



Lovebirds

Agapornis sp

Lovebirds are small sociable parrots originating from Africa. They are not the most talkative of birds, but can be taught to make different sounds, and can be very interactive with humans. Ideally, all birds should be paired up with a same species, opposite sex bird for lifetime companionship.

Most Lovebirds are sexually monomorphic, meaning that they can only be definitively sexed by DNA testing from a blood sample or feather pluck. Only the Abyssinian lovebird, the Madagascar lovebird, and the black-collared lovebird are sexually dimorphic, meaning that they can be sexed visually. They can live 10-15 years in captivity.

Diet

In the wild, these birds eat a wide variety of fruits, vegetables, grasses and seeds. It is however, difficult to replicate this diet in captivity as many birds can be notoriously fussy when fed a traditional bird seed mix, picking out the parts they like best (which are usually not the most nutritious!). Feeding a good quality complete pellet diet is the best way to ensure your lovebird has the best balance of nutrients. Leafy greens can also be provided as part of the diet.

Treats can be given to provide interest and for training, including small pieces of oranges, apples, corn on the cob, or grated carrot, but these should form no more than 10% of the total diet.

Grit will provide additional minerals and aid with digestion of food. Supplementation with a vitamin and mineral balancer is advised if a seed diet is fed.

Water

Water should always be available both for drinking, and in a shallow saucer for bathing. This should be changed daily.

Accommodation requirements

- Ideally lovebirds will be happiest in a spacious aviary set up. In addition to the flying area, a sleeping area should be provided. Perches can be placed at varying heights around the enclosure with branches of different diameters providing the most natural set up.
- If an aviary is not an option, lovebirds may be housed in a cage set up, although ideally the cage should only be used for housing the bird at night or when unsupervised. They can be tamed as individuals but generally are best as a small group. Lovebirds can be aggressive to each other and introductions should be performed carefully. A cage set up should also be as spacious as possible, and placed out of direct sunlight and draughts. It should be situated away from any item that may give off toxic fumes, such as non-stick cooking utensils, which can release lethal fumes when heated. It is similarly important to ensure that the cage is made out of zinc-free materials as zinc is also very toxic to birds.
- A variety of branches can be placed as perches as in an aviary set up, and different toys should be added and changed regularly to entertain birds. It is however, important to bear in mind that many pet shop toys can be easily demolished, so only sturdy toys



should be used. If planning to be out of the house for a long time, it is also a good idea to leave a radio program on at a low volume to give the birds some stimulation.

- Free flight is an essential requirement and birds should be given the opportunity for exercise daily. It is however, important to ensure that the room they are allowed to fly around is totally secure with all windows, doors and chimneys blocked off, heaters and fans turned off and any potentially poisonous house plants removed. If started young, birds can be easily trained to perch on a finger and returned to the cage.
- The cage or aviary should be cleaned out at least once a week to help prevent disease and a suitable disinfectant used.
- Ultraviolet lighting is important for birds, being required both for natural behaviour and calcium metabolism. Specific bird lamps are available and have recognised health benefits.
- If planning to be out of the house for a long time, it is also a good idea to leave a radio program on at a low volume to give the birds some stimulation.

Signs of ill health

- A healthy lovebird will be bright and alert with clear eyes and nostrils, shiny feathers and a clean vent. It is important to become familiar with your lovebird's normal behaviour and droppings, in order that signs of illness can be noticed at an early stage. Beak and nails should also be checked regularly in case trimming is required
- Birds will often not show obvious signs of illness until they are very sick, so any changes in breathing, discharges from the eyes or nostrils, changes in droppings or general "fluffed up" appearance should be taken seriously, and a vet consulted as soon as possible.
- Feather plucking – this can be a skin problem, behavioural issue or underlying disease and an in-depth investigation is generally necessary to determine the cause.
- Respiratory disease – there are various respiratory problems which can affect lovebirds, which can progress quickly and in some cases also be transmitted to people so it is important to investigate any changes in breathing as soon as possible.

Breeding

- Lovebirds can try to breed in captivity and even mixed species can breed together.
- Lovebirds can carry material over their backs between the wings when trying to build a nest.

Insurance

- Unfortunately there is no NHS for birds and many conditions can be ongoing and require a number of diagnostic tests, leading to a financial strain which would be removed by insurance.

The Exotic Animal and Wildlife service offers

- All our vets are very experienced in avian medicine and surgery and can offer your pet a high quality standard of veterinary care



- All birds are hospitalised in appropriate temperature controlled, individually ventilated enclosures.
- First opinion consultations
- For the more unusual and complex cases you can be referred to us
- For emergencies, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, please ring our veterinary hospital on 0131-6507650