are hand reared. It is generally accepted that hand reared babies do not make the best parents in the future and if that is the aim then parent reared parrots should be purchased. When first setting up the nursery one must consider the overall number of chicks anticipated to be reared in that environment during a 12 month period. Peaks and troughs will take place where on occasions very few babies are being hand reared and during the peak of breeding activities the largest number will be in the brooders. Only the largest establishments hand rear in excess of 40 chicks per year. Therefore the level of production this book anticipates is probably something in the order of 10-15 chicks in the hand rearing room at any one time. If over-production is attempted in a limited nursery then disease and other health problems will increase significantly. If it is anticipated that your nursery will accommodate chicks of 2-3 weeks old that have previously been eggs incubated in the bird room.

brooder temperatures

As previously mentioned brooder temperatures are critical particularly in the early stages of a chick’s life. From 1-14 days old, temperatures must be between 37°C and 35°C. If chicks have been raised by the parent’s for the first 2-3 weeks, then initial brooder temperatures once removed from the nest will be approximately 31°C. As can be seen from the variation of the temperatures, chicks fed by their parents in an outdoor environment become acclimatised to lower temperatures much more quickly than do incubator hatched chicks. At PARROTCARE we still believe that it is necessary to have a professionally manufactured brooder to ensure chick survival even from the age of 2-3 weeks. Home made devices are not advisable where the life of a parrot chick is at stake. Some of the items you will require for the hand rearing room are listed below:-

- Medical supplies
- Hand feeding equipment
- Kitchen tissues
- Finer tissues
- Cups
- Feeding instruments
- Food bowls
- Cages
- Veterinarian and avicultural medical supplies
- Antibiotics
- Anti-fungals
- Probiotics
- Bedding materials
- Brooding containers
- Clean water
- Heat lamp
- Microwave
- Refrigerator
- Cups
- Cleaning containers
- Food bowls
- Microwave
- Cups
- Feeding instruments
- Antibiotics
- Probiotics
- Brooding containers
- Heat lamp
- Air tight containers

cleanliness

It can never be overstressed the importance of cleanliness in the hand rearing area. Chicks at an early stage are extremely susceptible to diseases, viruses, bacteria and fungi. Bedding in the brooder container must be changed at every feed and at PARROTCARE we use paper tissues as bedding. For the first few years of hand rearing, we used microwaved and sterilised wood shavings for this task. Over the past few years we have ceased this practice and now only use paper tissues. We had the unfortunate occurrence where a chick attempted to swallow the wood shavings and although survived the ordeal we felt it was too risky to continue with that practice.

A nursery should be a well ventilated area and at least one major extractor fan should be situated in the room, which ensures a turnover of air at least twice per day. In climates where high temperatures occur air conditioning and air filtration systems will be required to maintain air conditions at acceptable levels. Ionisers are also in use at PARROTCARE to reduce the level of dust in air.
mortality rates

It would be true to say that mortality rates amongst chicks hatched from the egg should not exceed one or two in a hundred. If deaths in the hand rearing room exceed this number then they must be regarded as suspicious. Very few parrot babies die suddenly in the hand rearing room unless by accidents caused by choking on formula or accidental death by physical injury i.e. dropping the chick. Prior to any chick's death, there is a period when it is possible to identify problems are occurring and therefore urgent action is needed to rectify whatever the problem is. The main areas to check are cleanliness of spoons, cups, brooders and chick containers, humidity and the level of bacteria that may build up in water used in the brooder, the temperature and viscosity of the hand rearing formula, temperatures in the brooder which should relate to the chick's age.

Chick colouration is a direct indicator of health. Healthy chicks should have a pinky look about them and any signs of pallor could be regarded as unacceptable and a sign of ill health. Weight gain is also important. A parrot chick should increase in weight by approx. 20% over day over the first 2-3 weeks.

Whenever brooders, hatchers are not being used they must be immediately disinfected for any new chicks to enter. It is fatal to continue to use a brooder throughout the breeding season without disinfecting regularly. Commercial products are available which can reduce the level of bacteria which may be prevalent in water used for brooders in connection with air humidity. Remember if you are to disinfect the hand rearing room and its contents, you must be extremely careful that any chemicals, pesticides or disinfectants do not cause the death of any chicks. While performing any disinfecting tasks of hatchers and brooders it is often wise to remove them from the hand rearing room. If the hand rearing room is to be disinfected then a good circulation of air is required. A large selection of commercially available disinfectants are specially manufactured for this task.

chick identification

In most cases, where limited numbers of parrot chicks are hand reared, it will be unnecessary to identify chicks, as this information will be readily contained in the breeder's head. In larger more commercial operations, it will be necessary to identify chicks for blood line. This can be done by felt pen in different colours and the use of plastic leg rings, which are expandable throughout the life of the chick. Once independent, these leg rings can be removed. Parrot chicks can be close rung at between 2/3 weeks and these rings can be obtained from the Parrot Society or commercial organisations. Parrots because of the variety in size have numerous leg rings available. It is obviously critical that only the appropriate leg ring should be placed on the bird. If an incorrect steel leg ring were to be placed on a chick then at a later stage in life when the leg grows it could cause to stop the circulation to the foot and therefore require removal. The following is the UK Parrot Society recommended size for various parrots.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variety of Bird</th>
<th>Close ring size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grass parrots</td>
<td>L/M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parakeets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love birds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakariki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many coloured</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Rump</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanley</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosella</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cockateels</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larger Rosellas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pileated</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Conures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smaller Lorys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Port Lincolns</td>
<td>P</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POWs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barrabands</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloncurries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pennants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusky and Perfect Lorikeets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slatey Headed Conures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Bellied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nanday</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jendaya</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blue Throated Conures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quakers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crimson Wings</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chattering Lorys</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plum Heads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Throated Conures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Bellied</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rock Pebblers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

organisations. Parrots because of the variety in size have numerous leg rings available. It is obviously critical that only the appropriate leg ring should be placed on the bird. If an incorrect steel leg ring were to be placed on a chick then at a later stage in life when the leg grows it could cause to stop the circulation to the foot and therefore require removal. The following is the UK Parrot Society recommended size for various parrots.

Visit our website at www.parrotcare.com
keeping records

If you have not kept records of your breeding results, as the years go by it becomes more confusing as to which bird was bred from which pair. With relatively little effort it is possible to track the birds from breeding pair, through the hand rearing process and to the parrot’s eventual owner. Information can be kept in either hard copy, i.e. in booklet form, or on a computer.

type of brooder

At PARROTCARE we have used many types of brooders over the past 20 years, some were hand made by us and others are commercially purchased. At PARROTCARE we use CURFEW incubators and these have been extremely satisfactory over the past decade. CURFEW are capable of maintaining temperatures at the required tolerance and are easily dismantled to ensure cleanliness is at the highest level. The heat source within the brooder we have found at PARROTCARE to be extremely important. We once purchased a brooder with top heat in the lid and this unit proved extremely troublesome as chick development was extremely poor and in some cases caused the eventual death of the baby. This unit has been discarded at PARROTCARE but is still in commercial operation in the UK. The correct advice initially when purchasing a brooder can be critical at a later stage.

brooding

0-6 hours
The temperature maintained at this critical time is 1/2° below the incubation temperature at 37°C. No food is required during this period as the chick is still being provided with food from the yolk sac. After this time the first feed of water and commercially produced bacteria is introduced to the chick. The bacteria kick starts the crop and commercially prepared formula contains this ingredient.

The first 5 days
During this period of time it is essential to brood chicks individually. This will assist the hand rearer to identify problems with an individual at an earlier stage than if they were brooded collectively in one bowl.

5 days to 14 days
Temperatures of 35°C are normally adequate during this period of time. A practical way to check the temperature of a chick is to place the very tip of its wing between your lips, if they feel cold then obviously the temperature is too low. Chicks being brooded with nest mates can often tolerate slightly lower temperatures because of heat generated between them. Babies are more content when brooded with nest mates. At this stage, the container must be increased in size to allow chicks the ability to move away from their nest mates and adjust the temperature to their needs.

14 days to substantially feathering
At PARROTCARE the temperature is lowered to approx. 34°C at this time in the chick’s life. This temperature will be slowly lowered until the chicks are feathered on both wing and head. At this time they are able to maintain their own temperature due to their feather insulation.
Full wing feathers
At this stage, 25 °C underfloor heating is adequate. At PARROTCARE all chicks are placed in a play pen at this stage and allowed access to food. Throughout all stages of hand feeding the formula is gradually thickened up whilst ensuring the food is clearing the crop. A mistake often made is to feed chicks too thin a formula over the early stages of its life and if this is taken to the extreme the chick may die of malnutrition. All baby parrots at PARROTCARE are weaned directly onto a complete diet. This ensures that adequate nutrition is available throughout the early stages of a chick’s life. At a later stage, additional fruit and vegetables diced can be placed in a separate bowl and added to the baby’s diet.

Transfer to a cage
Once the baby is perching adequately and sampling pellets, it is transferred to a cage to simulate its future environment. Perches are placed low with food bowls easily accessible at each end and directly in front of the bird at the same level as the perch. Pellets are easily accepted and produce little waste. If the temperature does drop in the weaning area, chick heat can be supplemented via an infra red lamp. Cages in which baby parrots are weaned should have wire floors to ensure that any faeces or leftover food drops in an area inaccessible to the chick.

Temperature of food
This is an important issue and if the food is fed too cold the chick may choke on the contents of the spoon as it attempts to reject the formula. A method which we use at PARROTCARE is to check the temperature of the food with the lips. If the food feels the right temperature to you then it is the right temperature for the chick. In the early stages of a chick’s life the temperature of the food is more important than in later life. A chick will take coolish food from a warm spoon as it can feel the heat from the spoon. When feeding very young chicks it is important to dip the spoon into warm water to maintain its temperature throughout the feeding period. The smallest spoon possible is used over the first week or so. Spoons are modified by turning in each side to provide a funnel leading to a narrow point at the end. Spoons should be made from the finest material possible and at PARROTCARE we have always found the old fashioned tiny silver spoons to be perfect for the task. As the chick grows older, the spoon is increased in size to hold extra formula. Food that is too hot is far more dangerous than food that is too cold. Unfortunately, we have heard of chicks dying with burnt crops.

The digestive system
Lactobacillus is an important ingredient in commercially produced hand rearing formulas. Additional lactobacillus can be purchased separately and added to any formula when it will be most appreciated at the beginning of the chick’s life. Lactobacillus provides good bacteria which enables the food to be digested more readily. If negative bacteria enters the crop, then this can cause illness and may have to be treated through antibiotics. It is essential to ensure that good bacteria enters the crop at the earliest possible stage, and therefore the first feed should contain a high level of lactobacillus.
other forms of feeding instruments

At PARROTCARE we have tried to use various syringes over the years and found them to be inadequate. Only the use of spoons are acceptable to us as this gives us the opportunity for the chick to taste the food and spend more time with the carer. Other feeding utensils are catheter tubes, galvanised needles, eye droppers, bulb and piston syringes. Some of the aforementioned instruments are positively barbaric and we feel at PARROTCARE they are inadequate for the feeding of baby parrots.

day old chicks

For the beginner, feeding a day old chick can be a daunting experience. For such a tiny bird the feeding response is often vigorous and may take the inexperienced hand feeder by surprise. Very small feeding implements are required and although we use the smallest available spoons at PARROTCARE, an eye dropper will do a similar job while the feeding formula is watery. It is very important to be in control of a situation and to do so feeding should take place at eye level and under a high intensity light to ensure that your vision of the chick feeding is unimpaired. If the hand rearing room is cool, then it may be necessary to employ an infra red heating lamp to ensure the day old chick does not chill while feeding takes place. Our hand rearing room is maintained at 20°C and additional heating under these circumstances is not necessary. Normally it takes up to 7 or 8 hours for a chick to absorb the yolk which remains in the abdomen. If warm water is left for a few moments it tends to become thicker the longer it stands. There may be a necessity to add additional warm water to get the food back to the required consistency. After the first week or so the chick will require a much thicker formula as the level of nourishment for growth is increasing. After 3 or 4 weeks the food may be at the consistency of apple sauce to provide the correct nutritional levels. The entrance to the bird’s crop is normally down the right hand side of the bird’s neck. This entrance is called the oesophagus. Therefore it is important to feed the bird via the left hand side of the beak with the spoon facing towards the oesophagus on the right hand side of the bird’s neck. This ensures an easy flow of formula from the spoon directly into the bird’s crop. If the reverse action is taken and the bird was fed from the right hand side the food would basically go around the mouth before it could enter the oesophagus.

weight gains in hand reared chicks

There is no reliable evidence that weight gain charts can be relied on as the true development of a “normal” chick. It is better to be concerned with the general health and growth of the chick rather than precise weight comparisons between hand reared babies that has been raised by some mythical person who supposedly has produced weight gains in hand reared chicks. A classical example of normal weight gain is a chick parent reared against a chick hand reared at the same age will be vastly different. The parrot reared chick will be substantially heavier and give the appearance of a greater development than the hand reared chick. This is how nature works and there is no getting away from the fact that the parents will always do a better job than the hand rearer. The important thing whilst hand rearing any type of bird is if the chick is showing good hydration levels, good colour and maintaining a plump and round appearance and weight is greater than the previous day, then you can be sure its
development is normal. If during physical examination a chick appears to be normal, it is of greater value than weight data. It is surprising that at the end of the hand rearing exercise and the chick is fully weaned and on the perch, it will have achieved the target weight and size if the procedures described have been adhered to.

**problem solving**

There are many problems that can occur in the hand rearing room most of which can be put down to poor management practices. Problems are legion and too many to mention in a small booklet such as this. Going back to one of my opening remarks on hand rearing, very few chicks should perish during the hand rearing procedure even from day old and should be no more than 2-3%. If the procedures outlined in this booklet are adhered to, then problems requiring medical attention should be few and far between. If viral or bacterial infections invade the chick, then there is very little the hand rearer can do to cure it. Prevention is far better than cure and a very detailed management plan should be put into effect and adhered to.

**weaning**

Once your baby parrot has reached this stage the job is almost complete. The most amazing stories have been heard about weaning but at PARROTCARE there have never been any major problems weaning the baby parrot onto hard food. I am now of the firm belief that weaning onto a formulated complete diet or pellet is the easiest and most successful way of weaning the baby parrot. The colourful nature of the pellets and their crunchiness appears to attract the baby and although this starts as play it soon ends up with the bird being fully weaned. It is possible to buy interim or weaning diets that are produced for that express purpose. You can not starve a baby parrot into submission when it comes to becoming independent. At PARROTCARE we continue to feed the baby until it no longer requires the food from either a psychological or nutritional standpoint. By simply feeling the bird’s crop it is possible to establish whether it is feeding correctly.

Over the past 20 years we have tried every weaning trick available. Lorys are by far the easiest of all parrots to wean. The weaning process can take as little as one day as food is consumed in liquid form, merely introducing the lory to the liquid diet warmed up is sufficient. It is often a good idea to put the spoon in the nectar and the bird is clever enough to put two and two together and realise that simply playing about the spoon is sufficient to encourage eating and drinking.

Much more difficult are the larger parrots, Eclectus and Macaws will allow you to hand feed them for as long as you want, even though they are totally independent in terms of food consumption. They often continue to beg for food from the hand rearer whenever he enters the room. Strangely enough when a person who is not the hand rearer enters the room the begging ceases, proving the need for food is psychosomatic and not nutritional. It is important to know the difference. As mentioned previously we now wean all babies onto the complete diet, with the addition of fruit and vegetables in a second bowl. At PARROTCARE we have found this to be easily the quickest and most satisfactory way of weaning.

The number of unweaned chicks finding their way onto the pet market is quite alarming and at PARROTCARE it is a policy not to allow any parrot to leave the premises for at least 10-14 days after we feel it is totally independent and feeding himself. Purchasing a parrot that is not properly weaned can be an extremely traumatic experience for both owner and parrot. The parrot may not survive the ordeal.

Throughout the weaning process for all parrots, there is a weight loss probably in the region of 10%. The baby will tell you when it does not require any further food. If
an attempt is made to feed a weaned baby then it may start initially to take food but very quickly turns its head away. This is a sure sign that the weaning process is complete. Never allow a baby to retire for the evening without food in its crop. A little food at this time will only have a beneficial effect. There are positives and negatives in producing imprinted parrots. On the plus side any hand reared parrot is gentle and humanised and experiences no stress in the company of human beings. At PARROTCARE we believe that hand reared babies particularly in species such as Cockatoos and Macaws do not make good breeding stock, being completely imprinted on their human owner. Other parrots such as African Grays, Amazons and Eclectus, if associated with other of their own species at an early stage in their lives accept the other parrot and will eventually go on to breed.

Churchill adored Parrots like these in Florida and had one as a pet.
your pet parrot

buying a parrot
training your parrot
parrot behavioural therapy
**Introduction**

It is recorded that the first parrot was seen in Britain 500 years ago. Parrots were known even further back in history by the Alexandrians. Parrots were regarded as luxury articles and they were used as bartering items by the Romans in exchange for slaves. Times have changed. Parrots are regarded as food items in some countries.

The parrot's personality, fascinating behaviour and great beauty were first appreciated in Europe where they became companions for their human friends. One endless fascination by man for parrots has been their intriguing ability to mimic.

One of life’s major decisions is to purchase a parrot, the commitment required over 30 to 40 years and the possibility that your descendents may inherit your pet make it very important and serious. There is a need to make the right decision first time and with 300+ species of parrots to choose from it is easy to make a mistake.

Special parrots need special people to look after their needs. Hand reared tame and cuddly parrots have numerous good points, clowning one minute and moody the next. The loyalty shown by your pet parrot must be returned for the rest of your life!

This booklet has been written to improve the life and relationship between your pet parrot and yourself.

**Purchasing a Parrot**

The first thing you must decide is what type and species of parrot do you require. Maybe you have a friend who currently has a parrot that you particularly like. Otherwise you will probably have to revert to scanning the pages of parrot journals or a good book on the subject. Many of the parrots you see depicted in books are not readily available or are infrequently bred in captivity. Therefore, at the end of the day you may have to modify the type of the bird you require based on availability.

**Pet Shop or Parrot Breeder?**

Most purchasers immediate contact with a baby parrot is generally via a Pet Shop. It is much more likely that your average baby parrot purchaser is going to come into contact with the local Pet Shop than the actual parrot breeder. In fact, the ideal place to purchase a baby parrot is via the breeder. The parrot breeder can offer you access to the baby parrot prior to its weaning on to hard food. This will enable any perspective purchasers to assess compatibility between himself and the new addition to the household. This is an important time as it gives the parrot an opportunity during play to become familiar with its new owner and also gives the owner the opportunity to judge whether that particular species is the type of baby parrot they require in the future. Alternatively, it is probably more convenient to visit a Pet Shop on a number of occasions to view the perspective purchase, but often parrots in Pet Shops have been neglected over a period of time as staff are not able to find sufficient time to entertain what is an intelligent creature that has the potential intellect of a 4 year old child. This means that the parrot could have already developed behavioural problems prior to finding a home.

The question worth asking at this early stage is the method by which the parrot has been hand reared, was it via a syringe and tube or the spoon fed method? This may seem relatively trivial, but it is an important area where the young parrot has had greater contact with the hand rearer if food has been administered via a spoon. In addition to that the bird has had the opportunity to taste the food as it is consumed. Via the tube method food is injected directly into the crop and it is a method which we have never indulged in or found acceptable and having always adopted the method of hand rearing via a spoon. This is a much lengthier way of hand rearing a baby parrot, but ensures that human contact is regularly achieved. The Pet Shop will be unable to answer this question, but the breeder certainly will.

You must also decide at an early stage the species of the parrot you wish to obtain, bearing in mind that parrots can live anything between 30 years for smaller and medium size parrots and up to 50 years for some of the larger Macaws and Amazons.
At PARROTCARE we have personally had the pleasure of breeding a number of Yellow Back lories over the past 20 or so years and know of one male who was in our possession who is in excess of 27 years and for a period of 20 years has bred and reared many babies.

**noise and chewing**

Remember, larger birds tend to have louder voices and in the category of loud voices would fall Macaws, Cockatoos and Amazons. They are certainly the more excitable of parrot species and generate considerable noise over relatively short periods throughout the day. The quieter species of parrots are headed by the African Grey, Senegals, Jardines. African Greys tend to make melodious sounds and very rarely screech. As a general rule of thumb, you could say that flat or apartment dwellers should stick to quieter birds as they have neighbours in the near vicinity. Owners living in rural areas can indulge themselves in the noisier species. Parrots generally chew quite heavily and this does not only apply to toys and perches but also your household furnishings if allowed access without supervision to your home. A parrot should never be allowed to roam the house without continuous supervision bearing in mind electric wires and other dangerous objects that may be picked up. Take care to ensure that doors and windows are securely locked and any chemicals such as cleaning fluids etc. are kept in a secure cupboard. One danger that is often overlooked are the toxic fumes that come from teflon pans. A non-stick pan is allowed to dry off whilst boiling on a stove it issues fumes which almost certainly would kill your parrot. If your parrot cage is normally in the kitchen, it is worthwhile removing the bird into another room during cooking activities.

**selecting your parrot**

When selecting your baby parrot look for a bird that is active, alert, healthy and will engage you with eye contact. A hand reared baby parrot after a few minutes getting to know him should be able to step onto your hand without any danger of inflicting an injury from a bite. If he cannot do this, it means that the parrot has gained a slight mistrust for humans and maybe a little older than the post weaning stage.

Parrots are wonderfully extrovert personalities and require lots of attention to entertain them. If you are someone who works 9 to 5 it will be difficult to provide your bird with the level of intellectual stimulus required in a normal day. If you do fall into this category of parrot owner it is possible to stimulate your parrot during the day by ensuring that fresh branches are always available in the cage, ropes and toys plus a radio playing music in the background is beneficial as he will not feel quite as alone as in a silent room. Generally speaking, hand reared parrots have a significant monetary value and it is not unheard of for vandals to break into the home and steal the parrot and leave the television set. So ensure that wherever your parrot is left when you go out, it is difficult to break into that particular room. It is not only the value of the bird that will disappear, but your pride and joy. Remember, you will not be able to replace him with an identical parrot. If your aim from owning a pet parrot is to have a bird with a large vocabulary and able to talk prolifically, you are more likely to obtain those objectives from an African grey or an Amazon parrot. They are generally regarded and in our experience the better talkers and mimics in the parrot family. Other parrots are more extrovert and probably could be regarded as good if not better companions than the latter two and the Macaws and Cockatoos would fall into this category. They are extremely extrovert and very loving and tend to bond with their owners.

You must also look at your preference in terms of plumage. Parrots come in multi -colours from the positively gaudy Macaws to the relatively sombre silver grey of the African grey parrot. Colour is of course a personal preference - is red better than green - or is grey preferred to blue.
heading home

Once you have made the decision as to what species of parrot you are going to buy and from which source either a breeder or a pet shop, you will be heading home with the new member of your family. And that is precisely what the parrot will turn into because very rapidly he will establish himself in the “pecking order” within the family structure. He will recognise the “leader or leaders” and will see himself as superior to other members of the family. It is far easier to establish a hand reared baby parrot, just weaned, into a family environment and expect him to adhere to basic house rules than it would be to achieve the same success with a bird say 2 years old who has had a previous owner. With the older bird it would depend entirely what the house rules were in his previous home and if you attempt to change what he regards as normality, problems will occur. Start as you mean to go on is the best advice with your baby parrot. For instance, when you first bring him home he is a novelty to the family, constantly out playing with everyone, hardly having the time to feed, let alone understand the disciplines and constraints which he will surely have to adhere to in the future.

It is better to take your pet parrot out of his cage 10 times per day for 15 minutes rather than once per day for an hour. He will find it much easier to cope with being put back in the cage if he knows that in a relatively short period of time he is going to be back out again because baby parrots love to be out, love to be involved in the family business. Other pets in the household, like dogs and cats should not present a problem with the parrot. Normally, the parrot will dominate any other pet in the household, even large dogs have a healthy respect for a parrot’s beak. A parrot’s favourite pastime is often to dive bomb other family pets.

wing clipping?

That leads onto the question as to whether the owner should clip the wings of a parrot thus ensuring that the parrot cannot fly around the house, or God forbid out the door and disappear. Your parrot will have no will to fly away but on occasions it does happen that parrots get out and are surprised by a sudden noise or movement and disappear over the roof tops. It can be quite difficult to retrieve your parrot as tame parrots can be picked up by anyone and there are unscrupulous people who will not hand the bird back. It is also easier to teach your parrot the disciplines of the house if he has clipped wings, but you will not have the enormous pleasure of a parrot flying from his cage onto your hand from some distance away. It is not advisable to clip your parrot’s wings until he has learned to fly. Some of the country’s leading Veterinary Surgeons have found that during the fledging period (the age when a bird naturally leaves the nest) a bird’s body is still developing and as the bird learns to fly it develops the muscles of its heart and wings and the ability to breathe as a normal flying bird. Birds prevented from going through the normal fledging stage are likely to have weaker hearts and wing muscles than properly flighted birds. This may remain the case for the rest of their lives and such birds may never be able to become fully fit and healthy. It is therefore a recommendation of PARROTCARE that wing clipping should become a thing of the past for all newly weaned birds. There are certain circumstances where it is necessary to clip a bird’s wings, if you find that the bird flies from its cage and attacks either a stranger or a member of the family then this cannot be allowed to continue and the only way to avoid this in the future is to restrict the bird by lack of flight. A relatively new innovation is the parrot harness. This is a commercially produced product and readily available. Harnesses come in several different sizes from the smallest Conures through to the largest Macaws. It is important to introduce your pet parrot to the harness at the earliest possible stage in its life. The preferred time is at the end of the hand rearing process when the bird will take naturally to wearing the harness. The basic reason for wearing the harness is to allow your pet parrot to accompany you on excursions into the garden or even farther outdoors. The principle is the same as a dog on a leash. The most important ingredient as far as the harness is concerned is the bird’s ability to accept it and also your parrot must be completely tame. If your parrot is not completely tame, forcing him to wear a harness will be extremely traumatic and could be positively dangerous if he panicked outdoors. The intention of a harness is not to secure your parrot to a perch in the garden and then leave him to his own devices. Your tame parrot should never be left outside unattended as this would be a recipe for disaster. Accidents could occur, or predators may cause serious injury to your bird without you being able to intervene.

To summarise on parrot harnesses it is always worth-while to check that any hand reared parrot you consider as a purchase should already be harness trained either by the breeder or pet shop.
cages

What is suitable accommodation for your new baby parrot? You could say the cage should be as large as possible within the constraints of the household finances and the size of the room in which the cage is to be kept.

The design of cages is endless from huge ornate cages to dome cages, round cages, square cages. It is worth mentioning here that round cages are not suitable for parrots and may cause psychological problems and lack of orientation. When buying a cage think also of the distance between the bars as some small birds in large cages may push their head through the bars and become trapped. It is preferable if the cage opens at the top to allow the bird to climb on to a high perch. This will allow your bird a feeling of confidence and security and also a launch pad to fly from or return. If the parrot you have purchased is a baby, you will find it beneficial to replace the perches that are normally sold in cages, which are a hard dowel and difficult for the claws to grip into square perches which have been serrated with a wood saw. Ensure that the perches initially are low in the cage and allow your pet to explore the cage before raising the perches up after a period of about a week. Easy access to food is essential at this stage and additional feed pots would be beneficial. Remember you must ask the breeder or the pet shop what the bird's diet has been previously and to commence with stick closely to their instructions. After a few days once your parrot has established himself in the cage, it is then time to become more adventurous in regard to his diet. It is also desirable to have a stand in another room in the house, for instance, if his cage is in the living room it is nice to have his stand in a conservatory or kitchen so that he can have his own space in both areas of the house. It will mean that he will naturally go to these places to feed, drink and rest.

what is a good diet?

The diet we feed at PARROTCARE consists of a good quality parrot mix with fruit and vegetables. The fruit consists of apples, oranges, bananas, kiwi fruit and any other fruits that may be in season. Vegetables consists of brussels sprouts, carrots, cabbage, peas, beans soaked for 24 hours and any other vegetable in season. Parrots also enjoy berries such as hawthorn and rosehip, they will also find time to chew the attached branches. The parrot food, fruit and vegetables should be mixed together so that the juices from the fruit cause the mixture to be moist. It will then be possible to add any supplements which will ensure the health of your parrot.

We find that the powder can be easily administered via addition to the mix. All parrots have a requirement for calcium. There are a now a number of premium brands produced in liquid form that can be added to the drinking water to the prescribed levels. In addition to the aforementioned mixture, pellet diets are now readily available. Pellets should be available throughout the day. Most parrots enjoy fruit and vegetables and seed mix in preference to pellets, but pellets contains the complete diet required for your parrot, although I believe a purely pellet diet would be extremely boring and would not provide sufficient mental stimulation on its own. The combination will provide a comprehensive diet on which he will thrive. We recently boarded an African Grey parrot while his owners were on holiday and he enjoyed nothing better than a small bowl of weak tea and half a slice of toast each morning. Obviously, this is something he had got used to and it would be extremely stressful if he had not been allowed to have this whilst in our home. Whilst this parrot enjoyed tea, it must be remembered that both tea and coffee contain caffeine which may have the effect of hyperactivity and cardiac problems in parrots if given in large quantities. Also creams, milks and butters in large quantities can cause digestive problems. do believe it is not unreasonable to give a very small bowl of weak tea and toast without wedges of butter. A highly toxic fruit which can cause rapid death in parrots is advocado. Often overlooked in a number of parrot journals but is worth stressing in regard to a hand reared bird who may be offered a piece by its owner. Rhubarb is excessively acidic and although often cooked can retain toxic properties. Aubergine or egg plant contains great levels of solonin causing digestive upsets in parrots and yet completely harmless to humans. Asparagus can also cause the same stomach upsets. Theobromin contained in chocolate can be toxic to your baby parrot and as we are all aware is almost addictive in humans. There are lots of good foods so stick to them and avoid those which would cause harm. Branches from trees such as lilac and laburnum must be avoided at all cost as they are poisonous.

Another useful food is tinned sweetcorn or corn on the cob. A particular favourite with our Eclectus, Amazons and Cockatoos. The occasional digestive biscuit is also relished.
When you first obtain your pet parrot it is so easy to spoil him by having the bird out of the cage more often than he is in. Initially over the first few days this is the wrong thing to do. I often use the expression “More hands off and less hands on” as a way to describe what should happen when you first acquire your bird. Give him a chance to settle down and learn about his new environment before exposing him to the rigours of the family and the home. Routine is good, birds and animals prefer a routine life rather than sudden or dramatic changes.

**identify your parrot**

At PARROTCARE we are often asked if a parrot should be close rung when you buy him. A close ring means that the parrot has to have the ring placed on his ankle at approx. 14 days old as a chick. This proves that the bird is aviary bired and cannot have been caught in the wild. I have heard of close rung parrots being caught on mesh or twigs or even trapped in the nest box by the ring and obviously if that happens a leg can be lost or even death by starvation can occur. This situation would rarely occur for a parrot kept purely as a pet in the home.

Parrot society close rings indicate the year the bird is bred and often the initials of the breeder and can be useful in time to come, particularly if a bird is stolen. If the ring has not been removed by the thieves, it will be possible to identify the bird as yours. Another more sophisticated method of identifying a particular bird is by micro chip concealed under the skin. Your local vet can easily carry out this minor operation for minimal costs. Identification guns are held at numerous police stations and RSPCA offices and therefore the specific number on the chip can be read out on a screen once the gun is pointed at the parrot. If you have to refer a theft of your parrot to the Police, the first question is “Can you positively identify the stolen bird?”. Police will not follow up your complaint if the parrot cannot be identified to the satisfaction of a court of law. It is also impossible to solve disputes over ownership if the bird is traced. Parrot thefts are on the increase and bird losses due to escapes are escalating. Parrots wings moult out and the bird flies away catching the owner by surprise. The National Theft Register maintains statistics for parrot loss and theft. During 1999, 70 incidents were reported with birds valued at £74,000. For £15 you can microchip your bird, it can pay dividends in the future.

Many owners find it necessary to insure their pet parrot. At PARROTCARE we feel this is essential and relatively inexpensive compared with the level of vet bills that may accumulate should your bird be ill. Insurance also covers theft. It is a personal point of view as to whether this is necessary but it will lessen the financial blow if the misfortune of illness or theft were to occur.

**illness**

Regarding ailments, with a hand reared parrot these should be extremely rare but if you feel that your pet looks a little under the weather or is behaving differently to the way he normally behaves, for instance, sitting with his head under his wing with two feet on the perch, with droppings dissimilar from normal i.e. possibly watery or dark, then it is a precautionary measure to consult your local vet. It is better to react early to ailments as once they set in it is very difficult to cure. Prevention is always better than cure and good management techniques are important in terms of diet and cleanliness. Always use the maxim that if it is not good enough for you it is not good enough for your parrot. By using this rule of thumb, you will find that many problems will be avoided before they happen.

Night fright is something that occurs normally with birds that are not fully tamed but it is nevertheless a worthwhile precaution to have some form of dimmer light in the room in which you are keeping the parrot overnight, as this will ensure that any taps on the window, wind outside, or anyone entering the room during the night will not frighten the parrot causing him to panic and injure himself.

Toys for the cage should be considered carefully based on the space available. If the cage is quite large it may be possible to hang a rope on which he can play. Ropes are best made of natural fibre such as hemp or sisal. Many hours will be spent chewing, swinging or hanging on these ropes. Perches which maintain toe nails at an acceptable sharpness are available at PARROTCARE. They come in various diameters depending on size of parrot and vary in terms of diameter from one end to the other causing a steady wear on the toe nails. This saves nail clipping which can be stressful for certain birds.  

**stop boredom**

Boredom is something that must be guarded against at all cost. The repercussions of a bored parrot can be feather plucking. Feather plucking is not only a major vice that can be stressful for the bird but also the owner as the parrot can become denuded and feather plucking on the breast is one of the major problems that can occur with boredom. Once this habit has set in, it is very difficult to break and therefore prevention again is better than cure, so plenty to do in terms of toys, ropes, fresh cut branches primarily from fruit trees should be continuously given to the bird for entertainment. It is better to overdo this aspect of keeping your bird than underdoing it. It goes without saying that cleanliness is of the utmost importance. Food, water, cages and perches should be changed or cleaned daily. Thorough disinfection of the cage on a regular weekly basis would be advisable. As humans we are
lucky to be custodians of some of the most beautiful creatures in the world it is therefore incumbent on us to ensure that they remain mentally and physically healthy throughout their long lives.

training your parrot

One often hears patience is a virtue. When it comes to training parrots, patience is a necessity. Repetition without boredom would be the best way to describe training. Remember we are talking about training and not taming. Your hand reared parrot will already be extremely tame if you have taken the precautions for buying outlined in the previous section. One of our friends owns an African Grey parrot called Angus who is approx. 2 years old. In his vocabulary he now boasts 58 separate phrases. A phrase for instance would be the first two or three lines of a nursery line. This gives you some example of what can be achieved with patience and effort. This bird is obviously exceptional and a credit to his owner. He has spent many long hours with his bird, patiently encouraging him to talk because initially for the first 12 months of the parrot's life he spoke very little. It is important to maintain contact with your parrot even when you leave the room. It is possible to do this by whistling tunes which builds up a rapport with a solitary bird. Amazingly, if you teach your parrot the entire whistled tune it will be possible for you to start with the first couple of lines and he will often finish it off. Now due to my friend's endeavours he is reaping the benefits of an extremely entertaining and amusing pet.

Obedience training is absolutely essential as you can not have a parrot running amok with friends and relatives who come to visit your home. An example of a problem parrot, when I was invited to view a friend's recent acquisition which turned out to be a Blue Fronted Amazon. A male probably aged about 7 or 8 years old in full adult plumage. I noticed the parrot was some 20 feet to my right perched on the shoulders of my friend's daughter. The parrot was displaying wildly with head feathers erect and wings out to the side. Also a significant amount of screeching was coming from the bird. I was there to look at the condition of an African Grey parrot which was to my left on a table. As I turned to inspect the African Grey, it was obvious I was ignoring to my peril the Blue Fronted Amazon. Two minutes later I felt something tap on my shoulder. It was the Blue Fronted Amazon who then decided to sink its beak into my face. Fortunately no long term damage was done but if the victim had been a young child or a girl then obviously damaging inflicted to the face would be severe and significant. This is a classic example of a bird who is completely out of control and a danger to the public. The only option in that case is either to find your parrot a companion to breed with in an outside aviary or to clip its wings, which would ensure that he could not repeat the offence. A badly trained parrot can be a nuisance rather than an asset.

toilet training

One of the first things you need to teach him to do is to use his cage as the toilet and not the remainder of the house. This is much simpler to achieve than would first appear, particularly if your parrot is as described in the previous section as hand reared and just weaned. When parrots decide to deposit their droppings they tend to squat down and it becomes very obvious well in advance that your bird is about to do what nature intended. As soon as you notice you should immediately take your bird to his cage. Once he has deposited a dropping, take him out immediately and tell him what a good boy or girl he or she is. When this has been repeated on a number of occasions your parrot will actually fly back to his cage to do his droppings. He may indicate in some other way that he wishes to use the toilet. It is up to you to observe what this is and take the appropriate steps. A little effort on this particular area will save a lot of hard work cleaning up parrot droppings around the home.

intelligence

A lazy man's way of teaching his parrot to talk is by using tapes. These will aid his talking ability and can be played music on the radio or TV. Even squeaky doors can be mimicked very convincingly, where it is impossible to know whether your parrot is mimicking the phone ringing or the telephone is ringing genuinely because the bird's interpretation of those sounds are so perfect. A parrot like a naughty child often picks up the very phrase or word that you did not intend him to. So it is worth thinking about your own expletives before repeating them in front of your parrot.

Parrots as individuals vary in intelligence precisely the same as humans. Some parrots are extremely intelligent notably the one mentioned earlier having 58 separate phrases. Others unfortunately never learn to talk but can still be as endearing and entertaining as some of the best talkers. Generally speaking African greys and Amazons provide the best mimics. Macaws and Cockatoos are poorer talkers but have extremely extrovert personalities. All parrots can be taught the basics which will enable them to fit into the household routines. For a pet it is better to have a single parrot in the home rather than two or three. Once parrots get together they tend to either bicker continuously with each other or bond. Neither of these actions is beneficial.
in terms of the relationship between the owner and the parrot. A disabled parrot can often make an excellent pet and tend to be more gentle than able bodied birds. It is important to draw distinction between a bird that is unwell and ill as opposed to a bird that is disabled but otherwise has no illnesses. For instance a bird may have a problem with a claw, its leg or possibly a wing which does not stop him from becoming a fascinating and interesting pet so don’t reject out of hand a bird that may be cheaper initially to buy but can be just as gratifying as a pet in the future.

Whenever feeding your parrot this should take place in either the cage or on the stand. Don’t feed your parrot anywhere else in the house otherwise this will become a habit, which although amusing initially will become irritating particularly if the bird attempts to take food out of your mouth. So always make a point of feeding him tit bits in those two restricted areas. You will also find it enables him to return to his cage easily. It is generally accepted that a parrot likes to sit on a shoulder. Although I have never had a problem with any of my tame parrots, I am aware of the irritation this can cause if the owner is wearing ear-rings or has long hair or anyone who wears glasses. These items can become quite irresistible to the parrot and most annoying to the owner.

Therefore if you start the way you mean to go on it is essential to have your parrot used to sitting on an arm or your hand and whilst at rest on your lap. The owner is then in control of the pet and not the other way around. Training should be in steps, first of all make the decision as to what you want to train your parrot and the order in which you wish to do it. Once you start to teach him one particular thing stick with that until he has learnt to do it. The most confusing situation occurs if you start with one area and then abandon that half way through and start to do something else. The inevitable result is that at the end of the day nothing is ever learnt. So pick your words and phrases which mean the most and stick to these until he has mastered them and then move on to some-
Feather plucking is a behavioural problem, which once started is very difficult to stop. Not only is it distressing for the bird who looks like a plucked chicken, but it is also distressing for the proud owner who feels as if he has failed in some way and also the appearance of such a bird is not a pleasant sight. Once again prevention is better than cure. Think ahead. Early on it’s possible to detect a “feather plucker”. Simply a few feathers missing or in African greys a few chest feathers that are just starting to turn into a grey down. This problem more often occurs in the upper chest area initially. At this point it is not too late, but you must take immediate action by providing lots of entertainment for your parrot. A degree of overkill is required. Use all kinds of toys available and also natural twigs such as apple, pear and freshly sprouted willow, which is soft and juicy. You should always remove leaves from willow trees as they are slightly toxic in large quantities. Move his cage into a busier part of the house where he can be entertained by the family. Even if it is just by watching them move around and talking. It may be possible to bring him out at meal times because a parrot which eats what you eat and socialises with the family is less likely to become a feather plucker, as this is normally the trait of a lonely bird.

Illness in a hand reared baby parrot is quite rare, but action must be taken immediately if you feel that your bird is not 100%. This could be indicated by simply not adhering to his normal routines, i.e. if you feed him a certain item in the morning, say toast, if he fails to eat there may be a problem. Droppings are also a large indicator and I believe that an experienced parrot keeper can tell precisely the condition of his birds without even seeing the birds providing he can look at the droppings on a daily basis. If your bird is on a dry diet then obviously the droppings will be more solid green and white. If birds have a fruit diet this will be watery and not as solid as a bird on dry seed. If you feed your bird pretty much the same routine on a daily basis then the droppings will be easily identified as different to the previous day and therefore should causing some alarm. Very watery and dark droppings are a sign of ill health. It is always better to be trigger happy in terms of visiting your vet rather than leaving it too late. Birds deteriorate rapidly once they are ill, if you cannot maintain a level of fluid intake and food consumption. Finding a good avian vet is extremely difficult and before any problems loom on the horizon, it is worth checking out vets and establishing their track record in regard to parrots. Ensure you have available the appropriate pet carrier to take your bird if he requires any veterinary care. Intravenously is the only way to treat a pet parrot. They are so aware of the slightest changes in their diet, i.e. the water tastes “funny” and he will not drink it or food which normally has the taste of fruit changes slightly. This can be offputting for a bird, particularly if his appetite is poor. Fortunately, with good management visits to the vet should be few and far between.

Play time

The number of hand reared baby parrots has increased tremendously over the last 10 years and before that few were hand reared successfully. Identifying behavioural problems in parrots is a relatively recent science and therefore solving problems is in its infancy. Humans have been keeping parrots now for thousands of years but they were wild caught birds tamed by man. Imported wild caught parrots have been taught skills by their parents and can adjust to change, although not as
tame as hand reared birds. Hand reared domestic babies depend on their owners to socialise them. In a large establishment, hand rearing on a production line little time is given to this aspect of parrot psychology. They have been allowed to develop basically on their own. In smaller breeding programmes, humans spend time with babies and therefore develop and adjust personalities. Play time at PARROTCARE is a very important time for the babies when they learn to integrate with other parrots, cats, dogs and humans, and often small children and visitors. They learn that other creatures exist and they must modify their behaviour to integrate. Humans consider themselves to be a “higher” form of life, but I have my doubts. Humans certainly do not show a lot of intelligence and common sense when dealing with baby parrots. Amazingly humans seem to understand that if you buy a kitten or a puppy it is going to behave differently from a cat or a dog and requires to be taught social skills so it becomes a good and happy pet and also integrates into the family environment. For some obscure reason we are not as good at understanding that baby parrots need to be taught the same skills. Suddenly we have these tame, cuddly and beautiful little parrot babies who appear to think that humans are wonderful. When the parrot is brought home from the breeder or pet shop, the bird is at a stage of complete tameness and for some unknown reason we assume they are going to stay that way forever. Most people think they have nothing else to do but feed a balanced diet, get an avian vet to look after the bird’s health and love them. It doesn’t take long to realise that they are in for a rude awakening. If you have browsed the local newspapers or magazines you will have noticed that under the Pets for Sale column most of the parrots are aged between 6 months and 21/2 years. Unfortunately there is a correlation between a parrot being sold at this age and the time when behavioural problems can occur, if training has not been thorough in the earlier stages. When they become adolescent, they take on a whole new personality and those persons selling their bird are probably unknowingly the cause of the majority of the parrots problems. Although well meaning, they have been uneducated in parrot behavioural therapy and it is ultimately the parrot who pays for his mistakes. The “For Sale” sign goes up and they are got rid of because they are not good pets.

A clean well feathered parrot is often a happy parrot. Remember to spray your bird with a fine warm spray at least 2 or 3 times a week. Although this may not be his favourite past-time initially, you will find it won’t take long for him to look forward to these occasions. Often spreading his wings to channel the water down his body feathers and this is accompanied often with loud shrieks of delight. Remember a bird’s likes and dislikes of certain food items may be a passing phase, so don’t assume that if he does not eat carrot or broccoli or any other type of vegetables that in the future he will not eat them. Persevere by putting the largest range of fruit and vegetables in his mix every day regardless of whether it is consumed. Remember by theory of overkill do too much rather than too little. Human parents persevere when they know that a certain food item is good for their child rather than simply giving up. This probably occurs with adult parrots and their babies in the wild. It is always worth persevering, don’t think that your parrot knows more about diet than you do because he doesn’t. Advice often received by so-called experts in parrot behavioural psychology, when confronted with the stories of a misbehaving parrot, give the answer “Get him a mate”. This seems to be the cure all when it comes to a parrot that is screaming, fighting, feather plucking, etc. No meaningful suggestion is made to rectify the problem. Dogmatic advice is often handed out by so-called experts as the truth, when more often than not they are simply repeating “Parrot fashion” old ideas. African greys are often sold on at 1 year to 18 months old because they have simply committed the crime of not talking. Many African greys never learn to mimic and if the only reason for their purchase was to hear them speak then maybe the buyer should have bought a radio instead. If the quality of talking is the most important factors in owning a parrot, then it is possible to buy a parrot that already talks.

Over the years we have hand reared many of the larger parrots, Macaws, Cockatoos, Greys and Amazons but some of the most delightful pets are miniature parrots from the love bird family. In our earlier days, we hand reared a number of love birds, Fishers, Masked and Peach faced being the three species. Many have gone on to make fantastic pets with tremendous personalities. Another parrot or miniature cockatoo is the cockatiel. Again many have been raised at PARROTCARE and we still have a number of friends twenty years later who regard their white cockatiel as the most wonderful pet and companion bird they could possibly have. Love birds or cockatiels are not expensive even as hand reared birds and should not be overlooked in regard to companion birds, although they may not make the best mimics. Lories and lorakeets have been a tremendous favourite of ours over the past 30 years and we have hand reared many Yellow Back lories and Black cap lories (lory lory) and although they do have quiet voices when they mimic, close up you can identify quite clearly...
the words being spoken. One huge disadvantage in regard to lories are their liquid droppings. Over many years we developed a dry lory mix, which does improve the droppings but not to the extent of a seed eating parrot. We think it would be no exaggeration to say that the lory family are probably the most colourful birds in the world.

Ignore the dilated flashing pupils of an Amazon at your peril, fanned tail feathers and neck and head feathers erect can mean only one thing this is not the time to give him a cuddle, you are more often than not going to receive an extremely unpleasant bite. So to understand your parrot’s moods can be beneficial to both you and the bird. Many people are unaware of these signals and pay the consequence. Subsequently the Amazon is out the door and up for sale, mainly due to the fact that the owner could not read the signals. Our pet cockatoo Molly has moments of utter rage when she will fly around the room screeching and when she eventually does settle on her stand the wing feathers are cupped above her head this is the moment for my wife to retreat or I have to put Molly back in the cage. Again if you read the signs there are no problems. Within minutes Molly will return to normality and once again become an amusing affectionate pet. Remember when you buy a baby parrot you must accept him for what he is and not what you think he should be.

As already mentioned there is a huge diversity of parrots so let’s consider some of the more popular species.

**african greys**

Although sombre coloured they are highly regarded as talkers. Not only are they able to mimic well but also to sound like their owner’s voice in tone and accent. They are superb and comical companion particularly when purchased as hand reared birds. As mentioned previously they can learn many phrases and nursery rhymes. They are not particularly noisy and tend to make characteristic whistling which is more amusing than annoying.

**eclectus**

A very unusual parrot in as much as they are demorphic with the cock bird being emerald green and hens an amalgam of reds and purples. When Eclectus were first discovered in the wild they were thought to be two different species due to the extremes of the male and female plumage. They have quite loud voices which is perhaps a drawback but on the plus side they become extremely tame and amusing pets, they are readily available. Their ability to mimic is good, and even aviary birds at PARROTCARE are constantly chattering. The feathering in both male and female has the texture of very fine hair and is rather attractive. Both male and female reach a length of approximately 14 inches.

**cockatoos**

Most cockatoos are bred regularly and in reasonable numbers, therefore they are readily available. Varying in size from the small Goffins through to the large Moluccans. Although having an ability to talk they are not up to the standards of African Greys. They need an enormous amount of attention and would be a tremendous companion for a house-bound person. Consideration should be given to sensitive neighbours as cockatoos are capable of serious bouts of screeching. They can be the clowns of the parrot world but require an extraordinary amount of human attention.
amazons

They are predominantly green and come in many sub-species. The most popularly bred Amazons are Blue Fronted, Double Yellow Headed, Yellow Crowns and Red Lored. Amazons vary in length from 12 to 15 inches. They are very playful and make exceptional talkers.

macaws

Macaws vary in length from the tiny Noble through to the magnificent Hyacinth at 40 inches long. They are quite popular pets and the three species most available are Green Wings, Scarlet Macaws and Blue and Golds. They are probably the most colourful of all parrots and can be the most expensive. Hand reared Macaws, although having powerful beaks, very rarely use them to inflict injuries. Macaws can be quite rough in their play, but once used to this feature make extremely affectionate and cuddly pets.

smaller parrots

Jardines, Pionus and Senegals fall into this group. They are usually slightly less expensive than the parrots previously mentioned. Many have been bred at PARROTCARE and make fascinating companion birds. The choice is yours. Amazons, Cockatoos, Macaws, African Greys, Eclectus and other birds mentioned in this section. At PARROTCARE, we are available to discuss the species most suitable for you.

index of do’s and don’ts

A list of Do’s when purchasing a Pet Parrot

1. Decide on the species at an early stage based on sound knowledge of the Parrot’s noise factor, size, ability to mimic, colour etc.
2. Do spend time with your intended purchase to assess compatibility with you and the family.
3. Do ask for a guarantee of the parrot’s age. Black eyes are a sure sign of a baby.
4. Do ask how the parrot has been raised, i.e. spoon fed or syringe. Spoon fed babies are the best.
5. Do ask what he is eating and stick to this for the first few weeks, then become more adventurous.

A list of Do’s when you have made your choice and on your way home

1. Do ensure you have an appropriate pet carrier.
2. Do have the cage prepared before your parrot arrives home.
3. Do put food within easy reach, i.e. at the end of the perches. Keep perches low to start with for a baby parrot, move them higher in the cage after two weeks.
4. Do take him out of the cage for short periods frequently, but allow lots of time for feeding in his cage.
5. Do ensure that clear expanses of glass are covered by blinds or curtains until he is aware that he cannot fly through the windows, if he flies at speed in to such as patio doors, a broken neck may be the consequence.
6. Do ensure he is entertained by supplying fresh branches from non-poisonous trees and plenty of the appropriate ropes and toys commensurate with the size of the cage.
7. Do leave a radio on in the house if you are leaving your parrot alone for any period of time.
8. Do think carefully about wing clipping.
9. Do be aware of the toxic properties of certain foods mentioned in the main text. Fumes from teflon pans can kill a parrot.
10. Do microchip your parrot for identification purposes in case of theft or loss.
11. Do spend as much time as possible to train your parrot, this will keep him occupied and give you lots of pleasure from the results.
12. If you have problems and want them resolved, Do contact PARROTCARE
The list of DON'TS when purchasing a parrot

1. Don't pick a species on impulse - try and stick to your original plan.
2. Don't be afraid to ask a list of prepared questions about your prospective purchase, e.g. how old is he, who was the breeder, how long has he been in the Pet shop care, what food does he like?
3. Don't purchase a Macaw or a Cockatoo if you live in an apartment, the voice is too loud.
4. Don't buy an older bird unless you are prepared to accept he may have some bad habits.
5. Don't buy a parrot that has signs of illness, fluffed up feathers, faeces on the tail, lack of alertness and instability in movement. Parrots are good at covering up their problems.

A list of Don'ts when you have made your choice and on your way home.

1. Don't put your parrot in direct sunlight when travelling in the car, this will cause distress and possible death on a long journey.
2. Don't keep him out of his cage for long periods, let him feed regularly and discover his new cage.
3. Don't allow him access to your home without supervision. Electric cables, stoves, chemicals all present a hazard to your parrot who will be naturally inquisitive.
4. Don't cause your bird discomfort through physical abuse. He will remember and you will never regain his confidence.
5. Don't leave your parrot in an unsecured room when you leave the home and lock him in his cage. This may slow down the thieves.
6. Don't delay taking him to a veterinary surgeon if he is off colour. Any changes in his normal habits may be a sign of illness.
7. Don't be restrictive about the variety of foods offered, persevere with as wide a range as possible.
8. Don't spoil your baby parrot. Start the way you mean to go on, changes in daily routines are upsetting for him.
John Wragg - Aviculturist
Operates and manages the family business