

AFRICAN GREYS

Two species of African grey parrots, native to Africa, are commonly found in captivity: the Congo (Psittacus erithacus) with a bright red tail and the timneh (Psittacus erithacus timneh) with duller coloration. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. Outside of the United States, importation and smuggling remain major conservation issues and continue to result in disease and inhumane treatment. High quality companion birds are available from reputable breeders, rescue organizations and avian sanctuaries. Research has shown that African greys are capable of actual reasoning and verbal communication (beyond just mimicking). There is speculation that an imprinted male may have difficulty relating to a female bird. The current aviculture trend is to allow chicks to remain with the parents for the first few weeks of life and then be removed for hand-feeding until weaning. This parental influence may also help reduce the incidence of behavioral problems later in life.

Common Disorders of African Grey Parrots

- Feather destructive behavior, such as feather picking
- Respiratory diseases
- Oral abscesses
- Malnutrition, including hypocalcemia syndrome
- Choanal atresia
- Cardiovascular disease (enlarged heart, atherosclerosis)
- Proventricular dilatation disease (PDD)
- Chlamydiosis
- Reproductive disorders (egg binding, cloacal protrusion)
- Psittacine beak and feather disease (Pbfd)
- Other bacterial, viral and fungal infections

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery. For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting www.AAV.org and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting www.ABVP.com/diplomate.

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What to Expect from Your African Grey Parrot

African grey parrots are extremely intelligent and alert; some may be considered high-strung.

Selective breeding for calmness is being initiated by some aviculturists. Like many parrots, these birds may form an inappropriate pair bond with individual family members, which may lead to a variety of undesirable behaviors, including aggression towards others. This may become exacerbated during the breeding season. They are believed to be emotionally sensitive and may be prone to remember negative experiences and associate these

with certain people and objects. African grey parrots have the greatest potential among common pet bird species for a range of vocalizations and an increasing vocabulary throughout their lives. This mimicking ability can include sounds like dripping water, flushing toilets, squeaky doors, coughs or sneezes and answering machines.

Is Your African Grey a Male or a Female?

In most African greys, it is difficult to distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, endoscopy or laboratory methods must be used for sex determination in pet birds and those in breeding facilities. African greys prefer to choose their own mates and bond for life. Once initiated, African greys are prolific breeders, and the offspring are easy to hand feed.

What Should You Feed Your Grey?

For a long, healthy life, African greys should be fed a high quality, toxin-free formulated diet. Supplementation may include small amounts of chopped organic vegetables and fruit and whole grains.

What Do African Greys Do All Day?

Because of their high intelligence, African greys require a stimulating and enriching environment. Toys should be rotated frequently and include puzzle-types and toys designed to be shredded or destroyed. Toys should be

“bird safe” and free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small easily consumed components. Most parrots can be taught to enjoy foraging, where food and treats are hidden in puzzle toys or other objects, such as paper cups or paper. This is an excellent way to prevent boredom. Socialized African greys benefit from inclusion in a busy family’s activities in a variety of situations.

Are African Greys Tame?

Young, hand-tamed African greys adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well-adjusted to these events. Non-socialized adult birds are less inclined to accept environmental changes.

How to Identify Your Bird

African Greys occasionally escape outdoors, and permanent identification may help to return birds to their owners. One method used to permanently identify your bird is implantation of a microchip, as is performed in other pets. Some birds already have leg bands for identification. Although closed leg bands seldom cause injury, some owners prefer to have them removed.

Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds allowed free flight benefit from exercise and mental stimulation; however, free flying birds may be injured by hitting windows or ceiling fans or hurt by encountering toxic materials. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Clipping must be done carefully and tailored to each individual to prevent flight and injuries from falling.

How to Keep Your African Grey Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your Grey to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then once annually for examinations.
 - ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction and foraging opportunities.
 - ✓ Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet with fresh chopped fruits, vegetables and whole grains according to the manufacturer’s recommendation.
 - ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently. Greys can be trained to use a water bottle.
 - ✓ Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath, or gently spraying with clean warm water daily if possible.
 - ✓ Avoid spraying house with insecticides.
- Housing for your African grey parrot should:
- ✓ be as large as possible (minimum: 2’ x 3’ x 2’ [60 x 90 x 60 cm]).

- ✓ be clean, secure and safe.
- ✓ be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain toxic metals, such as zinc).
- ✓ contain variable-sized perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free wood or branches.
- ✓ have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- ✓ have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- ✓ offer opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight and exercise.

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy African Grey



- Dry, open nares
- Clear, bright eyes (no discharge)
- Smooth beak
- Alert, erect posture
- Good body condition
- Smooth, bright feathers that are not ragged, discolored or broken
- Even pattern of skin on the feet, nails of appropriate length

African greys are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

✗ ceiling fans

✗ stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets

✗ fumes from overheated non-stick cookware

✗ sandpaper-covered perches

✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke

✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol

✗ toxic houseplants

✗ pesticides or chemical cleaners

✗ easily dismantled toys

✗ dogs, cats and unsupervised children

✗ sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)

✗ plug-in air fresheners

✗ scented candles