



# Grey Parrots

## AAV Companion Bird Care Series

Two species of grey parrots, native to Africa, are commonly found in captivity: the Congo (*Psittacus erithacus erithacus*) with a bright red tail and the Timneh (*Psittacus erithacus timneh*) with duller coloration. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. Outside of the United States, importation and smuggling remain major conservation issues and continue to result in disease and inhumane treatment. High quality companion birds are available from reputable breeders, rescue organizations, and avian sanctuaries. Research has shown that grey parrots are capable of actual reasoning and verbal communication (beyond just mimicking). There is speculation that an imprinted male may have difficulty relating to a female bird. The current aviculture trend is to allow chicks to remain with the parents for the first few weeks of life and then be removed for hand-feeding until weaning. This parental influence may also help reduce the incidence of behavioral problems later in life.

## Vital Statistics

**Total length:** 13 inches (33 cm)

**Body weight:**

Congo: 300-550 g

Timneh: 275-375 g

**Age of sexual maturity:** 3-6 years

**Typical life span:** 80 years

## Common Disorders of Grey Parrots

- Feather destructive behavior, such as feather picking
- Respiratory diseases
- Oral abscesses
- Malnutrition, including hypocalcemia syndrome
- Choanal atresia
- Cardiovascular disease
- Avian bornavirus infection
- Chlamydiosis
- Reproductive disorders (egg binding, cloacal protrusion)
- Psittacine beak and feather disease (PBFD)
- Other bacterial, viral and fungal infections

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery.

For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting [www.AAV.org](http://www.AAV.org) and click on "Find-a-Vet."

## What to Expect from Your Grey Parrot

Greys are extremely intelligent and alert; some may be considered high-strung. Selective breeding for calmness is being initiated by some aviculturists. Like many parrots, these birds may form an inappropriate pair bond with individual family members, which may lead to a variety of undesirable behaviors, including aggression towards others. This may become exacerbated during the breeding season. They are believed to be emotionally sensitive and may be prone to remember negative experiences and associate these with certain people and objects. Grey parrots have the greatest potential among common pet bird species for a range of vocalizations and an increasing vocabulary throughout their lives. This mimicking ability can include sounds like dripping water, flushing toilets, squeaky doors, coughs or sneezes, and answering machines.

## Is Your Grey Parrot a Male or a Female?

In most grey parrots, it is difficult to distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, DNA sexing, followed by endoscopy may be used for sex determination. Greys choose their mates and bond for life. They are prolific breeders.

## What Do Grey Parrots Do All Day?

Because of their high intelligence, greys require a stimulating and enriching environment. Toys should be rotated frequently and include puzzle-types and toys designed to be shredded or destroyed. Toys should be "bird safe" and free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects, or easily consumed components. Most parrots can be taught to enjoy foraging, where food and treats are hidden in puzzle toys or other objects, such as paper cups or folded paper packets. This is an excellent way to prevent boredom. Socialized grey parrots benefit from inclusion in a busy family's activities in a variety of situations.

## What Should You Feed Your Grey Parrot?

For a long, healthy life, grey parrots should be fed a high quality, toxin-free, formulated diet, preferably certified organic. Supplementation may include chopped organic vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.

## Are Grey Parrots Tame?

Young, hand-tamed greys adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well-adjusted to these events. Non-socialized adult birds are less inclined to accept environmental changes.

## How to Identify Your Bird

Grey parrots occasionally escape outdoors, and permanent identification may help to return birds to their owners. One method used to permanently identify your bird is implantation of a microchip, as is performed in other pets. Some birds already have leg bands for identification. Although closed leg bands seldom cause injury, some owners prefer to have them removed.

## Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds allowed free flight benefit from exercise and mental stimulation; however, free flying birds may be injured by hitting windows or ceiling fans or hurt by encountering toxic materials. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight, but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Clipping must be done carefully and tailored to each individual to prevent flight and injuries from falling.

## What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Grey Parrot



## How to Keep Your Grey Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- Take your grey parrot to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then at least once every 6-12 months for examinations.
- Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction, and foraging opportunities.
- Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free, formulated diet with fresh chopped fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Provide clean, fresh, uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently. Greys can be trained to use a water bottle.
- Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath, or gently spraying with clean warm water daily if possible.
- Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

## Housing for Your Grey Should:

- Be as large as possible (minimum: 2' x 3' x 2' [60 x 90 x 60 cm]).
- Recommended bar spacing: 3/4 inch to 1.5 inch.
- Be clean, secure, and safe.
- Be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain toxic metals, such as zinc).
- Contain variably sized perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free wood or branches.
- Have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- Have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- Be offered opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight, and exercise.

## Essential Safety Tips

Greys are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

- Ceiling fans
- Stove tops with hot burners, pans, or skillets
- Fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- Sandpaper-covered perches
- Tobacco and cigarette smoke
- Chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- Toxic houseplants
- Pesticides or chemical cleaners
- Easily dismantled toys
- Dogs, cats, and unsupervised children
- Sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini blinds, or linoleum)
- Plug-in air fresheners
- Scented candles



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