

Safety Precautions for Birdkeepers

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The following list of safety precautions does not cover every possible danger to birds, but the most common dangers are listed here. Add any precautions that might be unique to your home situation and print it for your bird sitter.

***FOODS** that are dangerous to birds include avocado, guacamole, chocolate, cocoa, alcohol, caffeine, the pits of apricots, peaches, plums, prunes, and seeds of the cherimoya fruit, as well as foods containing large amounts of salt, sugar, grease, preservatives, artificial coloring, and other additives. Obvious dangers such as moldy foods and under-cooked or raw meat should be avoided. Parrots should be fed the same quality of food that is suitable for human infants.

***PTFE** treated products, such as Teflon and other name brands of non-stick cookware kill birds by releasing odorless, deadly gases when overheated. PTFE is used in some space heaters, ranges, ovens, stove-top burner bibs or liners, heat lamps, irons, griddles, bread makers, woks, waffle makers, electric skillets, crock pots, popcorn poppers, coffee makers, roasters, curling irons, hair dryers, and more. Check labels before purchase.

***SELF CLEANING OVENS** use extremely high heat to burn off oven debris, and in the process create toxic fumes that can harm or kill parrots.

***COOKING BAGS**, especially those treated with PTFE emit harmful fumes during cooking that kill birds. Any substance that releases smoke and/or fumes when heated should be avoided in bird homes.

***KITCHENS**, especially when cooking is in progress, are unsafe for birds. The obvious hazards of open flames, hot ranges, open pots of hot food or boiling water are as deadly as smoke or other toxic fumes, even from dishwashers if a plastic item falls into a heating element during the dry cycle.

***GRIT** is not necessary for parrots and can cause impaction of the digestive system.

***IMPORTED CERAMIC CROCKS** often contain toxic metals that can leach into bird food and water. Stainless steel, Pyrex and other glass is safer.

***HALOGEN LIGHT FIXTURES** such as torchier-style floor lamps create extreme heat and can kill birds that land on them. Choose only bird-safe light fixtures for bird homes.

***LITTER** made of walnut shells or corn cobs can cause life-threatening impaction if ingested by birds. They also harbor fungal spores when soiled or wet. Newspaper is safer.

***METALS** such as lead, zinc, copper, and iron can cause metal toxicosis if ingested by birds. Some sources are house keys, (especially gold colored keys), galvanized wire, lead-based paints, metallic paints, paints containing zinc, linoleum, vinyl mini-blinds, foil from champagne and wine bottles, lead weights, bells with lead clappers, stained glass, some improperly-glazed ceramics, costume jewelry, mirror backing, copper pennies, zinc oxide, artist paints containing cadmium, and cardboard or paper with high gloss inks. Aviary wire treated with zinc is also dangerous.

***QUIK-STOP** and other styptic products should never be applied to avian skin. They are safe for bleeding toenails when broken or cut too short, but they destroy skin. For broken or pulled blood feathers, either cornstarch or flour are safer. Aloe gel can be applied first to help the flour or cornstarch to adhere to the wound and to help with pain and healing.

***CATS, DOGS, FERRETS** (and many other pets) are a danger to birds. The slightest cat scratch can infect birds with Pasteurella bacteria and immediate vet treatment is required to save the bird's life. Never allow birds to interact with ANY pet without close supervision.

***FLEA COLLARS AND SPRAYS** emit toxins into the air and should not be used in bird homes. Lice shampoo also contains dangerous toxins and should never used on birds.

***PESTICIDE SPRAYS, NO-PEST STRIPS, AND FOGGERS** poison the air and can kill birds. Safer solutions are roach traps, ant bait, and other solid insect poisons that can be safely secured in the back of cabinets and other areas that are inaccessible to birds.

***STICKY STRIPS** for flying insects should always be enclosed in old cages or other containers accessible to insects but out of the reach of birds and other pets. Citrus oil or peanut butter can be used to safely remove sticky substances from feathers.

***WING CLIPS** should be checked on the first day of each month to prevent flight-related accidents. Wing-clipped birds can often fly well enough to escape so they should be protected by a harness, leash, or carrier when taken outside.

***TRANSPARENT AND REFLECTIVE SURFACES** like glass windows doors, and mirrors should be shown to flighted birds. Many birds can be trained to avoid large expanses of glass by repeatedly holding the bird on your hand and imitating flight toward the glass and then lightly pressing their beak, feet, and body against the surfaces. Decals can be used as a visible reminder.

***CEILING FANS** should not be used in homes of flighted birds.

***OTHER DANGERS** to birds are open windows and doors, hot pots and stove burners, open containers of water (sinks, toilets, tubs, boiling water), poisonous or thorny houseplants, electrical wires, medication, insect bait traps, and many other toxic substances.

***TOYS**, both new and used, should be cleaned and examined for loose parts that could lodge in a bird's throat. Loose strings and threads can trap and cut off circulation to necks, wings, legs, and toes. Use only stainless steel (not zinc) "quick links" as toy fasteners and never use strings, chains or ropes long enough to wrap around a birds' neck or other body parts.

***WOOD SHAVINGS** such as cedar and redwood are toxic to birds and should not be used in cages, aviaries, or nestboxes. Newspaper is a safer cage liner and pine or aspen shavings are safer nestbox substrate.

***PRESSURE TREATED LUMBER**, conventional plywood, and particle board contain a variety of toxic substances. Untreated pine boards are a safer choice.

***HOUSEPLANTS** and fertilizer including "fertilizer spikes" can poison birds so they should be kept out of their reach. Some of the most common poisonous houseplants are azalea, oleander, castor bean, sago palm, yew plants, dieffenbachia (dumb cane), asparagus fern, daffodils, flower bulbs, mistletoe, poinsettia, philodendron, and potato sprouts or "eyes". Choose only non-poisonous plants for bird homes.

***CIGARETTES, CIGARS, PIPES, AND OTHER SMOKING SUBSTANCES** should never be used in air space shared by birds. Passive inhalation of smoke, including smoke from burning incense, damages the sensitive avian respiratory system, eyes and skin. Nicotine can settle on perches and other cage surfaces and cause the self-mutilation of feet and legs in sensitive birds, especially Amazon parrots.

***ESSENTIAL OILS** and potpourri oils should never be used in the breathing space of parrots. Perfume, hairspray, and other aerosolized grooming products can damage the avian respiratory system.

***AIR FRESHENERS**, including plug-in air fresheners and scented sprays are considered unsafe. Bird deaths from using Febreze in the home have been reported so until new research proves it safe, do not use it in bird homes. To safely freshen the air, simmer spices like cinnamon, cloves, vanilla, and citrus rinds and provide fresh outdoor air whenever possible.

***SCENTED CANDLES** release toxins when burned, so only unscented candles should be used in bird homes. (Be aware of the open flame). Beeswax candles are generally safe and unscented unless they are imported and contain lead wicks.

***CARPET POWDERS AND SPRAYS** such as Carpet Fresh, as well as similar treatments for upholstery (like Febreze), often contain toxins which are dispersed into the air when they are vacuumed so they should never be used in bird homes. Carpets can be cleaned safely with solutions of water and baking soda, vinegar, or Grapefruit Seed Extract.

***CLEANING AND DISINFECTING PRODUCTS** like pine oil, ammonia, mold and mildew cleaners, toilet bowl cleaners, drain cleaners, furniture polish, oven cleaners, dishwasher detergents, furniture polish, car cleaning products, and laundry products, including bleach, can irritate or burn the skin, eyes and respiratory tract of birds when used in their air space. Spray starch is also toxic to birds.

***HOME IMPROVEMENT PRODUCTS** that create fumes include fresh paint, new carpet, drapes, furniture and flooring that uses toxic glues. The outgassing of toxic chemicals from new furnishings, paints, solvents, adhesives, various finishes, and other building materials are sometimes described as the "new smell" and can damage the avian respiratory system.

***MEDICATION** and natural remedies containing tea tree oil, which contains the oil of the melaleuca tree, as well as all over-the-counter medications should be kept out of the reach of parrots.

***MOLD** on food or in the air is dangerous to parrots. Aspergillus mold can cause the deadly disease, aspergillosis. It can grow on improperly handled and stored foods, especially grains such as corn. Excessive moisture in bathrooms promotes the growth of various molds in homes.

***CARBON MONOXIDE** is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas produced by furnaces and other heaters. Birds in poorly ventilated, heated areas are at high risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. It robs the blood of oxygen and can be particularly harmful to animals and humans with heart ailments when inhaled at levels often found indoors.

***DRY CLEANED CLOTHING** should be aired outside or in an airspace not shared by birds until there is no remaining odor. The chemical "perc" (perchloroethylene) causes cancer in lab animals.

***MOTHBALLS** and moth-repellent cakes and crystals contain paradichlorobenzene. It also is found in toilet disinfectants and in deodorizers, and it causes cancer in lab animals.

***DISEASE EXPOSURE** should be avoided by quarantining all new birds from your existing flock or companion birds for one to three months. Taking birds to pet stores, bird fairs, swap shops and other bird gatherings can expose them to deadly, incurable diseases.

***HUMAN SALIVA** contains pathogens that are deadly to birds. Never allow a bird to place its beak in your mouth or nose, nor to "clean your teeth".

***CLEANLINESS** is important to the prevention of bacterial infections. Wash your hands frequently when working with birds and preparing their food and dishes.

***BOARDING BIRDS** with other birds of unknown health status is an unnecessary risk to healthy birds. It is safer to have a friend or relative come into your home or keep your birds in their home during your absence.

***EMERGENCY INFORMATION AND INSTRUCTIONS** should be left with your caregivers when you are away. Leave your vet's contact information as well as hotline numbers near the phone and advise your caregiver about potential emergencies and what to do.

***ALERTS** and warnings about newly discovered dangers such as new products that endanger birds are available on the BirdSafe E-list. Subscribe at www.birdsafe.com