### CAGED BIRDS

### Varietal range difference

The following guidelines apply to birds commonly kept as caged pets, such as budgerigars, canaries and finches.

### accommodation

Accommodation should be designed to suit the birds’ physical characteristics and natural behaviours and provide:

space enough for birds to fly, roost and avoid other caged birds

shelter from draught, direct sunlight through windows and the capacity to control temperature, ventilation and lighting

protection from menace or intimidation by predators

feed and water to supply essential nutrient

protection from disease

facilities for regular surveillance to detect problems

For further information, see Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Code of practice for the housing of caged birds.

### normal behaviour

Caged birds are normally alert with an erect carriage. They should be able to fly freely and the cutting of feathers or pinioning of wings, unless advised by veterinarians for therapeutic reasons, must not be undertaken.

Birds that are kept in captivity generally live in flocks in the wild, so the company of at least one other bird should be provided for companionship

### ENVIRONMENT

Ideally, most birds should be housed in large, well-designed and well-built outdoor aviaries. Some, however, are kept in indoor cages. The type of bird chosen will tend to dictate the type of housing required. All birds should have adequate room to move and express normal behaviours.

In general:

* all cages must be kept sufficiently clean as to provide an environment that is conducive to the birds' good health. In small cages, removable trays may assist cleaning
* cages should be constructed of strong, impervious materials that can be washed and sterilised thoroughly
* cages should provide protection from predators and extreme weather, and be draught-free
* there should be means for birds to avoid others in the cage
* a number of feed and water stations should be provided that is adequate to meet the requirements of all birds and allows every bird free access to them
* there should be a variety of perches of different diameters, with enough space for all caged birds to perch comfortably. Ideally, perches should be natural, bark-covered branches. Perches should not impede lines of flight or be placed directly above other perches or food and water containers. They should be cleaned or (preferably) replaced regularly
* hanging decorations, toys and vegetation should not clutter cages or impede lines of flight
* a choice of nesting and roosting sites and suitable nesting materials should be provided for all birds
* suitable floor drainage should be provided to prevent persistently moist or wet cages
* cages should be constructed to inhibit the entry of pests
* cages should provide at least two doors between the caged birds and the outside
* floors should be kept in a clean and sanitary condition. If they are covered with absorbent litter such as sand, the material should be removed completely at least twice a year
* cages should not be stacked together so as to impair ventilation
* cage interiors should be free of sharp edges and dangerous objects
* shallow bowls should be provided to give birds the opportunity to bathe, particularly on warm days

(Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Code of practice for the housing of caged birds)

In the design of birdcages, the ratio between the length and width, at right angles to each other, should not exceed 4:1, unless the shorter of these two lines is at least 900mm long. The shorter distance should be at least twice the span of the wings of the largest bird to be kept in the cage.

When housing mixed species, the minimum cage size should relate to the requirements of the largest birds.

For other indoor and outdoor cage dimensions, refer to Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, National Guidelines for the Housing of Caged Birds.

### food and water

Adequate food suitable for the needs of the particular species of birds being housed should be available at all times. Containers used to supply feed should not be constructed or used in a manner that may cause injury to the birds. They should be situated where the food is least likely to be spoiled or contaminated by faeces.

A varied diet should be supplied, alternating regularly between fresh fruit, vegetables and seeding grasses, as appropriate to the species being fed. Mixed grit and a source of calcium should be available.

Clean, cool water must be available at all times. Water containers should not be located in direct sunlight or placed in positions where they are likely to become contaminated by faeces. Containers should be kept clean and free of foreign matter, by regular washing with a low-toxicity disinfectant and rinsing with clean water.

### HANDLING

Birds should be conditioned to accept handling. They need to be handled calmly and with care. Training birds to accept transfer between cages on a daily basis ensures that they can be handled easily, provides a level of environmental enrichment and may reduce the incidence of territorial behaviour.

Because of the time involved in training parrots, it is unlikely that this activity would be carried out in schools. However, teachers or lecturers may use trained birds to demonstrate the principles involved. Parrots can be tamed and trained to perform a large number of tricks and activities, including speech. The birds should be rewarded for desirable behaviours, generally with food, but normal feeding must not be withheld or overlooked. Punishment, especially physical forms, should not be used as a deterrent for undesirable actions. Reward the bird’s spontaneous actions that approximate desired behaviour. Repetition is the key to success and it may take years to perfect the performance of a single desired action on command.

### DISEASE PREVENTION

To decrease the incidence of disease, it is vital that the housing, nutritional and environmental requirements of each species are known. All new animals should be kept quarantined until they are proved to be disease and parasite free.

### Signs of illness

Birds' health should be monitored at least daily and preferably more often. The first sign of ill-health may be noticed as a change in their natural demeanour, which may be listless or lethargic. Birds may show changes in:

* the appearance of droppings
* food or water consumption
* attitude or behaviour
* appearance or posture
* body weight
* rate or depth of respiration

Birds may show evidence of:

* enlargements or swelling
* vomiting, injury or bleeding
* discharge from nostrils, eyes or beak

Birds with any of these symptoms should be isolated immediately and their cages disinfected fully. A failure to thrive or grow is another sign of illness.

If a bird shows signs of ill-health or distress immediate veterinary advice should be sought. Illnesses and injuries and the treatment given should be documented in the appropriate records.

### Euthanasia

In the case of a bird becoming so sick, diseased or injured that recovery is unlikely or undesirable, on humane grounds euthanasia must be arranged with a veterinarian or a person competent in the technique for birds.

A record of deaths is required for the annual report to VSAEC.

### Fate planning

A fate plan should be considered before using a bird in any program. Animals that are no longer required must be re-homed. They must not be released into the environment.

### More information

* [Department of Environment and Primary Industries](https://www2.delwp.vic.gov.au/)
* [University of Sydney (Faculty of Veterinary Science)](https://sydney.edu.au/science/schools/sydney-school-of-veterinary-science.html)
* Code of practice for the housing of caged birds, Bureau of Animal Welfare (2001), Attwood, Victoria
* What Bird is That? Revised field edition, Cayley, Neville W. (1991), Angus and Robertson, NSW: North Ryde
* The Finch Handbook, Koepff, C. and Romagnano, A. (2001), Barron’s Pet Handbooks, New York
* Everybird: A Guide to Bird Health, MacWhirter, P. (ed.) (1987), Inkata, Melbourne
* The Canary Handbook, Vriends, M. and Heming-Vriends, T. (2001), Barron’s Pet Handbooks, New York

Kindly sourced from the [SAEC – Schools Animal Ethics Committee of Western Australia](http://www.det.wa.edu.au/curriculumsupport/animalethics/detcms/school-support-programs/animal-ethics/about-us-/about-schools-animal-ethics-committee.en?page=2)