

ORIGIN	SIZE	WEIGHT	LIFESPAN	NOISE	TALKING
West & Central Africa	30–36 cm	400–550 g	40–60+ years	Moderate but piercing	Exceptional

Personality & behaviour

- Highly intelligent, observant and naturally cautious. Greys are neophobic: new objects, new people and changes to routine can trigger real fear. They bond deeply, often to one person, and they remember. Famous talkers — but never buy one expecting speech.
- Feather plucking usually starts on the chest, thighs and under the wings. Growling, pinned eyes and tight feathers mean fear — back off and never force handling. Watch for one-person bonding turning into aggression toward everyone else, and for night thrashing.
- Use positive reinforcement only — never hit, shout at or frighten a bird for biting or vocalising.

Housing & cage setup

- Cage minimum 100 × 75 × 120 cm; a 120 × 90 cm footprint is far better. Rectangular only — never round or tapered. Bar spacing 19–22 mm, horizontal on at least two sides for climbing.
- Four to six perches of varying diameter (12–25 mm) in untreated natural hardwood; discard the plastic dowels supplied with most cages, and never use sandpaper perches. Stainless steel or bird-safe powder coating only — no galvanised or zinc-plated wire. Place the cage against a wall, away from the kitchen and direct sun.

Time, company & noise

- 3–5 hours out of the cage daily, including 1–2 hours of direct interaction and training. A grey left alone all day, every day, very commonly develops feather plucking and phobic behaviour. This is the species most damaged by a working household with no plan.
- Moderate in volume but sharp and penetrating. Greys mimic household sounds — microwaves, smoke alarms, phones — relentlessly and accurately. Usually workable in a townhouse; check body-corporate rules first.
- Foraging is not optional: aim for at least half the daily ration to be worked for out of puzzle feeders, wrapped parcels and foraging boxes. Rotate toys weekly, offer destructible wood daily, and train with positive reinforcement — greys need a job.
- 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. A separate, smaller sleep cage in a quiet room helps greatly in a busy household.

What to feed

- A complete formulated pellet as roughly 60–70% of intake.
- Dark leafy greens every day — kale, pak choi, rocket, dandelion — the best practical calcium source.
- Orange and red vegetables for vitamin A: butternut, carrot, cooked sweet potato, red pepper.
- Cooked legumes, quinoa and brown rice in small portions.
- A cuttlebone or mineral block available at all times.
- A maximum of three to six nuts a day, used as training rewards — almond or walnut, never salted.
- Clean fresh water daily.
- African greys are prone to low blood calcium. Greens and a cuttlebone beat a calcium syrup: do not add calcium or vitamin supplements on top of a pelleted diet without your avian vet's direction, because over-supplementation damages the kidneys. Natural daylight through an open window, or an avian UV-B lamp, helps the bird use the calcium it eats.

Do not feed

- High-fat seed mixes as a staple — the direct cause of most grey calcium problems.
- 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

- Hypocalcaemia is a documented, grey-specific risk: weakness, falling from the perch and seizures in birds kept on seed. Also watch for aspergillosis, vitamin A deficiency, PBFD, feather-destructive behaviour and, in older birds, atherosclerosis.
- **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
- Falling from the perch, weakness or seizure — suspect low calcium

Who this species suits

- **First-time owners:** Not recommended. Greys punish inconsistency and need an owner who can already read parrot body language.
- **Experienced owners:** An outstanding match — if you can commit to decades of routine, foraging and training.
- **Families & children:** Best in calm households with older children. Not suited to toddlers or chaotic schedules: greys startle easily, and a frightened grey bites hard.

Before you decide

- I can give 3–5 hours of daily out-of-cage time for the next forty years.
- I can keep routines predictable and introduce change slowly.
- I can afford avian-vet care, quality food and constant toy replacement.
- I have named who will take this bird if I cannot keep it.
- 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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