



## Bird Care Guide: Lovebirds

Lovebirds are intelligent and affectionate birds. They are okay for beginners, but require a bit more work than other species. They are best kept as pairs, since they require so much attention and affection.

The lovebird is a small stocky parrot between 5.1-6.7 inches (13-17 cm). They have a large bill and a tail that is either round or square. Their average life span is between 10-12 years with some living even longer. The oldest recorded lovebird lived 17 years.

### Care and feeding:

Most lovebirds love a bath either in a flat earthenware dish or by spraying them with a light mist of lukewarm water. If you use a bathing dish, you will see the birds perch on the edge and dip their heads and upper bodies in the water and beating their wings. They prefer this kind of bath to getting into the water.

Lovebirds generally maintain their nails and beaks on their own through climbing and chewing. However, consult your vet about nail trimming.

In the wild, lovebirds feed on seeds, berries, fruits, grains, grasses, leaf buds, and agricultural crops of corn, maize and figs. A lovebird's diet will consist of 1 1/2 to 2 ounces (45-60 grams) of feed daily for a single bird. A diet consisting of a small parrot mix along with a variety of supplements and vitamins is generally regarded as suitable; also a formulated diet along with greens, fruits, and vegetable supplements but without additional vitamins is also regarded as suitable, and is a more current trend.

Supplements include fresh vegetables, greens, and tree branches for the bark, some fruits, and millet spray. Some of the fruit supplements include berries, apples, grapes, pears, bananas, and kiwi. Some of the greens and vegetable supplements include spinach, endive, watercress, chickweed, radish, parsley, dandelions, carrot tops, and corn on the cob, peas, endive, field lettuce, and various garden herbs. Additional proteins can be offered such as nuts, try some unshelled peanuts as well as hazelnuts, walnuts, Brazil nuts, and chestnuts. A cuttlebone, or gravel and oyster shell in a separate dish should be offered to provide calcium. Do not feed avocado, as it can be toxic to birds!

Their food and water dishes should be earthenware or porcelain as lovebirds will chew the plastic dishes and this can be lethal. Lovebirds drink a lot of water, so be sure to change their water dishes frequently through the day.

### Housing:

Lovebirds are very active birds, so a cage best suited to adequately house them must provide a lot of space. Remember, they are extremely active birds. A minimum of 32" x 20" x 20" (81 x 50 x 50 cm) per pair of birds is recommended with about four perches, feed and water dishes and an area for a bath. Place the cage on a stand or hang it from a wall bracket at eye level or at about 6' off of the floor. Be sure the spot you pick has good light and is well ventilated, though free from drafts. It should be away from doors and windows where direct exposure to sunlight can make it overly warm, but placed close to at least one wall to enhance a feeling of security.

Average daytime temperatures can range from 60oF to 70oF with nighttime temperatures down to 40oF. As a rule of thumb, ambient temperature comfortable for you should be adequate for your bird. Whether your bird is sick or healthy, be sure to watch for tell-tale signs of temperature-related discomfort: cold birds will often remain fluffed up for extended periods of time, and overheated birds will hold their wings away from their bodies and pant. The cage should be covered at night to prevent drafts and disturbances. Lovebirds like special resting places. Nest boxes placed up high, all at the same level and all of the same type work well and help prevent fights. A nest box for a lovebird is 8" x 8" x 8" (20 x 20 x 20 cm) or 10" x 6" x 6" (25 x 15 x 15 cm). Be sure to check for eggs and remove them at once to prevent overpopulation. Remember, there are already so many homeless animals out there!

### Maintenance:

The basic cage care includes daily cleaning/changing of the food and water dishes. Plain newspaper can be used to line the bottom of the cage and should be changed daily to prevent diseases and illness. Weekly you should clean and disinfect the cage with warm soapy water or an avian cage disinfectant. Wash and completely dry the perches and toys whenever they become soiled.

### Social Behaviors:

Lovebirds are very social birds. Generally, it is thought that it is essential for their good health and happiness that they are kept in pairs, not single. If you have a single lovebird, you must provide the necessary social interaction that it is missing from another bird. These birds develop fierce loyalties to their keeper or their mate.

Aside from their social nature toward you or their mate, they can be extremely aggressive towards other birds. You must be certain that all pairs get along together, and that they are true "pairs": not mismatched. Do not mix species of lovebirds as they will fight. Bonded pairs constantly groom each other and will feed each other from the crop during breeding season and all year round.

These little birds will chatter all day long. They will hide in their nest box if they are startled by a sudden noise, if they spot a potential predator, or if it gets cold and windy.

### Handling/Training:

To have a tame lovebird, choose a young single bird. Young birds have an amazing ability to learn tricks and be affectionate, whereas adults are very difficult to tame and generally won't learn a lot of tricks or imitate behaviors. Hand-raised youngsters are easiest as they are already quite socialized and tame, but are not always available.

Taming involves acceptance and trust between you and your bird. It means spending a lot of time with your bird daily. Start with talking softly and making slow movements. Once your bird is comfortable with you, then you can begin hand taming. Use a dowel and push it gently against the bird's chest while offering a treat to coax it up onto the dowel. This may take many tries. Once it is comfortable with stepping up onto a dowel, substitute your finger for the dowel.

Lovebirds are not considered one of the best talkers, and only some may learn a few words.

### Activities:

Lovebirds awaken with the dawn, get a drink, eat, and then immediately begin to chirp. They will generally quiet down by mid-morning and resume their chirping in the late afternoon.

These birds are very active, flying and climbing about, gnawing on wood or chew toys, and grooming themselves all day. They love toys of all kinds such as seed bells, swings, ladders, mirrors, shiny objects, and wooden gnaws. They are natural paper shredders, so be sure to provide them with dye-free paper to play with. A lovebird outside of its cage will not stay on its playpen since they like to explore. Be sure that any room that your lovebird is playing in is free from open doors or windows, water containers such as drinking glasses and toilets/sinks and that they are never near a hot stove. You should always monitor your bird when it is out of its cage!

### Problems:

Signs of illness to be aware of are if a bird seems withdrawn, feathers are ruffled and the plumage is dull, sits with its eyes closed for long periods of time, eyes are watery or dull, runny nose, sleeps a lot, loses interest in its environment and stays at its feed dish. The droppings may change color and be loose (if healthy they are grayish white and not too thin). Also a lot of tail bobbing, dropping off its perch, odd breathing, sneezing, and excessive scratching.

Some of the common illnesses your lovebirds could contract are injuries from fighting, Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease, Polyoma Virus Infection, yeast infections (Candidiasis), Avian Pox Virus Infection, bacterial infections, internal parasites, mites, ticks, egg binding, intestinal influenza, coccidiosis, respiratory ailments, and diarrhea. An ailing bird should be taken to an avian veterinarian for diagnosis and treatment immediately!

### Sources:

Jack Hanna's Ultimate Guide to Pets, 1996  
[www.Animal-World.com](http://www.Animal-World.com)