

# The Budgie Manual

Max Diamond

Useful Tips & Advice to Help You  
Take Care of Your Feathered Friend



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Max Diamond of Freebiesave.org  
Brighton, United Kingdom

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## Chapter 1 - Budgies in the Wild and as Pets

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Many people are surprised at how much personality can be packed into such a small bird! The colorful budgie (also widely known as a parakeet) is playful, energetic, entertaining, easy to train, and sometimes even talkative. It is no wonder that surveys often place the budgie as the most popular or the second most popular pet bird in American households.

Because of their small stature, budgies aren't always thought of as parrots, but they are. Parrots form a very large group, or order, of birds known as the Psittaciformes, which contains about 342 different bird species. The order is broken into two families: the Cacatuidae, or cockatoos; and the Psittacidae, the parrots. The term parrot can indicate either the family or the order. Some scientists believe there should be a third family, the Loriidae, containing just the lories and lorikeets.

Budgies have been highly sought-after pet birds since the mid-1860s, when they were brought from Australia to England and the European continent. Today, domestically bred budgies are one of the most popular pet birds in America.

There are many names for the budgie. Scientists call this little Australian parrot *Melopsittacus undulatus*. Some historical references use the term Australian shell parakeet. About fifty years ago, another and more unusual name 'budgerigar' began to appear often in books and articles about pet birds. Although this name sounds strange at first, its shortened form 'budgie' rolls off the tongue with ease.

This book uses the term budgie, although many people still identify this bird as the parakeet. It is true that the budgie can be classified as a parakeet but certainly not as the only one. The term parakeet can apply to any member of the Psittacidae family who is relatively small, is slender, and has a long, pointed tail. Australia alone has more than two dozen species that fit under the general term parakeet, and many of the Mexican, South American, and Central American conures (also parrots) could be called parakeets on the basis of their size and shape. In southern Asia and Africa, several species of very long-tailed, bright-green little parrots are also commonly known as parakeets.

Now let's get to know something about the budgie, the most popular parakeet of all.

The Wild Budgie

A wild budgie is a small, slender parrot with a pointed tail, pointed wings, and a small beak. The wild budgie is typically seven-and-a-half to eight-and-a-half inches long overall, with central tail feathers three-and-a-half to four inches long (roughly half the bird's total length). The wings are long and pointed, with each wing roughly four inches long, so the wingspan is less than a foot. Wild budgies are much smaller but similar in structure to the American budgies, the birds you are likely to find in a pet store. American budgies are two to three inches smaller in length than the typical English budgies, who have been bred for competitive showing. The English budgies can be quickly identified by their large heads, which are round and bulging rather than small and tapered. (The English budgie is discussed in greater detail in a later chapter.)

Like other parrots, budgies can turn their heads 180 degrees so they can reach the important oil gland (the uropygial gland) at the upper base of the tail; budgies smear the oily secretions onto their beaks and then spread the oil over their feathers to make them more waterproof. A wet budgie keeps some dry plumage even during a rain storm or a light bath.

The budgie's beak is small, and its base is covered with feathers that can be fluffed out to enclose almost all but the tip of the beak. The upper beak is longer than the lower beak and is sharply pointed; the shorter lower beak fits into the upper beak and ends in a squarish tip. The tip of the lower beak fits against ridges in the upper beak that allow the budgie's thick, specialized tongue to roll an individual seed between the two parts of the beak until the seed's outer coating is split and rolled off, thus hulling the seed before it is passed into the mouth and then down toward the stomach. Above the beak is a wide area of featherless skin that contains the nostrils. This area, called the cere, can vary in color, depending on the age and the sex of the bird.

A budgie's feet are large, with four unequal-sized toes ending in long, sharp nails. The toes form an X (a pattern known as zygodactylous, common to all parrots), allowing the budgie to firmly grasp both large and small perches. The legs are short and mostly hidden under the feathers, giving the budgie a characteristic waddling walk.

Wild budgies are predominantly bright green, with yellow heads and throats and black feather markings--certainly not the variety of colors and shades you can find in a pet store. These limited colors allow wild budgies to blend with the colors of both the soils and grasses when they drop to the ground to feed. An adult wild-type budgie is bright green from the upper chest to under the tail and on the rump (the part of the body above the base of the tail); the back, head, and neck are bright yellow. The body is heavily marked with black spots and crescents on the back and with many fine, horizontal black lines on the nape of the neck and the back of the head. The face is bright yellow, with three large black spots on each side of the throat. The eyes are rather small, have whitish irises, and are surrounded by a narrow band of featherless skin, pinkish to bluish in color.

## The Budgie's Scientific Classification

Although often called a parakeet, the budgerigar, or budgie, also has a scientific name that is standard among ornithologists, breeders, and pet owners around the world:

*Melopsittacus undulatus*.

Class: Aves

Order: Psittaciformes

Family: Psittacidae

Genus: *Melopsittacus*

Species: *undulatus*

The tops of the wild budgie's wings are yellow and black, with green to black flight feathers (also called primaries); the undersides have a wide yellow bar and black primaries. The tail feathers are mostly blue-green and sometimes yellow on top, but the shorter feathers near the base are mostly yellow underneath; the central tail feathers are blue-green both on top and underneath.

Immature budgies differ little from adults, but from the time they leave the nest with their first set of feathers until they molt into their adult plumage (at about four months old), they can be distinguished by their somewhat duller colors, the absence or near absence of throat spots, and the continuation of the fine horizontal black lines from their napes over their crowns to the base of their beaks. If the crown and area above the beak are not one solid color, then the bird is almost certainly a baby. Young birds also have all-black eyes; the pupils become paler with age.

## Betcherrygah

When the first English explorers questioned the Australian Aborigines about the local fauna, the explorers asked for the common names of the birds they saw, including the budgie. They were told that abundant bird was called a betcherrygah (sometimes spelled budgerygah). Further questioning led the explorers to interpret the word to mean "good bird." When the Aboriginal language was better understood, it was clear that "good" in this case meant "good to eat."

As mentioned, the budgies you see in a pet store may look quite different from the wild birds. Pets can be all yellow or all green, different shades of green or blue, or white, and the black markings may be faint or even nonexistent. Breeders have carefully and intentionally bred for these color varieties, which first appeared naturally as genetic mutations in pet birds; you'll never find them in nature. If a color mutation appeared in a wild budgie, the bird would stick out like a sore thumb in a flock of all green and yellow budgies and would attract predators; a short life span would reduce the likelihood of mating and passing on the mutation to any offspring.

All wild budgies have the green and yellow coloring. This color pattern allows budgies to blend into their surroundings and avoid predators

## RANGE AND HABITAT

Budgies are strictly Australian birds. They gather in large flocks of dozens to thousands of birds who can be found almost anywhere in the dry interior plains of Australia and on the Indian Ocean shores of the continent. These birds do not tolerate even moderately wet habitats. Budgies occasionally appear in Tasmania, but those are thought to be escaped pets and not natural populations. Budgies truly are birds of deserts; extremely arid plains; and open, dry savannas with only sparse vegetation.

Because budgies are nomadic, it is difficult to pin down where any group of birds might be at any time of the year. The flocks move around constantly, following the rains; water is rare and rains are unpredictable, so grasses and other foods may not appear in one specific spot for several years. Flocks of thousands of birds may descend on shallow lakes that appear with annual rains. There they spend several weeks feeding on new grass and breeding. As is true for many other desert birds, the population numbers rise and fall depending on the weather--after many years of drought, a high percentage of budgies die, and the species may become relatively uncommon in an area; but the next extended period of rainfall and subsequent breeding season quickly return the species to normal numbers.

Although a budgie's natural coloring is green and yellow only, pet budgies like these are available in a variety of colors and shades--including the normal (wild) green.

## FEEDING AND BREEDING

In nature, budgies feed on ripe and ripening seeds of a great array of grasses, especially the spinifex and Mitchell grasses that are common to the dry interior of Australia. But budgies also eat seeds of shrubby eucalyptus species and, when necessary, will eat wheat and other cultivated crops. It is likely that wild budgies will eat almost anything green or seedy if more traditional foods are not available.

Like most desert parrots, budgies are most active for an hour or less after sunrise and then for another hour or so before sunset when temperatures are relatively low. Although they can survive temperatures over one hundred degrees Fahrenheit for a while, they are stressed by such extremes and do much better in ranges from the upper sixties to the low eighties. When winter comes, budgies often move to warmer climates, although they can tolerate temperatures as low as the mid-forties.

The unpredictability of food and water in the wild dictates budgies' breeding habits. Their young leave the nest and mature early, compared with other parrots, as an adaptation for survival; if the adult birds had to incubate the eggs and feed the chicks for months instead of weeks, the water and grasses would probably disappear before the nestlings could fly.

Wild budgies are primarily seed eaters who feed on the ground. Your budgie may also happily munch on seeds and pellets placed in a cup on the cage floor.

Wild budgies nest primarily during the periods when rains and food are most likely to be abundant, but nesting seasons are unpredictable. Birds from the northern part of the range often breed at a different time from those in the south because climate patterns in Australia usually produce rains at different times in these areas. Unlike many other nomadic Australian parrots, budgies seldom approach the eastern coast during the winter, so they are seldom found in major Australian cities.

Like almost all other parrots, budgies lay their white eggs in a hole in a rotting branch or tree trunk and don't line the nest with straw or feathers. And, as is true of other parrots (but not cockatoos), the male feeds the female during nesting, and she seldom leaves the nest to look for food until the chicks are fairly grown and able to maintain their own body temperatures.

From Australia to England to America

The first Australian birds made their way to England on the ships of Captain James Cook, an English explorer who traveled to the eastern coast of Australia in the 1770s. Naturalists and others traveling with Cook collected a few birds and other animals and brought them back to Europe. These extremely rare specimens drew lots of interest from British and other European scientists, who named them according to the recently formulated rules of Linnaeus, a Swedish botanist who revolutionized taxonomy (the naming and classification of plants and animals).

On the basis of travelers' descriptions of a small green and yellow bird found in New South Wales on the southeastern coast of Australia, British naturalist George Shaw named the budgie *Psittacus undulatus*--a parrot (all parrots were placed in the genus *Psittacus*) with fine wavy lines over the back and nape of the neck.

Budgies and cockatiels--other small parrots native to Australia--sometimes form mixed flocks in the wild, traveling together to find food and water.

The first live budgies were brought to England in 1838 by painter John Gould, who not only visited Australia but also had family contacts there. Gould put budgies in a new genus, *Melopsittacus* (singing parrot), because of their melodious whistles or warbles. This gave us the current name *Melopsittacus undulatus*.

Gould and his friends and business associates soon were importing more budgies into England and elsewhere in Europe, where they found ready buyers among upper-class hobbyists willing to exchange gold for these new additions to their cages and aviaries.

Budgies caused a sensation among fanciers wanting rare, expensive animals for their collections, and it wasn't long before budgies were being bred in high numbers in captivity. Imports continued into Europe until 1894, when Australia passed regulations forbidding further exportation.

Breeding budgies became a very profitable business in France, Holland, Belgium and Germany, countries that long had traditions of commercially raising many types of unique pets. Budgies commanded high prices, and if you were a banker or a duke or had similar stature, you had to have a pair to keep up with your friends. When an all-yellow budgie mutation appeared in Belgium in 1875, followed by blue mutations in the early 1880s, interest in these birds grew, and prices for the mutations often reached well into three figures. The blue birds proved especially popular in Japan after they were imported by a Japanese prince in 1925.

Budgies had reached the United States by the late 1920s, where they became extremely popular. Soon every home had to have a little cage with a budgie (preferably all blue or all yellow) sitting in it. Books about how to care for budgies were published, budgies appeared in print ads, and talking budgies even appeared on radio shows. They became even more popular in the 1950s, when they competed with canaries as the most popular pet birds.

Today, budgies can be found in more than twenty color mutations, and perhaps as many as one hundred varieties are widely available to breeders and pet bird owners, although most of those seen in pet shops are either yellow, green, blue, white, or green and yellow (as in the wild). No matter what color, all budgies have great pet potential and are relatively inexpensive to purchase and care for. By buying a budgie, you join hundreds of thousands of dedicated pet bird owners who have found budgerigars to be truly wonderful pet parrots.

All-yellow budgies, and all-blue budgies were all the rage in early twentieth-century America.

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## Chapter 2 – Is a Budgie Right for You

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Many first-time parrot owners are surprised at the amount of care, time, and money a pet bird requires. Some people believe that a pet bird simply sits passively in a cage all day and is content as long as he receives regular food and water. In truth, parrots are highly intelligent, extremely social creatures who crave regular interaction, need a specialized diet, and require regular veterinary care. You'll discover that caring for a pet bird isn't much different than caring for a cat or dog. But first, ask yourself the following questions before welcoming a budgie in to your home.

Can you afford the time it takes to care for a budgie? You will need to feed your bird each morning and evening and replace his water every day. You also will need to spot-clean his cage, toys, and perches daily and do a thorough cleaning every week. Budgies have high metabolisms and produce feces approximately every ten to fifteen minutes. Although many cages have seed guards, or aprons, around the edges to help funnel droppings, food crumbs, and seed hulls back into the cage, some debris will certainly escape. If you believe that vacuuming, sweeping, and dusting are dreaded chores, then a budgie--or any pet bird--probably isn't right for you.

Do you or does anyone in your household have allergies? Birds constantly shed small flakes of skin and secretions from around their feathers, and they spread dried dust from droppings, pelleted foods, and seeds. Some people are just as allergic to birds as others are to cats or dogs. Although allergies can be treated and are seldom severe, dealing with them certainly would be an added expense and nuisance.

Can you afford the time to give your bird at least an hour of one-on-one attention each day, along with a few hours of ambient attention, such as spending time in the same room, talking to the budgie, and supervising his playtime on top of the cage or on a playgym? Budgies are among the most human-centered pet birds and will become depressed if simply placed in their cages and ignored. Budgies need company because they are flock animals that in nature are never alone--other birds are near them when they fly, feed, sleep, and even nest. A lonely budgie may pick his feathers and tear his skin into bleeding patches; he won't eat and will become withdrawn and morose. As his owner, you are part of his flock, and he will demand your attention for as many hours a day as you can manage. Can you put down your work or set aside hobbies and housework so you can interact with your bird every day?

Are you willing to forego long vacations or even overnight visits to keep your bird company? Or are you willing to find and pay a bird sitter to watch your budgie when you

do go away? Or do you have a trusted friend or neighbor who likes birds and would be willing to come by each day to spend time with your bird and refresh his food and water?

A hand-tamed budgie will want a lot of your time and attention, and he will reward you with years of companionship.

Once you've decided a bird is the pet for you, you will find a delightful companion in a budgie. And after you've seen how enjoyable one bird is, you may want two!

Are you prepared for the financial responsibilities of caring for a budgie? A safe, quality cage will cost more than the bird, although the cage should last for years. And you will be amazed at how many accessories you can buy to make your bird more comfortable or your cleaning efforts easier. You'll also have the ongoing expense of a high-quality food, as well as new toys and perches to replace those that become dirty and worn. One or two budgies are not expensive birds to maintain, but accidents and illnesses do happen, requiring veterinary visits and surprisingly large bills for such small birds. Can you budget for both the expected and the unexpected?

#### How Delicate Are Budgies?

All birds are relatively delicate compared with mammals. You need to be aware of the following physical characteristics before you purchase a budgie.

Budgies have complex respiratory systems that require the ribs to move in and out when they breathe. Holding a budgie too tightly will restrict his breathing and could lead to death, as could exposing him to any potentially toxic fumes, such as those created by household cleaners or cigarette smoke.

Their bones are hollow and fragile and contain extensions of the lungs, so a broken bone not only affects the bone but also leaves the lungs open to infections and bleeding.

Birds bleed easily around the bases of feathers that are erupting through the skin (called pin-feathers, blood feathers, or feather shafts). If these feathers are injured, the bleeding can sometimes be difficult to stop.

Birds also have fewer fat reserves to tide them over if they miss a meal or suffer minor ailments, and often they show signs of diseases only just before dying.

Budgies react wildly to sudden movements and even loud noises. Their typical reaction is to try to fly away from the disturbance, which can lead to deadly collisions with cage bars, toys, windows, or furniture.

The fact is that budgies are small, lightweight, relatively delicate pets who, at the same time, enjoy being handled and petted. Just keep this in mind: always handle your budgie gently, and avoid approaching his cage suddenly.

Will your neighbors tolerate a bird in your home? For that matter, are there local laws against keeping budgies? Some cities and states have passed laws that exclude all or most exotic pets, and budgies are still considered exotic in some places (even though they have been bred in captivity for a century and a half ). You probably won't have any problems, but if you live in a large city such as Chicago or New York City, it is best to check for recent changes in the laws.

Apartment complexes and condominium developments often exclude pets of all types on the basis that they are a potential bother to neighbors. Budgies have relatively soft voices for parrots, but they can still call and whistle fairly loudly, and this can carry. If you suspect there will be a noise problem, check with the owners or the management before making the investment in a pet that you may painfully have to give up later. Plainly put, responsible bird owners obey the law and respect their neighbors.

Do you or any other members of your family smoke? If so, a parrot isn't the pet for you. First, birds have highly efficient lungs that allow them to take in oxygen rapidly and process it more thoroughly than, for instance, a mammal does. As birds take in oxygen, they take in any other compounds in the air, including secondhand smoke. Exposure to smoke of any kind can lead to respiratory disease and early death. Pet birds are also negatively affected by the exposure to nicotine and other chemicals that remain on a smoker's hands.

When a smoker pets his or her bird, or when a bird perches on a smoker's finger, these toxins are transferred to the bird. The bird's feathers and feet become irritated, leading to highly destructive feather picking and intense foot chewing.

**Budgies and Kids** Do you have young children in the home? Budgies are good pets for children, but only under an adult's supervision.

These birds need to be fed twice a day, every day, which most children under twelve may not be able to do consistently without guidance. And you can expect only the most responsible child to change a budgie's cage papers regularly without prompting from an adult.

Safety is another concern. Children may accidentally injure a budgie, perhaps by grabbing him tightly or throwing him when surprised by the bird's quick nip or scratch. Talk with your child about how to hold a budgie, what kinds of behaviors to expect (like small nips or taps of the beak), and how to respond. But be prepared to always supervise playtime between children and budgies.

Budgies shouldn't be left alone with youngsters, but responsible older children can make good caretakers and playmates for birds such as these English budgies.

## Budgies and Other Pets

Do you share your home with other pets? If you have fish in an aquarium or perhaps a lizard in a terrarium, you'll have no problems. However, if you have cats, dogs, or even other pet birds, there is a potential for conflicts. Budgies cannot share their cages with larger birds, and even relatively small lovebirds and cockatiels may pick on budgies, pulling out feathers and trying to nip at their toes and eyes. Snakes are a no-no, of course, as most would regard a budgie as a great snack, and snakes escape from their cages often enough to simply not be safe to keep in the same house as a budgie.

These birds have been carefully introduced to these furry companions, who all got along nicely for this photograph. But always make sure your bird is supervised if you allow feather and fur interaction!

Dogs sometimes adapt to having a budgie around the house, and many will ignore a bird or even treat him with gentle respect. However, even the smallest breeds of dog (who are more likely to chase a hopping or low-flying budgie than larger breeds are) can kill a budgie with a single snap of the jaws or by a scratch. Some people have had success gradually introducing (and always supervising) dogs and budgies, but it certainly cannot be recommended without caution.

Cats are even more dangerous, any cat that deserves the name will look at a budgie as either prey or toy, and if the cat can reach him, the bird will be killed. Cats have sharp teeth and nails, all of which can wound a budgie with just a touch. And the bacteria carried by a cat's teeth and nails quickly produce infections that will kill most slightly wounded birds within a few days. Cats and budgies are a fatal combination.

Guinea pigs and rabbits may adapt to having a budgie around when both are free in a safe room, but they are clumsy enough to accidentally trample a budgie. Hamsters, rats, and mice may consider budgies prey--or at least worth a curious nibble that could have disastrous results. A curious budgie who is investigating a caged small mammal may become tangled in the bars of the cage or react in fright to a sudden movement in the cage, causing the bird to panic and inadvertently jump or fly into a wall, window, or furniture.

These warnings aren't meant to discourage you; they're just to give you a realistic picture of what pet bird ownership is like. Think carefully about how owning a bird will affect your household before rushing out to buy a budgie.

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## Chapter 3 – Selecting a Great Budgie

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Once you have decided that a budgie is the pet for you, it's easy to get caught up in the excitement and purchase the first budgie who catches your eye. Before you bring that budgie home, though, be sure you have thought about what you are really looking for in a pet bird. Color, gender, age, and health are just a few aspects to consider.

### Choosing a Color

A large pet store is sure to have an array of colored budgies, ranging from solid white to solid yellow or solid blue, with all shades of yellow, green, and blue in between. Does color make a difference in the quality of a pet? Probably not, as long as you plan to buy one of the common colors; some rare varieties have more health problems and may have shorter average life spans. It is highly unlikely, however, that any rare and problematic budgies will be available in your local pet store. Instead, you will find birds in the typical colors and shades, all of whom are similar in behavior, health, and longevity.

### Choosing the Sex

There are differences in behavior between the sexes of budgies, although none really makes one a better pet than the other. Males tend to be outgoing compared with many females, and they whistle and sometimes talk better. This is to be expected, since a male is constantly trying to woo a female to mate, and the quality of his calls certainly affects how a potential mate perceives his desirability. Males often form very close bonds with their owners, even to the point of trying to feed them.

Females form bonds with their owners that can be just as strong as those of males. Many females are not quite as vocal as males are, however, although they may still whistle well. Females can be taught to speak, but females are less likely to speak as clearly as males do. Of course, there are exceptions to every rule, and speaking ability is often the result of an individual owner's training efforts. Remember that any speaking budgie talks rapidly in a very high voice that is difficult to understand, even at its best.

Adult females sometimes lay eggs even when no male is present, and they will try to incubate these infertile eggs. It is also possible for a female budgie to become egg bound, a condition in which the egg is trapped inside the bird's cloaca. Causes can include insufficient muscle tone or a diet lacking in calcium and other minerals that allow a thick shell to form around the egg. An egg-bound bird is listless, sits fluffed in a

corner, and does not eat or drink. If you suspect egg binding, call your bird's veterinarian immediately; egg binding can be fatal.

What color of budgie you choose is a purely personal decision, as any healthy and well-handled budgie has the potential to be a great pet.

### One Budgie or Two?

If you are a first-time budgie owner, start by purchasing a single budgie. One bird will give you an idea of what it is like to have budgies as pets and whether you want to expand your bird family. Allow your first bird at least three or four months to become acclimated to you and your home and to undergo basic training and bonding. Once the first bird is fully bonded to you, it is okay to purchase a companion bird. Don't immediately put the second budgie (preferably a young bird) into the cage with the first one; instead, cage her separately near the first bird so the two have a few days or even weeks to get to know each other. Introduce them gradually, perhaps in a neutral room or on a new playgym, and only under your supervision. Female budgies are more aggressive than male budgies are, so never place two females together in the same cage. When you are deciding which sex to buy, just remember that if you put a male and a female together, you will get eggs, so two males may be the best pairing for pet budgies.

There aren't many distinguishing features between this male and female budgie other than size and cere color. Males may be more likely to learn to talk than females, but both can learn to bond with you, given enough time and attention.

### Where to Buy Your Bird

Most large pet stores always have at least a few budgies for sale, and some pet superstores may offer more than a dozen birds in a variety of colors. Pet stores that specialize in pet birds will offer you the best selection of all.

Not all pet stores are equal, and it is important to check the appearance of a store and the health of its birds before you consider buying a budgie there. Judge each store individually. Most shops are clean, but occasionally you will find one that doesn't meet even minimal standards. You have to make some allowances for the messy nature of birds, which is especially noticeable when a few birds are housed together in a store. If birds are overcrowded with no room for toys or to exercise, consider that a red flag. Because so many avian diseases are transmitted through the air, it is never safe to buy a budgie from a pet store that is questionably clean.

Ask to be allowed into the back of the store to see how the birds are fed and handled--good stores should let you see how they handle their birds. Ask the management and employees about budgies; do they really know about the birds, or do they give out bad

information or ignore you? The best stores often have friendly and helpful employees, and the worst have truly disagreeable employees. Be sure to ask about the exact ages of the birds being sold: if the budgies have not yet been weaned, you will have to hand-feed your bird yourself, which can endanger her health if you aren't experienced at hand-feeding.

All reputable pet stores will offer some type of guarantee that covers the health of the bird for at least a few days after she leaves the shop--certainly long enough for you to take her to a veterinarian for a general examination. Make sure the store will take the bird back if the veterinarian finds a problem.

Make sure your budgie is fully weaned and on an adult diet before you bring her home.

### Fledglings

Budgies mature quickly, and you should be certain the bird you choose is weaned before you buy her. A bird who is not fully weaned won't be able to eat the adult diet you offer her. At best, her development could be delayed; at worst, she could become sick and die.

Budgies typically wean when six to eight weeks old, but ask the breeder or store employee about the weaning status of your budgie, and make sure you see her actually eating adult food. Better yet, make arrangements to select your perfect pet bird and leave her at the pet store for one to two weeks before picking her up. This gives the store time to make sure the bird is weaned and allows you plenty of time to buy and set up the proper cage and accessories.

Pet stores aren't the only source for finding budgies. Reputable breeders also have healthy birds, and pet bird owners and bird clubs are excellent sources for recommendations. When you visit a breeder's home or aviary, look for cleanliness, toys in the cages, healthy food, and plenty of room in the cages for the budgies to hop and flutter about. Ask the breeder about his or her experience with budgies, and confirm that he or she will be available to answer any questions you have after you take your bird home. Budgies are also sometimes available for adoption from animal shelters or through bird rescue groups. See the appendix for a list of parrot rescue organizations.

### Find a Healthy Bird

Under no circumstances should you buy a budgie from a pet store or breeder's aviary where there are sick birds--the chances of infection spreading are too likely. Make sure the budgies are active, have bright and clean eyes, and are walking or fluttering around in the cages. They should not be sitting still in a corner with their heads hidden in their feathers unless it is their normal nap time. Ask to inspect individual birds while they're being held by a store employee so you can touch the birds and look carefully at all their

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