

# AMAZONS

Depending on classification, there are approximately 27 species of Amazon parrots (some with subspecies). Their native habitat ranges from South America to Northern Mexico. Nine species of Amazons are from islands in the Caribbean. Deforestation of their natural habitat and capture for the pet trade have greatly reduced the numbers of these once common species. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered. Efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States and Europe through CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). High quality companion birds are available from reputable breeders, rescue organizations and avian sanctuaries. Amazons have extroverted personalities and entertaining antics with profound talking abilities, but these birds don't always enjoy being touched or "cuddled." Some may be considered hyperactive or short-tempered. They are not recommended for first time bird owners and generally do not like to be around children.

## Common Disorders of Amazon Parrots

- Malnutrition
- Behavioral issues (screaming, aggression/biting)
- Obesity
- Feather destructive behavior
- Vitamin A deficiency, resulting in discolored feathers, sores and/or redness on the bottom of the feet, blunted choanal papillae, sinusitis
- Respiratory disease (sneezing, discharge from nares, labored breathing, swollen eyes)
- Cardiovascular disease (enlarged heart, atherosclerosis)
- Liver disease
- Amazon foot necrosis
- Tumors (lipomas, papillomas)
- Reproductive disorders (egg binding, cloacal protrusion)

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](http://www.AAV.org) and click on "Find a Vet" or contact the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners by visiting [www.ABVP.com/diplomate](http://www.ABVP.com/diplomate).

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Companion Bird Care  
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## What to Expect from Your Amazon Parrot

Amazon parrots are known for their strong personalities, high intelligence and excellent ability to mimic. Double yellow-headed, yellow-naped and blue-fronted Amazons seem to have the most potential for talking, laughing, whistling, coughing or even imitating a baby's cry. The ability to "talk" or imitate sounds is an individual characteristic even within a certain species. This ability seems to be developed best at an early age, probably before the bird is 2 years old. Males may be easier to teach than females. As with other

parrots, Amazons tend to be the most vocal in the early morning and late afternoon. They may also express vocalization in a negative way by screaming. Although mealy, white-fronted and orange-winged Amazons are not as lively and talkative as other species, they are usually regarded as more gentle and affectionate. Hand-raised blue-fronted Amazons generally make good companions.

### Vital Statistics

Adult body length: 10-18 inches  
(25-46 cm)

Adult body weight: 200-700 g

Age of sexual maturity: 4-6 years

Maximum life span: 80 years

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### Is Your Amazon a Male or a Female?

In most Amazon species it is difficult to reliably distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, laboratory methods using DNA technology may be used for sex determination. Amazons are somewhat of a challenge to breed but the offspring are easy to hand feed.

### What Should You Feed Your Amazon?

For a long, healthy life, Amazons should be fed a high quality, toxin-free formulated diet. Supplementation may include chopped organic vegetables and fruit and whole grains. Amazons are prone to obesity; therefore, food items that are high in fat must be avoided.

### What Do Amazons Do All Day?

Amazons are more sedentary than other birds, so some effort must be made to keep them active. An exceptionally large enclosure would encourage them to move around more as would foraging stations, complex puzzle toys and other methods of preventing boredom. Because Amazons love to

chew, toys must be free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small, easily consumed components. Providing chew toys or fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees may prevent some Amazons from destroying their perches as quickly. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations on locally available, safe trees.

### Are Amazons Tame?

Young, hand-fed Amazons adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (e.g., car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household) so they are well adjusted to these events. Adult Amazons tend to become bonded to certain individuals and exhibit territoriality and aggression toward others. They learn quickly to use lunging or biting to relay their negative opinions. Discipline, leadership, patience, a sense of ritual and the offering of rewards are necessary to modify the behavior of Amazons. Even then, they are not completely trustworthy and may bite for no apparent reason, especially after they reach sexual maturity.

### How to Identify Your Bird

Amazons 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 Wing Feathers 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 Amazon Parrot Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Take your Amazon to your veterinarian 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. Amazons 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 Amazon should:

- ✓ be as large as possible.
- ✓ be clean, secure and safe.
- ✓ be constructed of nontoxic material (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 Amazon Parrot



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

- ✗ ceiling fans
- ✗ pesticides or chemical cleaners
- ✗ stove tops with hot burners, pans or skillets
- ✗ easily dismantled toys
- ✗ fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- ✗ dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- ✗ sandpaper-covered perches
- ✗ sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini-blinds or linoleum)
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke
- ✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- ✗ plug-in air fresheners
- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ scented candles