

## PARAKEET (BUDGERIGAR)

The budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) also known as common pet parakeet or shell parakeet and informally nicknamed the budgie, is a small, long-tailed, seed-eating parrot. Budgerigars are the only species in the Australian genus *Melopsittacus*, and are found wild throughout the drier parts of Australia where the species has survived harsh inland conditions for the last five million years. Budgerigars are naturally green and yellow with black, scalloped markings on the nape, back, and wings, but have been bred in captivity with colouring in blues, whites, yellows, greys, and even with small crests. Budgerigars are popular pets around the world due to their small size, low cost, and ability to mimic human speech. The species was first recorded in 1805, and today is the third most popular pet in the world, after the domesticated dog and cat.

They are very active, playful birds, and they are incredibly intelligent. Some (but not all) budgies learn to talk, there are even budgies have a 100+ word vocabulary!

Budgies can easily become finger tame while they are young with some diligent training, even if they were not hand fed as babies.

Many owners of fully tamed budgies will swear that their budgie thinks it's a human! Even if a budgie is not tamed, they still make enjoyable pets. Their antics and singing will brighten up any room in your home. And budgies who are not finger tame still can become friendly towards you, and even still learn to talk.

### Name

Many people know them as "parakeets," but their real name is "budgerigar". The word "budgerigar" comes from the aboriginal people of Australia, the budgie homeland. We like to use "budgie" as a shortened version of "budgerigar". In English, "budgerigar" or "budgie" is a more accurate name, because "parakeet" actually refers to a large group of small to medium sized parrot species.

### Lifespan

Parakeets have a lifespan of around 10 – 15 years though individuals have been reported to have lived significantly longer.

### Reproduction

Egg laying will start 1-2 days after mating. The female will lay an egg every other day, laying a total of 4-9 eggs. The female will sit on the eggs at all times. The eggs will usually hatch at around 18-20 days.

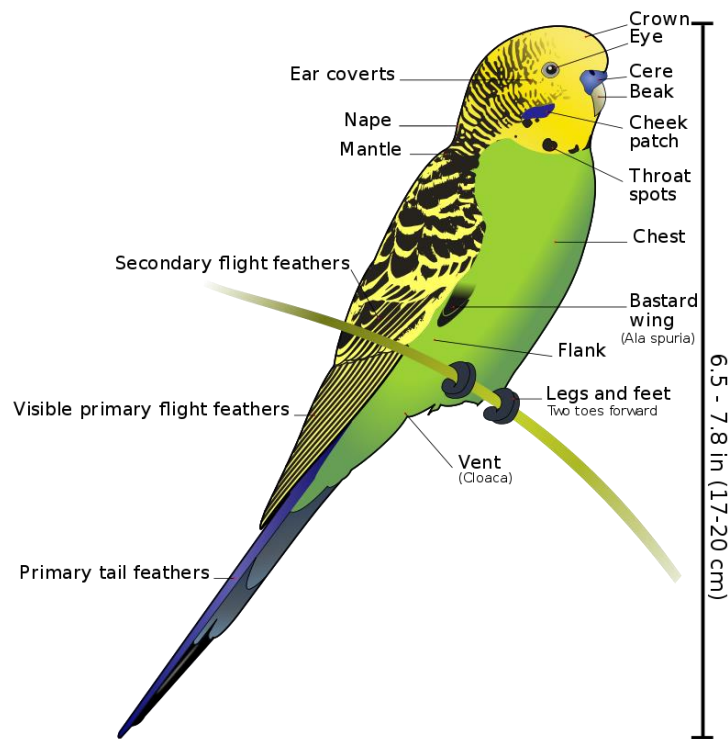
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## Sexing

It is usually easy to tell the sex of a budgerigar over six months old, mainly by the cere colors, but behaviors and head shape also help indicate sex.

A mature male's cere is usually light to dark blue, but can be purplish to pink in some particular color mutations, such as Dark-eyed Clears, Danish Pies (Recessive Pies) and Inos, which usually display much rounder heads. Males are typically cheerful, extroverted, highly flirtatious, peacefully social, and very vocal.

Females' ceres are pinkish as immatures and switch from being beigish or whitish outside breeding condition into brown (often with a 'crusty' texture) in breeding condition and usually display flattened backs of heads (right above the nape region). Females are typically highly dominant and more socially intolerant. When females get older, their ceres tend to be brown usually, females are often more bossy and rude with their own gender, but with males they get along better; usually when budgies of different gender are put together, they tend to be more kind to each other. Some will not even fight or peck at each other for their life time



## Vision

Like many birds, budgerigars have tetra chromatic color vision, but all four classes of cone cells operating simultaneously requires the full spectrum provided by sunlight. The ultraviolet spectrum brightens their feathers to attract mates. The throat spots in budgerigars reflect UV and can be used to distinguish individual birds.

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## Bathing

Parakeets love to bathe. Some prefer a misting with a spray bottle, others enjoy a good soak in the “tub” when you offer them a shallow bowl of water. In the wild, parakeets like to roll around in the grass after a rain shower. In our homes, many parakeets will appreciate a bowl of wet greens, such as parsley, to crawl around in. Your parakeet will need to bathe 2-3 times a week, and more often if it prefers.

## Diet

Many people make a mistake in believing that small birds only eat seeds. In fact, many people are told as much when they purchase their parakeets. That information is wrong and will lead to health problems due to the bird's dietary needs not being met. Parakeets need the nutritional advantages of fresh fruits and vegetable, grains and legumes. Foods such as strawberries, blueberries, broccoli and tomato are all acceptable options.

Additionally, the bird will need a healthy, organic pellet and fresh water that is changed at least once daily, served in clean dishes.

## Social Behavior

Parakeets are flock creatures, and part of their care is providing social activities. If their human family members are home a lot, able to hand tame the bird, and give it lots of interaction time, then they will become its flock. Parakeets can form strong bonds to their human flock mates. If they will be gone a lot, then the parakeet should be kept in an environment with other parakeets. The human/bird bond may not be as strong but it is healthier for the birds overall. Without a companion the bird may suffer from depression and other mental health problems.

## Signs of Illness

- Irregularities in eating
- Sleepiness, lethargy, anti-social behaviors
- Stains around vent or change in droppings
- Wheezing or sneezing
- Discoloration of feathers above nostrils
- Vomiting
- Sitting on cage bottom, weak, unable to perch

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## Toys and Play

Parakeets are quite inquisitive and active and should always be provided with a supply of toys to keep them mentally stimulated. Basic toys with bells, beads, and rings will be favorites. Swings and chew toys are recommended. Keeping toys outside of the cage and rotating them keeps it clear of clutter. Additionally, it can be greatly beneficial to allow parakeets time outside of their cage so long as steps have been taken to insure a safe environment for the bird.

## Common Behaviors

- Stretching - Budgies stretch from time to time to get exercise and to get their blood flowing.
- Beak Grinding - While asleep, budgerigars often nibble or grind their beaks.
- Preening - To stay clean, budgies preen on a regular basis. They get oil from the "preen gland" at the base of the tail and use it to keep their feathers in excellent shape.
- Fluffing - It's not unusual to see budgies fluff themselves up or shake around, and they usually do this when they're done preening. It gets their feathers back into order. They may also do this immediately before taking a nap, and it's sometimes a part of mating behavior.
- Chewing and Shredding - Budgerigars' beaks are always growing. To keep them from becoming overgrown, these birds enjoy shredding things up and chewing on things.
- Napping - Around midday, most budgies take naps. They typically nap for 15 to 45 minutes.
- Yawning - Whether it's done before a nap or immediately after one, yawning is normal. A budgerigar's throat might move forward when he yawns, and that's normal too.