

BUDGIE CARE GUIDE

Melopsittacus undulatus · Know before you bring one home

ORIGIN Australia	SIZE 17–20 cm	WEIGHT 30–40 g	LIFESPAN 8–15+ years	NOISE Cheerful chatter	TALKING Very good
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Personality & behaviour

- Social, curious, highly trainable and capable of very large vocabularies. A budgie is a parrot, not décor: a solitary, cage-bound budgie is a bored and frustrated animal, and it usually shows in a shortened life.
- Watch the cere (the fleshy area above the beak): a male's blue cere turning brown can signal a testicular tumour, and a hen's cere turning crusty and thick may mean hormonal problems. Tail bobbing at rest, a fluffed posture or sleeping on the cage floor in a bird this small means see a vet today, not next week.
- Use positive reinforcement only — never hit, shout at or frighten a bird for biting or vocalising.

Housing & cage setup

- Minimum 80 × 45 × 50 cm for one or two birds, and length matters far more than height because budgies fly horizontally. A 120 cm long flight cage is a much better target. Bar spacing 10–12 mm, horizontal on at least two sides. Never a round cage.
- Natural branch perches of varying diameter (10–18 mm) — remove the plastic dowels that come with most cages. Add ladders, swings, shreddable toys, a shallow bathing dish and a cuttlebone. Skip mirrors for a single bird: they trigger regurgitation and frustration rather than company.

Time, company & noise

- Budgies do best kept in pairs or small groups. A single bird needs several hours of human company a day. Either way, allow 2–3 hours of out-of-cage flight daily in a bird-proofed room.
- Constant cheerful chatter rather than screaming — comfortably the most flat-friendly parrot on this list.
- Foraging toys, shreddable paper and palm, millet hidden in wrapped parcels, and target training. Budgies learn tricks quickly and enjoy it.
- 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 budgie-sized complete pellet as the foundation, converted gradually over weeks — never starve a bird onto pellets.
- If seed is fed, a measured 1–2 teaspoons of quality small-parakeet mix per bird per day, not a full bowl.
- Fresh greens daily: rocket, kale, broccoli florets, carrot tops, dandelion, spinach in moderation.
- Finely chopped or grated vegetables — budgies eat small pieces.
- Millet spray as a training reward only: roughly 2–3 cm per bird per week.
- A cuttlebone and an iodine or mineral block available at all times.
- Clean fresh water daily.
- A seed-only diet is the single biggest killer of pet budgies, through obesity, fatty liver, goitre and tumours. Convert gradually with an avian vet's guidance and weigh weekly — a budgie has no reserves, so a bird that stops eating during a rushed conversion can die within a day or two.

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 pits 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

- Budgies are highly prone to tumours (lipomas, testicular and kidney), obesity, iodine-deficiency goitre from all-seed diets, chronic egg-laying in hens, scaly-face mite and air-sac mite. A budgie on seed alone commonly lives about half as long as one fed properly.
- **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.

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
- A visible lump, or a male's blue cere turning brown

Who this species suits

- **First-time owners:** Yes — the best first parrot here, provided the owner commits to flight time, company and a diet beyond seed.
- **Experienced owners:** Endlessly rewarding, and the easiest species to keep as a properly social small flock.
- **Families & children:** Excellent for families with children old enough to be gentle and calm, roughly seven and up, always supervised.

Before you decide

- I will keep a pair, or give a single bird hours of company every day.
- I have a cage at least 80 cm long and a bird-proofed room for daily flight.
- I will move this bird onto vegetables and pellets, not just seed.
- I accept that a well-kept budgie may live twelve to fifteen years.
- If several answers are “No”, this is not the right bird for you — and walking away is a good outcome.

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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