

BLUE-AND-GOLD MACAW CARE GUIDE

Ara ararauna · Know before you bring one home

ORIGIN
South America

SIZE
76–86 cm

WEIGHT
900–1,300 g

LIFESPAN
50–60+ years

NOISE
Extremely loud

TALKING
Good

Personality & behaviour

- Confident, playful, affectionate and emotionally demanding. Highly trainable and genuinely funny. The beak can snap a broom handle, and a boisterous adolescence arrives at three to five years.
- Eye-pinning, a fanned tail and flushed facial skin come before a bite — learn to read them. Expect adolescent testing bites and seasonal hormonal aggression. Do not pet below the neck, do not provide dark hiding places, and keep nights a full 12 hours; all three reduce hormonal behaviour.
- Use positive reinforcement only — never hit, shout at or frighten a bird for biting or vocalising.

Housing & cage setup

- Indoor cage minimum 200 × 150 × 200 cm; a walk-in flight of three to four metres is much closer to adequate. Bar spacing 25–38 mm in heavy-gauge stainless steel. Replace standard cage latches with escape-proof clasps — macaws open them.
- Very heavy natural-branch perches, 40–60 mm diameter, replaced as they are destroyed. Expect to supply fresh destructible wood every single day: chewing is a need, not a habit. Budget realistically for continual toy replacement.

Time, company & noise

- At least 4 hours out of the cage daily, with real flight or sustained wing-flapping exercise. A caged macaw predictably develops screaming, plucking and aggression.
- Among the loudest animals kept in any home — calls exceed 100 dB and carry more than a kilometre. Unsuitable for flats, townhouses, semi-detached homes or estates with noise rules. Noise is the single most common reason macaws are given up.
- Large destructible toys, foraging boxes, shower time and trick training. A macaw with nothing to destroy will destroy your home instead.
- Provide 10–12 hours of quiet, uninterrupted darkness on a predictable schedule. Sleep-deprived parrots become irritable, scream more and are more likely to pluck.

What to feed

- A complete large-parrot pellet as roughly half to 60% of intake.
- Macaws genuinely need more fat than other parrots: a daily allowance of palm nut, macadamia, walnut, brazil or almond — roughly 8–12 nuts a day for an adult, adjusted to weight.
- Generous fresh vegetables every day: butternut, carrot, peppers, broccoli, cooked sweet potato, dark leafy greens.
- Moderate fruit portions — papaya, mango, berries, apple without pips.
- Cooked beans, maize and whole grains.
- A cuttlebone or mineral block available at all times.
- Fresh water changed at least twice a day; macaws foul bowls quickly.
- Unlike every other species on this site, a healthy macaw's nut ration is food rather than a treat — but weigh the bird weekly and cut back at the first sign of gain. Red palm fruit or palm oil is traditionally used to support macaw plumage; discuss it with your avian vet before adding it.

Do not feed

- Avocado — every part of the plant, including guacamole.
- Chocolate and cocoa.
- Caffeine, alcohol and xylitol (sugar-free sweetener).
- Onion, garlic, chives and leeks.
- Fruit pips and stones: apple, pear, cherry, apricot, peach and plum.
- Raw or dried beans — all legumes must be thoroughly cooked.
- Rhubarb leaves.
- Salty, sugary, fried or processed human food.
- Dairy in more than a trace — birds cannot digest lactose.
- Mouldy or fermenting food, including fruit left in the bowl.
- Anything from your mouth, plate or fork — human saliva carries bacteria that kill birds.
- Grit. Parrots husk their own seed and grit can cause fatal impaction.
- Human medicines or supplements unless prescribed by an avian vet.

Health & what to watch

- Watch for proventricular dilatation disease (avian bornavirus), psittacosis, aspergillosis, foot and beak trauma, obesity, vitamin A deficiency and heavy-metal poisoning from unsafe cage materials.
- **Before you buy:** Ask the seller for the hatch date, the closed ring number, a DNA sex certificate and any disease screening already done. A seller who cannot answer those questions, or who will not let you watch the bird eat, is a seller to walk away from. Ask what the bird is currently eating, so you can keep it stable for the first fortnight.
- **Your first month:** Book a wellness examination in the first week, not just when something looks wrong. Quarantine a new bird for 30–45 days away from any birds you already keep, ideally in separate air space. Recommended screening: psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD), psittacosis (*Chlamydia psittaci*), polyomavirus and avian bornavirus.
- **Ongoing & human health:** Annual check-ups, moving to twice yearly for larger species over ten. Wing clipping is not routine care — discuss it first, because flight builds fitness, balance and confidence. Psittacosis passes to people as a flu-like illness or pneumonia: if you develop unexplained respiratory symptoms, tell your doctor you keep birds.

Who this species suits

- **First-time owners:** No. A first-time owner cannot safely or humanely meet a macaw's housing, noise and behavioural needs.
- **Experienced owners:** Suitable only with large-parrot experience, dedicated space and a written succession plan.
- **Families & children:** Not for households with small children. The bite risk is genuinely serious and the noise is beyond what most families expect.

Before you decide

- I have space for a walk-in flight or a room the bird can occupy.
- My neighbours and my housing rules can tolerate calls above 100 dB.
- I can supply fresh destructible wood and replacement toys every week.
- I have named who inherits this bird — it will likely outlive my ability to care for it.
- If several answers are “No”, this is not the right bird for you — and walking away is a good outcome.

Urgent — see an avian vet today

- Difficulty or open-mouth breathing
- Pronounced tail bobbing at rest
- Fluffed, quiet and sitting on the cage floor
- Collapse or severe weakness
- Bleeding that does not stop, including a broken blood feather
- Seizures or loss of balance
- Repeated vomiting or regurgitation
- Not eating, or noticeable weight loss
- Straining, a swollen abdomen, or a hen unable to pass an egg
- Sudden major change in droppings
- Any contact with a cat or dog, even a minor scratch
- Suspected poisoning, fumes or trauma
- Regurgitating onto people repeatedly — hormonal, and a welfare concern, not affection

Recommended avian specialist

- **Bryanston Avian, Exotic & Small Animals Clinic**
- 99 Grosvenor Road, Bryanston, Johannesburg
- 011 706 1381 · WhatsApp 061 533 9950 · info@baesac.co.za
- Not every vet treats birds. Find your nearest avian-experienced practice before you need one.



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