



# Lovebirds

## AAV Companion Bird Care Series

Lovebirds (*Agapornis* spp.) are small colorful parrots with short tails and relatively broad bodies. Free-ranging birds are found in central and southern Africa. The species most commonly seen in captivity are peach-faced, masked, and Fischer's lovebirds. Although color mutations are highly valued by some aviculturists, the inbreeding required to produce unusual colors has resulted in some negative genetic disorders, including decreased disease resistance, reduced longevity, and hatching defects.

## What to Expect from Your Lovebird

Lovebirds are intelligent, relatively nondestructive birds that can make entertaining companions for families. They are mischievous birds that like to hide, such as under paper, in shirt pockets, or in long hair. They are generally poor talkers, but they can easily learn tricks. Single lovebirds in the home can be relatively quiet and may be affectionate, although some adult birds may be nippy. In a colony situation, however, lovebirds do not live up to their name, as they are territorial and may kill new additions or weaker birds.

## Is Your Lovebird a Male or a Female?

In most lovebird species it is difficult to reliably distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, DNA sexing, followed by endoscopy may be used for sex determination. Lovebirds are prolific breeders in captivity.

## What Should You Feed Your Lovebird?

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

## Are Lovebirds Tame?

Young, hand-raised lovebirds are calm and 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. Parent-raised birds are more difficult to tame, but consistent, gentle behavior modification techniques used in larger parrots will result in a bird that is more tolerant of handling.

## What Do Lovebirds Do All Day?

Because of their high intelligence, lovebirds 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. They 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 lovebirds benefit from inclusion in a busy family's activities in a variety of situations.



## Vital Statistics

**Body length:** 5-7 inches (12-18 cm)

**Body weight:** 40-60 g

**Age of sexual maturity:** 8-12 months

**Typical life span:** 12 years

## Common Disorders of Lovebirds

- Feather plucking and self-mutilation
- Bacterial infections, including chlamydiosis
- Circovirus
- Fungal infections
- Reproductive disease
- Yolk Stroke

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."

## How to Identify Your Bird

Lovebirds 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 Lovebird



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

- Take your lovebird 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. Lovebirds 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 Lovebird Should:

- Be as large as possible.
- 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

Lovebirds 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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