

Two species of African grey parrots, native to Africa, are commonly found in captivity: the Congo (Psittacus erithacus erithacus) with a bright red tail and the timneh (Psittacus erithacus timneh) with duller coloration. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. Outside of the United States, importation and smuggling remain major conservation issues and continue to result in disease and inhumane treatment. High quality companion birds are available from reputable breeders, rescue organizations and avian sanctuaries. Research has shown that African greys are capable of actual reasoning and verbal communication (beyond just mimicking). There is speculation that an imprinted male may have difficulty relating to a female bird. The current aviculture trend is to allow chicks to remain with the parents for the first few weeks of life and then be removed for hand-feeding until weaning. This parental influence may also help reduce the incidence of behavioral problems later in life.

Common Disorders of African Grey Parrots

- Feather destructive behavior, such as feather picking
- Respiratory diseases
- Oral abscesses
- Malnutrition, including hypocalcemia syndrome
- Choanal atresia
- Cardiovascular disease (enlarged heart, atherosclerosis)
- Proventricular dilatation disease (PDD)
- Chlamydiosis
- Reproductive disorders (egg binding, cloacal protrusion)
- Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD)
- Other bacterial, viral and fungal infections

Many common disease conditions in African grey parrots are the result of malnutrition. Visiting your avian veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many of the above diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your African grey parrot. Veterinary attention should be sought for any feather destructive behavior because increasingly, medical causes have been associated with this disorder. For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting www.AAV.org.

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AFRICAN GREYS



Companion Bird Care
SERIES

What to Expect from Your African Grey Parrot

African grey parrots are extremely intelligent and alert; some may be considered high-strung. Selective breeding for calmness is being initiated by some aviculturists. Like many parrots, these birds may

form an inappropriate pair bond with individual family members, which may lead to a variety of undesirable behaviors, including aggression towards others. This may become exacerbated during the breeding season. They are believed to be emotionally

sensitive and may be prone to remember negative experiences and associate these with certain people and objects. African grey parrots have the greatest potential among common pet bird species for a range of vocalizations and an increasing vocabulary throughout their lives. This mimicking ability can include sounds like dripping water, flushing toilets, squeaky doors, coughs or sneezes and answering machines.

Is Your African Grey a Male or a Female?

In most African greys, it is difficult to distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, endoscopy or laboratory methods must be used for sex determination in pet birds and those in breeding facilities. African greys prefer to choose their own mates and bond for life. Once initiated, African greys are prolific breeders, and the offspring are easy to hand feed.

What Should You Feed Your Grey?

For a long, healthy life, African greys should be fed a high quality, toxin-free formulated diet. Supplementation may include small amounts of chopped organic vegetables and fruit and whole grains.

What Do African Greys Do All Day?

Because of their high intelligence, African greys require a stimulating and enriching environment. Toys should be rotated frequently and include puzzle-types and toys designed to be shredded or destroyed. Toys should be “bird safe” and free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small easily consumed components. Most parrots can be taught to enjoy foraging, where food and treats are hidden in puzzle toys or other objects, such as paper cups or paper. This is an excellent way to prevent boredom. Socialized African greys benefit from inclusion in a busy family’s activities in a variety of situations.

Are African Greys Tame?

Young, hand-tamed African greys adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well-adjusted to these events. Non-socialized adult birds are less inclined to accept environmental changes.

Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds that are allowed unrestricted freedom in the home can encounter numerous physical dangers or toxins. Wing clipping is a personal decision made for each bird and decided between the client and veterinarian. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Because African greys are particularly heavy-bodied birds, falls from overtrimmed wings may result in severe damage to the chest.

How to Keep Your African Grey Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- ✓ Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction, and foraging and problem-solving opportunities.
- ✓ Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet with daily supplementation of chopped vegetables and fruit and whole grains.
- ✓ Provide clean, fresh uncontaminated drinking water (try using water bottles) and replace twice daily.
- ✓ Provide occasional opportunity for bath, shower, or misting (at least weekly).
- ✓ Avoid spraying the house with insecticides.

Housing for your African grey parrot should:

- ✓ be as large as possible (minimum: 2’ x 3’ x 2’ [60 x 90 x 60 cm]).
- ✓ be clean, secure and safe.
- ✓ be constructed of durable, nontoxic material.
- ✓ contain variable-sized perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free tree branches.
- ✓ avoid having perches located directly over food containers.
- ✓ offer occasional opportunity for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, sunlight and exercise.

What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy African Grey

Dry, open nares

Clear, bright eyes (no discharge)

Smooth beak with powder coating

Alert, erect posture

Body free of lumps and bumps

Smooth, bright feathers without color breaks, transparency or ragged edges

Even scaling pattern on the feet, and nails of appropriate length

African greys are very curious and may investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

- ✗ ceiling fans
- ✗ hot cooking oil
- ✗ overheated nonstick-coated cookware
- ✗ leg chains
- ✗ sandpaper-covered perches
- ✗ tobacco and cigarette smoke

- ✗ chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- ✗ toxic houseplants
- ✗ pesticides
- ✗ toxic fumes
- ✗ easily dismantled toys
- ✗ dogs, cats and young children
- ✗ cedar, redwood and pressure-treated wood shavings
- ✗ sources of lead or zinc
- ✗ plug-in air fresheners
- ✗ heavily-scented candles

Vital Statistics

Body length: 13 inches (33 cm)

Body weight

Congo: 300-550 g

Timneh: 275-375 g

Age of sexual maturity: 3-6 years

Maximum life span: 80 years