



## African Grey Care Sheet

### Basic facts:

African Greys originate from equatorial Africa and their habitats include savannahs, coastal mangroves, woodlands and edges of forest clearings. The Congo African Grey parrot has a black beak, silver-grey body that is lighter around eyes and rump, and a red tail. The smaller Timneh parrot (horn-coloured beak, dark grey body, maroon tail) was previously considered a subspecies, but it is actually a genetically distinct species.

African Greys are sexually monomorphic, which means that males and females look the same and **sex needs to be determined** by DNA testing (from a drop of blood taken from the toe) or endoscopy.

They are intelligent and **require plenty of physical and mental stimulation**. They love to be active and are vocal communicators, often able to mimic sounds (like a doorbell or a dripping tap) and even talk. CITES Appendix II lists African Greys as a species whose wild population is at risk due to wildlife trade. It is therefore vital to buy your African Grey with a metal ring from a well-established breeder, or adopt, so as not to support illegal wildlife trade.

As pets African Greys can be held in bonded pairs or as single birds. Keeping only one bird assumes that the owner can spend enough time with their pet. This is why some countries have laws against keeping African Greys on their own.

**Clipping** your Grey's **wings** makes sense if they are living in a household setting with potential for escape. Your avian-savvy veterinarian or nurse will cut the **first few primary feathers on BOTH wings**. It is **NOT advisable to cut too many feathers or to only cut feathers on one wing** – this causes your bird to be off-balance, insecure and at risk of breaking their beak or sternum if they fall from a height.

### Enclosure:

**The bigger the better!** There are various ways to house your African Grey. You can keep a Grey in a cage if they also are given ample opportunity to free-roam under supervision. The cage usually serves as a place to rest and eat. It is advisable to have the cage on wheels so that your parrot can more easily be afforded outdoor time as well. Daily access to **unfiltered sunlight** (outside, not through a window) is important for the health and mental well-being of your parrot. Remember that at least one side of the cage should be up against a wall or covered so that your bird doesn't have the feeling of being "under attack" from all sides. The cage should be in a well-ventilated yet draft-free area with **no kitchen fumes, smoke or scented aerosols** nearby. Unfortunately, most cages are not adequate as permanent enclosures as they do not allow for enough movement and mental stimulation. It is advisable for your Grey to have prolonged daily out-of-cage time where he/she can interact with you. The ideal is to house your parrot in an aviary that is sufficiently big to allow for free-flight and climbing options (minimum 2 x 1 x 1 metres).

African Greys need lots of stimulation for their wellbeing. **Enrichment/entertainment items** are crucial as they serve to fulfill the natural instinct of foraging behaviour. Toys should be made of safe materials;



free from metal pieces that can be chewed or swallowed; and should allow for destruction or foraging behaviour. Examples of such toys include toys made of sekelbos and other safe woods, toilet paper rolls stuffed with shredded paper and foraging baskets. A toy that never gets damaged did not serve a function! Mirrors should not be hung in the cage! We offer a vast array of toys on our website (see below link). Treats hidden within an enrichment item can stimulate interaction with that toy.

**Perches** in the enclosure should have **different diameters and a natural, uneven surface** as would be found in the wild. It is not advisable to have your African Grey perching on thin perches as this will put pressure on only one portion of their feet and lead to bumblefoot. Smooth, evenly round perches don't engage the whole foot, are harder to grip and also do not wear the down the nails. Rough perches with a sandpaper- like texture (which are usually marketed as being good for wearing down nails) are very abrasive on the feet and should not be used. A natural branch from a non-toxic tree that has been treated against contaminants and parasites is the ideal.

#### Diet:

It is important to remember that wild African Greys spend the majority of their time flying and foraging. In captivity they will never be able to be as active and exercise as much as they would in the wild. This is why it is important to be conscientious of the calorie intake as well as the nutritional value of their food when they are in our care.

**DO NOT FEED A SUNFLOWER SEED- or PEANUT-BASED DIET!** Some pet shops will incorrectly sell a sunflower seed diet to parrot owners – to the detriment of your parrot. Sunflower seeds and peanut are high in fat, devoid of vitamins and essential nutrients, often harbor dangerous aspergillous spores on their shells and can cause a variety of health problems. Your parrot is surviving on this diet, but not thriving! This is why vets commonly refer to these mixes as the “donut diet”.

A well-balanced diet for your pet African Grey is a mix of **60-70% high-quality pellets** (e.g. Roudybush) and **30% fresh fruits and veggies** (see list below). Treats can consist of other fresh or dehydrated foods, parrot-specific treats, seeds and nuts. These can be used for bonding and training purposes and should never exceed 5% of total daily intake.

The importance of a **high-quality pelleted diet** cannot be overstated. These pellets (e.g. Roudybush, TOPS, Natures Nest) offer a balanced nutrition that would not be achievable in the home kitchen. They help **prevent diseases** that are unfortunately still commonly seen in many pet African Greys (e.g. rhinoliths, sterile abscesses, etc). Do not feed coloured pellets or pellets with added sugar. In vet practices we often hear the statement: “My bird does not like pellets, he/she only likes seeds (+/- apple).” It may well be the case that your African Grey may not WANT to switch to a healthier diet, but that doesn't mean that with a little perseverance they cannot switch. It can take days to months to change the diet and habits of these parrots, but it is always possible. Try some of these tricks or ask your exotics vet for further advice:



- Offer only the pellets for breakfast when your bird wakes up as they will then be at their most hungry. Remember: we never want to starve our birds, so after an hour you can reintroduce the old diet and try the pellets again the next day.
- Make a porridge out of some pellets and then mix the previously eaten seed mix in – by virtue of eating the seeds your parrot will also be confronted with the taste of the pellets. Remove any moist food after 2 hours to prevent spoilage.
- Crush some pellets over your parrots favorite fresh foods.
- Do not try to convert a sick or debilitated bird to a new diet before seeking veterinary advice.
- In the interim, while your bird is still transitioning to pellets, it is advisable to feed healthier seeds along with your old diet. These include chia, pumpkin seed and linseed. Jacobiez Herbal Seed Mix is a good alternative.

**Safe vegetables** and legumes: cucumber, pumpkin, butternut, sweet potato, zucchini, carrots, kale, collard greens, broccoli, peas, peppers (green, red, paprika) and lentils. Not an exclusive list. Sprouts are one of the best sources of nutrients and therefore highly recommended (e.g. Jacobiez Sprouting Mix). Always feed proportionally more veg than fruit, since fruits are higher in sugars.

**Safe fruits:** apple, grapes, banana, mango, papaya, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, guava, kiwi, figs, pears, oranges and nectarines. This is not an exclusive list.

**AVOID caffeine, chocolate, avocados, added salt and sugar.**

Wash fruits and veggies well before feeding them to your Grey. Always provide ample fresh water for drinking. In areas where the water-quality is questionable it is advisable to first filter your water. Remember that your bird might bath or even poop in their water bowl so make sure to thoroughly wash the bowls daily with dish-washing liquid and hot water.

## Health:

**Obesity** is likely one of the most common ailments of captive birds. It is caused by a combination of lack of exercise and excessive caloric intake. In turn obesity is linked to diseases of the heart, airways, joints, sores on the feet and hormonal behaviour.

**Feather plucking** (feather destructive behaviour) is a syndrome that is frequently observed in African Greys. The owner may witness their bird actively pulling feathers out or might just see bald patches or feathers lying at the bottom of the cage. There are multiple causes for this behavior and these need to be investigated in a step-by-step approach by your avian vet. Your vet may want to do x-rays and bloodwork, but also discuss changes to diet, interaction and environment.

Contact your exotics vet if you see any of these symptoms: reduced appetite, regurgitation of food, diarrhea, fluffed-up appearance, reduced activity or falling off the perch/cage bars.



African Greys can safely be **microchipped**. The advantage of this is that if your bird ever escapes you can be contacted in the event of someone finding him/her. This is especially important since these parrots rarely have physical features that clearly distinguish them from another Grey.

Give your parrot enough time to **sleep**! This is assisted by keeping their cage in a quiet, dark area covered with a blanket for at least 10-12 hours.

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Information on this care sheet is the opinion of the creator. This care sheet will be adapted if updated information becomes available.

To order food and enrichment items you can contact Exotic Pets Overberg via whatsapp (071-142-2953) or email [admin@exoticpetsoverberg.co.za](mailto:admin@exoticpetsoverberg.co.za). Or visit our online shop at [www.exoticpetsoverberg.co.za](http://www.exoticpetsoverberg.co.za)

Further information of toy safety: [https://lafeber.com/vet/wp-content/uploads/Toy\\_Safety.pdf](https://lafeber.com/vet/wp-content/uploads/Toy_Safety.pdf)

Further information of conversion away from seeds:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aav.org/resource/collection/AE20E93E-0F61-4C20-AB88-E237BD795B43/AAV\\_Transitioning\\_Diet\\_final.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aav.org/resource/collection/AE20E93E-0F61-4C20-AB88-E237BD795B43/AAV_Transitioning_Diet_final.pdf)

Further information on signs of illness:

[https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aav.org/resource/resmgr/pdf\\_2019/AAV\\_Signs-of-Illness-in-Comp.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aav.org/resource/resmgr/pdf_2019/AAV_Signs-of-Illness-in-Comp.pdf)

Further information on foraging: <https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.aav.org/resource/collection/AE20E93E-0F61-4C20-AB88-E237BD795B43/foraging.pdf>