

SENEGAL PARROT CARE GUIDE

Poicephalus senegalus · Know before you bring one home

ORIGIN
West Africa

SIZE
23–25 cm

WEIGHT
120–170 g

LIFESPAN
25–50 years

NOISE
Moderate

TALKING
Moderate

Personality & behaviour

- Playful, clever, observant and less needy than a conure or cockatoo. Senegals are comfortable entertaining themselves and are not natural screamers, which makes them one of the easier medium parrots to live with.
- Selective bonding is the defining behavioural issue. From sexual maturity at two to three years, a Senegal commonly picks one person and becomes aggressive toward others — lunging, biting and defending its chosen human. Prevent it deliberately: every household member should hand-feed treats, do short training sessions and handle the bird regularly from the first week. Eye-pinning and a stiff, lowered head are warnings.
- Use positive reinforcement only — never hit, shout at or frighten a bird for biting or vocalising.

Housing & cage setup

- Minimum 80 × 60 × 90 cm, larger preferred. Bar spacing 15–20 mm, with horizontal bars for climbing.
- Natural branch perches (15–25 mm), foraging toys, shreddable materials, destructible wood and a bathing dish. Stainless steel or bird-safe powder coating only.

Time, company & noise

- 2–4 hours out of the cage daily. More independent than most parrots, but the daily handling is what keeps a Senegal sociable rather than possessive.
- Moderate and intermittent — chirps, whistles and short squawks rather than sustained screaming. Realistically flat-compatible, which is rare in a parrot of this size.
- Foraging puzzles, shreddables, destructible wood and training. Senegals are content to work alone at a puzzle, which makes enrichment easy to provide.
- 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 pellet as roughly 60–70% of intake.
- Fresh vegetables and leafy greens daily, especially orange and dark green ones for vitamin A: butternut, carrot, red pepper, kale, broccoli.
- Small portions of fruit and cooked whole grains.
- Cooked legumes in measured amounts.
- Nuts and seeds only as training rewards — one or two small pieces a day.
- A cuttlebone and clean fresh water daily.
- Senegals put on weight quietly and are prone to vitamin A deficiency on seed-heavy diets, which shows up as recurring sinus and respiratory problems. Keep the fresh vegetable portion generous and the nut ration small, and weigh weekly.

Do not feed

- Sunflower-based seed mixes as a staple.
- 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

- Poicephalus parrots are notably susceptible to aspergillosis, a fungal respiratory disease — ventilation and clean, dry housing matter. Also watch for obesity, vitamin A deficiency, PBFD and sudden behaviour or appetite changes.
- **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
- Voice change, wheezing or laboured breathing — Senegals are prone to fungal respiratory disease

Who this species suits

- **First-time owners:** A reasonable first medium parrot, provided the new owner actively prevents one-person bonding from the start.
- **Experienced owners:** An easy, characterful companion that fits well into a household with other commitments.
- **Families & children:** Suitable for families where everyone will handle the bird regularly. In a family where only one person interacts with it, a Senegal will very likely become aggressive toward the others.

Before you decide

- Every person in my home will handle and train this bird, not just me.
- I can give 2–4 hours of out-of-cage time daily.
- I can keep housing clean, dry and well ventilated to reduce fungal risk.
- I accept a commitment that may reach fifty 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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