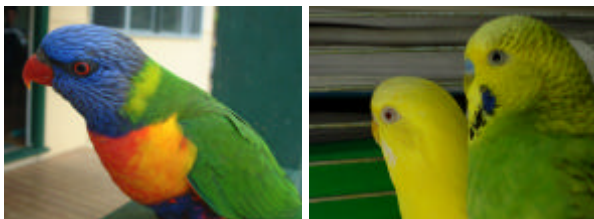


Bird Health Briefs:



**CHOOSING AN
AFRICAN GREY
PARROT**

General Information

The African Grey (*Psittacus erithacus*) from central Africa, is a highly intelligent bird commonly encountered in captivity. This elegant medium-sized bird is entirely grey with a strikingly red short blunt tail. The African Grey has a charming personality and is recognised as one of the best talkers amongst all the pet birds. With this extraordinary ability to imitate, some African Greys develop extensive vocabularies of words, songs, verse, whistles, sneezing, coughing and electronic sounds such as telephones and microwave ovens. Some individuals, especially if wild or improperly socialised, may have unacceptable vocalisations. The sound that a frightened, defensive or timid African Grey will make is a characteristic, loud growl. African Greys bond readily, often with one member of the family or specifically with males or females. This bond occasionally leads to aggression towards others. These handsome, good natured birds make excellent companions and family pets. Most are generally interactive and affectionate. They will often persistently solicit petting and head scratches. African Greys are very playful and enjoy climbing and chewing. It is important to keep these smart birds busy as boredom can lead to problems such as feather picking. Providing non-toxic, washed, fresh branches and pet-safe toys will afford many hours of entertainment and exercise for this inquisitive pet.

There are 2 types of African Grey parrots, the Congo African Grey and the smaller duller coloured Timneh African Grey parrot which has a maroon coloured tail.

Purchasing an African Grey Parrot

African Greys may be purchased from a pet shop or, better, a reputable breeder. When selecting an

African Grey, try to choose a young bird as it may be easier to tame and train. Older, wild, colony or parent raised birds may prove difficult to tame. Hand raised babies often make better pets since they have been completely socialised with humans. Young birds are easier to tame and adapt readily to new environments and situations. Importantly having a captive-bred bird also means that the wild bird population is not threatened further by catching and importing wild birds. This practice is bad both for the bird captured and transported as well as for the dwindling population left in the wild. Your new bird should be exposed early to different events (young and old people, males and females, other pets, car trips, visits to the vet, etc.) to help promote a calm, well-adjusted pet. The lively, alert bird that is not easily frightened is more likely a healthy bird. After purchasing your new bird, have it examined by your vet.

Veterinary care

African Greys require regular, routine veterinary health check-ups. Your vet can perform a physical examination, grooming (beak, nail or feather trim) and laboratory tests as needed. During these semi-annual check-ups, health, nutritional and maintenance issues can be identified and addressed. Veterinary check-ups help prevent disease and will aid in the maintenance of a long lasting, healthy relationship between you and your bird.

Colour

Mature

- in general the body feathers are light grey, the wing feathers dark grey, and tail feathers red

- iris (the coloured part of the eye) is pale yellow
- legs grey

Immature

- tail feathers dark red towards tip
- iris is grey
- legs darker grey and smoother

Sexing

Mature

- generally no reliable external sex differences
- experienced breeders recognise subtle size and colour variations between sexes

Weight: average 12 - 19 ounces (350 - 550 grams)

Size: average 13.5 inches (33 cm) in length

Life span: 20 - 25 years (maximum 65 years)

Diet: consult your vet or see the diet sheet in this series

Breeding: sexual maturity at 3 - 6 years, prolific breeders require lots of space

Brood size: 2 - 4 eggs hatch in 17 - 31 days, young leave the nest in 9 - 10 weeks

Cage: minimum 2 ft x 3 ft x 4 ft (60 cm x 90 cm x 120 cm)