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TIPS ON BUYING A BIRD

Owning a pet bird is no simple matter. Some parrots can live 50 or 60 years, so choose carefully: Buying one on impulse can have repercussions that last a lifetime. While there is no set number of things to keep in mind before you buy a bird, here are 10 considerations that never should be overlooked.

- Is this particular bird appropriate for you? Make sure you know the reasons you want a bird, and make sure the bird species you are considering satisfies those reasons. In other words, if speaking ability is important to you, then be sure to purchase a bird species that has the potential to talk.
- Consider the life span of the bird, which ranges from 10 to 60 years, depending on the species. Do you really want a pet that may outlive you?
- Once you've decided on a bird that meets your needs, think about whether you can meet his needs. Many species are highly social and need regular interaction and training.
- Is the dealer reputable? Dealers and breeders should be preparing pet birds for pet homes, meaning teaching things like appropriate behavior, potty training, step up/step down commands, etc. Ask around - check with other bird owners, veterinarians, and rescue organizations. Many buyers learn only after the sale that their dealer is known to be unethical and not concerned about the actual birds.
- Is the dealer in a fixed location where you can find him again, should you need help? Birds are often sold in flea markets and at roadsides - not good if you need to follow up.
- Does the dealer offer a warranty? Be suspicious of anyone who will not give you some assurance of the bird's health.
- What is the source of this bird? Was he bred locally? Is the breeder available for questioning? Importation of many species stopped years ago, but illegal smuggling still goes on.

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- Are you familiar with the nutritional needs of this particular bird? Certain species have special needs. Mynah birds, for example, require a low-iron diet. Another thing to keep in mind is the bird's present diet. For the most part, seed diets are worthless. Ask if the bird is already eating the ideal diet. If not, he will have to be converted to the correct diet. Remember that converting an older bird can be quite difficult.
- Is this bird healthy? There's no way to answer this without a veterinary exam and work-up. To start with, be sure the bird looks normal - that his eyes are bright and clear, his feathers are clean and unblemished, and that he seems alert and responsive. As soon as possible, set up a post-purchase exam to have him thoroughly checked out.
- Is your home ready for the bird? Do you have a suitable cage? Is it situated in the correct location - in a well-trafficked, sunny spot, away from drafts? Have you arranged the perches correctly? What about toys and other accessories?

Becoming an informed bird owner before you purchase your bird will help to make your experience a happy one.

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