

African Grey Care Sheet

Intelligent, vocal and long-lived. The diet is where most owners go wrong.

Living With African Greys | The Enclosure | Diet | Health | Call Your Vet

At A Glance

ORIGIN
Equatorial Africa

COMPANY
Bonded pairs, or a well-attended single

AVIARY
2 x 1 x 1 metres minimum

DIET
60 to 70% quality pellets

SLEEP
10 to 12 hours, dark and quiet

SEXING
DNA test or endoscopy

Living With African Greys

- African Greys come from equatorial Africa: savannahs, coastal mangroves, woodlands and the edges of forest clearings. The Congo African Grey has a black beak, a silver-grey body lighter around the eyes and rump, and a red tail. The smaller Timneh has a horn-coloured beak, a dark grey body and a maroon tail, and is now known to be a genetically distinct species rather than a subspecies.
- They are sexually monomorphic, so males and females look identical. Sex is determined by DNA testing from a drop of blood taken from the toe, or by endoscopy.
- They are intelligent and need a great deal of physical and mental stimulation. They are active, vocal communicators, often mimicking sounds like a doorbell or a dripping tap, and many talk.
- CITES Appendix II lists African Greys as at risk from wildlife trade. Buy from a well-established breeder with a metal ring, or adopt, so you are not supporting the illegal trade.
- They can be kept as bonded pairs or as single birds, but a single bird assumes you can give it enough of your time. Some countries have laws against keeping African Greys alone.
- Wing clipping makes sense in a household where the bird could escape. Your avian vet or nurse cuts the first few primary feathers on both wings. Cutting too many, or only one wing, leaves the bird off balance and insecure, and risks a broken beak or sternum in a fall.

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The Enclosure

- **The bigger the better.** A cage works if the bird also gets plenty of supervised free-roaming time, with the cage serving as somewhere to rest and eat. Put it on wheels so your parrot can go outside more easily. **Daily unfiltered sunlight** outdoors, not through glass, matters for health and mental wellbeing.
- Keep at least one side of the cage against a wall or covered, so the bird does not feel under attack from every direction. Site it somewhere well ventilated but free of draughts, with no kitchen fumes, smoke or scented aerosols nearby.
- Most cages are not adequate as permanent housing, they do not allow enough movement or stimulation. The ideal is an **aviary of at least 2 x 1 x 1 metres** allowing free flight and climbing.
- **Enrichment is not optional.** Toys fulfil the natural instinct to forage. They must be made of safe materials, free of metal pieces that can be chewed or swallowed, and built to be destroyed or foraged. Sekelbos and other safe woods, toilet roll tubes stuffed with shredded paper, foraging baskets. **A toy that never gets damaged did not do its job.** Never hang mirrors in the cage. Hiding treats inside a toy gets the bird using it.
- **Perches** should vary in diameter with a natural, uneven surface. Thin perches load only one part of the foot and lead to bumblefoot. Smooth, evenly round perches do not engage the whole foot, are harder to grip and do not wear the nails. Sandpaper-textured perches sold for wearing nails down are far too abrasive. A natural branch from a non-toxic tree, treated for contaminants and parasites, is ideal.

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Diet

- Wild Greys spend most of their time flying and foraging. A captive bird will never be that active, so calorie intake and nutritional value both need watching.
- **Never feed a sunflower seed or peanut based diet.** Some pet shops still sell it. These are high in fat, devoid of vitamins and essential nutrients, often carry dangerous aspergillus spores on the shells, and cause a range of health problems. Your parrot survives on that diet, it does not thrive. Vets call it the donut diet.
- **The balance:** 60 to 70% high-quality pellets such as Roudybush, and 30% fresh fruit and vegetables. Treats, whether fresh, dehydrated, parrot-specific, seeds or nuts, are for bonding and training and should never exceed 5% of daily intake.
- Quality pellets (Roudybush, TOPS, Natures Nest) give balanced nutrition you cannot achieve in a home kitchen, and they prevent diseases still common in pet Greys such as rhinoliths and sterile abscesses. No coloured pellets, nothing with added sugar.
- **"My bird only likes seeds."** Vets hear it constantly. Your Grey may not want to switch, but that is not the same as cannot. It takes days to months. Offer only pellets at breakfast when the bird is hungriest, then reintroduce the old diet after an hour and try again the next day, never starve them. Make a porridge of pellets and mix the old seed in so the taste becomes familiar. Crush pellets over favourite fresh foods. While transitioning, feed healthier seeds alongside: chia, pumpkin seed, linseed, or Jacobiez Herbal Seed Mix. Do not attempt a diet change on a sick or debilitated bird before getting veterinary advice.
- **Safe vegetables and legumes:** cucumber, pumpkin, butternut, sweet potato, zucchini, carrots, kale, collard greens, broccoli, peas, peppers and lentils. Sprouts are among the best sources of nutrients, so highly recommended.
- **Safe fruits:** apple, grapes, banana, mango, papaya, blackberries, blueberries, raspberries, guava, kiwi, figs, pears, oranges and nectarines. Always feed proportionally more veg than fruit, since fruit is higher in sugar.
- **Avoid** caffeine, chocolate, avocado, added salt and added sugar. Wash everything well. Keep fresh water available, filtered if your local water is questionable, and wash the bowls daily with hot water and dish-washing liquid, because your bird will bathe and sometimes poop in them.

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Health

- **Obesity** is probably the most common ailment in captive birds, caused by too little exercise and too many calories. It leads on to disease of the heart, airways and joints, sores on the feet, and hormonal behaviour.
- **Feather plucking** is frequently seen in Greys. You may catch the bird pulling feathers out, or just find bald patches or feathers on the cage floor. There are many possible causes and your avian vet needs to work through them step by step, possibly with x-rays and bloodwork, alongside changes to diet, interaction and environment.
- **Microchipping** is safe and worth doing. Greys rarely have features that distinguish them from another Grey, so if yours escapes, a chip is how you get the call.
- **Sleep.** Give your parrot 10 to 12 hours in a quiet, dark place with the cage covered.

Contact Your Exotics Vet If You See

- Reduced appetite.
- Regurgitation of food.
- Diarrhoea.
- A fluffed-up appearance.
- Reduced activity, or the bird falling off the perch or cage bars.

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