THE BUDGIE ACADEMY

BUDGIES FOR BEGINNERS

SCIENCE-BACKED FUNDAMENTALS FOR THE BEGINNER BUDGIE PERSON



by Dr. Amy Zhao



Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter I: What Is A Budgie?

Chapter II: Are Budgies Right For You?

Chapter III: Getting A Budgie

Chapter IV: Choosing The Right Cage

Chapter V: Diet

Chapter VI: Grooming

Chapter VII: Behavior

Conclusion

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Budgie Academy!

When I first decided to start posting about my budgies online, it was purely out of my love for them. However, I quickly realized that budgie people everywhere were struggling to find reliable sources of information on how to care for their budgies. New information, old information, even completely made-up information was everywhere, making it impossible for new budgie people to make the right choices for their budgies.

My name is Dr. Amy Zhao, and I've spent twelve years in the animal science field learning from the world's leading experts in parrot care. Most importantly, I'm a longtime budgie person who has experienced many of the issues that you might face in your journey and have found the science-based solutions that work to solve those issues effectively.

I created The Budgie Academy as the go-to place to get definitive, clear, confident answers for all of your budgie questions so you can spend less time sifting through wrong information, feeling confused about your budgies, and more time feeling confident and enjoying their company.



Your guide to confident, science-backed budgie care starts here.

-Dr. Amy Zhao

CHAPTER I

What Is A Budgie?

A Unique Biology

Hailing from the desert and semi-arid regions of Australia, budgerigars (budgies for short) are small grass parakeets that have evolved in fascinating ways to tolerate their harsh native environment. Although our pet budgies live in relative luxury compared to their wild counterparts, they still retain their natural instincts and specialized biology. By understanding some basic science behind the species, you can learn a great deal about your bird's needs and behaviors.

The budgie's Latin name, *Melopsittacus undulatus*, describes both their melodic vocalization and the wave-like black barring that covers their head and back. The budgie's natural habitat is highly unpredictable. Food and water are scarce. Wild budgies travel in flocks and family groups across vast distances, chasing rainfall tens of miles away in search of grass seed. These flocks can so efficiently sense rain that some indigenous groups of Australia would follow them to locate water many miles away. When flocks from multiple areas sense incoming rain, they gather to form larger flocks that can be thousands of budgies strong.

As a result of their highly unpredictable habitat, budgies evolved as "opportunistic breeders". This means that rather than breeding year-round or having a designated breeding season, budgies spend most of their time in their non-breeding state to conserve resources and rapidly activate their breeding behavior in response to the arrival of the short-lived favorable conditions suitable for breeding.



BUDGIES ARE EVOLVED FOR FLOCK LIFE!

Males and females form pairs and identify tree hollows as nest sites. A female will clean the hollow out with her beak and feet before laying 3-8 eggs. She incubates these eggs for about 3 weeks while her male partner forages for food outside, returning to feed her by regurgitating from his crop (the sac where food goes after it's swallowed).

When the eggs hatch, both parents work hard to raise their young. Over several weeks, the chicks will grow and practice flapping until they are large enough to fledge from their nest around 4-5 weeks old. After fledging, they follow their parents as a family group for several weeks, observing and learning flight skills, key behaviors, and vocal patterns before becoming a fully independent adult bird within the flock. When they begin to reach sexual maturity at a few months old and they encounter the right environmental conditions, they will restart the cycle with a mate of their own.

Why is this important?

There are about 400 species of parrots, all coming from extremely different areas of the world. It's a common misconception that all parrots are the same, and that they should all receive the same exact diet and housing. In reality, each species evolved in unique ways to fit their specific environmental and biological needs. To provide proper care, we need to have a clear understanding of the specific biology of budgies.



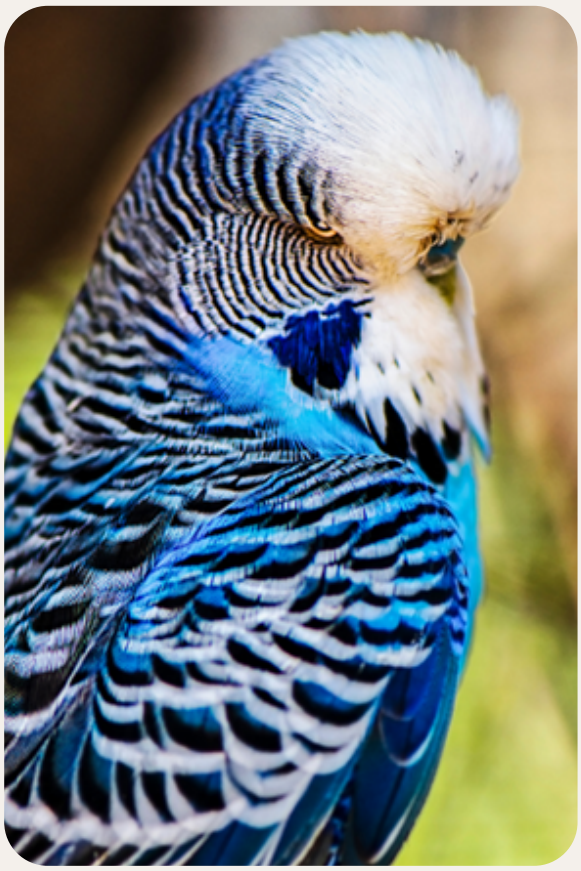
The Effects of Captivity

The budgie was one of the first parrot species brought into intensive captive breeding. First exported from Australia to Europe by ornithologists in the mid-1800s, the small, charming birds captivated the world. Over the next several decades, their popularity as pets exploded. Intensive captive breeding changed a few things about the budgie, leading to some clear difference between the native bush budgies of Australia and the budgies you see today in stores and aviaries.



The first difference you'll probably notice is color. Wild budgies generally come in only one color type: bright yellow and green with black barring. While rare color mutations occasionally appear in wild budgies, these budgies don't blend in well with their flock and are often picked off more quickly by predators. This prevents these rare color variants from persisting in any great number in the wild. In captivity, however, budgies are not subject to predation. This, paired with human fascination in budgie genetics (and other birds, like chickens and finches), has allowed breeders to produce a wide variety of budgies with all different color types. Today, budgies in captivity come in an extremely wide array of colors. You can read about the most common ones in our **Budgie Color Mutations Guide**.

Captivity has also made budgies bigger than their wild counterparts. Even the standard captive budgie, weighing thirty-five to forty-five grams, is a bit larger than their wild cousins. Exhibition or English budgies are even heftier, towering over both wild and standard captive budgies. Exhibition or English budgies are a variety of budgie resulting from intensive breeding to produce exaggerated characteristics, such as large body size, exaggerated plumage, and eye-catching patterns. Physical limitations are sometimes associated with these exaggerated qualities, including shorter lifespans and even difficulty seeing during flight due to large feathers that obscure vision.



Wild budgies burn much more energy each day than our pet budgies do!

Being brought into captivity also greatly reduced the budgie's daily energy expenditure. Wild budgies spend a large amount of time maneuvering on the wing in sustained, long-distance flights both during their daily foraging and during their searches for food and water. Budgies are one of the few birds whose flight energy expenditures have been measured. Sustained flight is estimated to require about 12x the number of calories compared to a budgie sitting on a perch. By bringing budgies into captivity, we have significantly decreased their daily energy expenditure. As a result, they cannot eat the same types of foods they eat in the wild. If a captive budgie ate their wild diet, they would be very overweight because they are taking in much more calories than they burn each day.

Wild foods are higher in proteins, fats, and micronutrients than domestic foods.

Plant items we buy in the supermarket and online are plant crops that have been selected by humans for hundreds or even thousands of years for taste and appearance, not necessarily for their nutritional value. These foods are nothing like what the budgies eat in the wild. Humans love carbohydrates, as do many animals, so the result is most human-grown seeds and grains have extremely high amounts of carbohydrates but lower proteins and micronutrients.

Put it all together?

By bringing the budgie into captivity we have dramatically reduced their daily calorie burn by limiting their flight. At the same time, most of what we have available for food on our shelves is the complete opposite of what they need. Our foods are high in calories and carbohydrates, yet what they need is less carbohydrates, proper protein balance, and micronutrient balance. This is why over many decades of scientific research, avian nutritionists have worked hard to find what the requirements of captive budgies are and created feeding systems specifically to match the unique needs of captive budgies.



CHAPTER II

Are Budgies Right For You?

Budgies are delightful animals for the right person, but they require special care to live long and healthy lives. Successful budgie people tend to share some general traits. Before welcoming a budgie into your home, ask yourself if you are:

Committed to continue learning.

Bringing a new animal into your life comes with a steep learning curve. Even when your pet is settled in, your education isn't finished! The most successful budgie people truly enjoy learning more about their budgies every day.

Not huge on physical touch.

Unlike mammals, birds have a very different evolved interpretation and use of physical touch. Budgies aren't necessarily cuddly pets that want to snuggle and be stroked head-to-toe. While budgies can be trained to allow some head scratches, petting and snuggling isn't going to be a huge part of your daily interactions. If you want a cuddly, snuggly pet that is still sociable and small, I suggest doing some research into mammals where snuggling is a perfectly healthy behavior like rats.

Looking to grow alongside your pet.

The human-animal relationship is often jeopardized when owners expect their pets to meet extremely specific companionship expectations. These rigid expectations only lead to disappointment when the animals fail to live up to their owners' unrealistic vision. The most successful budgie people are the ones looking to grow and build a relationship with their budgies over time and create a unique partnership of their own.



Able to adjust your home and lifestyle.

Our homes are built for humans, not birds. When you adopt a budgie, you're essentially tasked with creating an aviary in your house. We'll talk in-depth about safety considerations later, but in short, you'll have to eliminate certain pots, pans, and appliances, purchase new appliances, readjust furniture and finances, dedicate areas to things like cages and playstands, and overhaul your daily schedule. Importantly, you'll need the authority, physical capacity, and financial control to make these changes, which can be difficult for many people (e.g., if you share your home with others, live in a small space, or are working with a tight budget). Even with the best preparation, it's near impossible to make all these changes up front, and you will need to have the authority and control to make ongoing changes.

Comfortable making a financial commitment.

To keep your budgies healthy in the long term, you'll need to regularly purchase supplies like food, perches, and toys. Your birds will also need routine veterinary care, which for exotic animals tends to cost more than a traditional small animal vet. This also includes the cost of acquiring the necessary knowledge from a reliable source or to get more specific help with your budgie's specific case when necessary just like a person might with their dog or cat.

Willing to put in the time.

To build a strong relationship with your budgies, keep them mentally stimulated, and encourage them to seek you out for companionship and play, you'll need to provide them with daily interaction and training. After all, you can't build a relationship if you're not there! This means setting aside time for their routines outside of your work hours and perhaps adjusting existing commitments to fit that schedule. People often wonder how professional animal trainers make such rapid progress with their animals. One of the major factors is that we put our animals high on the list of importance, committing to being there at peak active times and putting time into continued additional learning.

Have achieved a stable living situation.

Budgies need daily care, socialization, and enrichment. This will require a dedicated caregiver to be there on a daily basis. If you travel frequently or have a lot of obligations that take you away from home for days or weeks at a time, it will be difficult to meet the care criteria to keep these animals at their best.

In this for the long haul.

On average, budgies live 5-7 years in captivity, but can live up to 10-15 with good care. Some rare cases even make it beyond 15! Before adopting, assess your life and try to picture where you'll be in a decade or so. If you have a series of major life changes coming up in rapid succession, think carefully about how you'll fit your budgies into those events.

Able to access a qualified avian vet.

Budgies are exotic pets, meaning they don't fall under the typical category of small animal veterinary practice. To get them access to proper care, you'll need to find a qualified veterinarian in your area that can see birds for routine and sick visits. Because these specialists tend to be rarer than vets that see mostly cats and dogs, you may need to travel quite a bit out of your way to find them. To find an avian veterinarian, go to the Association for Avian Veterinarians website, AAV.org, and look through their directory. You can also call nearby veterinary practices and ask whether they see budgies.



CHAPTER III

Keeping Your Budgie Safe

Having a budgie can make you feel like you have to do a million things at once. Especially on social media, everyone says you must do a huge laundry list of things—get your birds to play with toys, get adequate training, exercise regularly, even bathe. How are you supposed to accomplish all of that, especially if you have a budgie that's terrified of you?

The truth is this: it's not supposed to happen all at once.

Trying to make everything happen at once is a recipe for you to feel rushed, stressed, and overwhelmed while feeling like you're not making any progress. Instead, it is better that we build our budgie's care and relationship piece by piece, in order of importance and necessity. After all, incorporating a budgie into the home is a major learning curve not just for the budgie, but also for us. Taking it step by step and building a solid foundation of care is what will create the best result for you and for your budgies.

Physical Safety Comes First

When adding budgies to a home, physical safety is the first thing we tackle because only by ensuring their physical safety can confidently actively work with them and leave them unattended to rest when appropriate. Without a safe living environment, it is very hard to become successful in building a long-term relationship.

Let's go over some of the key things to address to create a budgie-safe environment in your home.

Household Hazards

Many household materials and appliances are extremely dangerous to budgies. While we might not think twice about lighting a candle or eating some guacamole, these mundane things can seriously endanger our birds.

Budgies, like all other birds, have specialized breathing systems that allow them to be lightweight while efficiently extracting oxygen from the air. In addition to lungs, birds have structures called air sacs that play a critical role in respiration. These sacs are connected to the core of their bones, meaning that airborne toxins can immediately and rapidly penetrate a bird's body. Combined with their light bodyweight, budgies can easily become sickened and die from airborne toxins that wouldn't even affect humans. One key part of parrot-proofing a home is to swap out toxic items for safe versions



Teflon-coated cookware

Teflon or PTFE chemicals make for a handy non-stick coating on pans, but when heated to high temperatures, they are released into the air and can result in the death of birds in the home. Use stainless steel, cast iron, glass or any other cookware that has not been coated with non-stick coatings.



Candles

Depending on what kind of wax a candle is made of, it will release varying amounts of soot and chemicals into the air. Needless to say, any amount of airborne soot and chemicals is bad for birds. I highly recommend not using any candles in the home since we have no idea how much is too much.



Aerosol sprays, fragrance plug-ins, and oil diffusers

As with all airborne substances, the chemicals and fragrances in these products are inhaled directly and can damage your budgie's health. If you want your home to smell fresh, there are other cute, budgie-safe ways to do it.



Smoking products or incense

Any type of smoke, whether from cigarettes or other substances, releases chemicals into the air. It's best to avoid smoking anywhere in the home.



Avocados

Avocados contain a substance that is toxic to parrots and can cause cardiac arrest. Never allow your budgies to step in or eat avocados!



Predator pets

If you have other pets that are predator-type animals (e.g., cats, dogs, ferrets), it is highly advised to keep these pets in a separate room whenever you work with your budgies or take them out of their cage.



Fish tanks, toilet bowls, and other open bodies of water

These should always be completely covered! A new budgie entering the home, regardless of flight skill, is completely new to the space and may not be familiar with the concept of large bodies of water. They can easily drown if they fall in, so it's best to keep all water-filled vessels covered.



Ceiling fans

These must always be off when budgies are outside the cage. A collision with a ceiling fan will almost always result in severe injury and death shortly after. Many owners use switch covers on their ceiling fan switches to prevent someone from accidentally turning them on while their budgies are outside the cage.



Open windows and doors

One of the most common reasons people lose their budgies is accidental escapes. Even if a budgie is clipped, a slight gust of wind can carry a budgie for miles. When bringing a budgie into the home, control of the windows and doors becomes extremely important. If a budgie escapes, the chances of recover/survival are almost zero.

Like I mentioned in the "Are Budgies Right for You?" section, welcoming budgies into your life will certainly mean substantial adjustments to the way you set up and run your home. These adjustments are crucial to keeping your birds happy and healthy for the long run and are an ongoing part of the budgie-owning journey.

Notes on Cats, Dogs, and other Predator Pets

- Cats are generally much riskier to smaller parrots than larger ones, and the way budgies move strongly triggers cats' predatory instincts. Cats should never be in the room when budgies are out of the cage.
- Some dogs are more reliable than others, but just like cats, smaller birds are at higher risk. It is best to have dogs in a separate room while budgies are outside the cage.
- Observe your budgie's behavior around your other pets. If the presence of other pets is causing noticeable fear behaviors, we can address this with some training exercises.
- There have also been cases of pets climbing on and knocking down budgie cages unintentionally, injuring the bird inside. Always play it on the safe side because injuries in these small birds are often challenging to treat.

CHAPTER IV

Getting Your Budgies

Age of A New Budgie

Where to get a budgie is always a hot topic so in this section, I want to break down the different options and what you can expect from each option.

First, we should only be buying or adopting juvenile or adult budgies. Many unethical breeders may try to sell unweaned baby birds who have been taken from the nest that you would need to continue hand-feeding. This is an extremely detrimental and dangerous practice that puts the budgie at great risk and deprives them of all their early life socialization. It also can force wean them, meaning they're taken from their parents and forced to eat solid food when they are not ready and still relying on their parents to feed them. It can seem like a cute idea but this is actually an extremely damaging practice, and it dramatically increases the risk of behavioral problems as the bird matures.

So how old should a budgie be when you bring them home?

Budgies are usually able to eat solid food and begin to fledge around 4 weeks of age and be fully weaned and able to fly well by 6 weeks so 6-8 weeks would be the youngest age to bring a budgie home.

How can you tell the age of a budgie? Baby budgies have black barring that runs all the way down their forehead to their nostrils! As they age, the barring starts to recede. When budgies reach about 4 months old, the barring will have completely receded.

When buying a budgie, look for budgies who either have their head barring starting to recede or forehead barring completely gone. These budgies are usually more than 2 months old and are old enough to leave their parents.

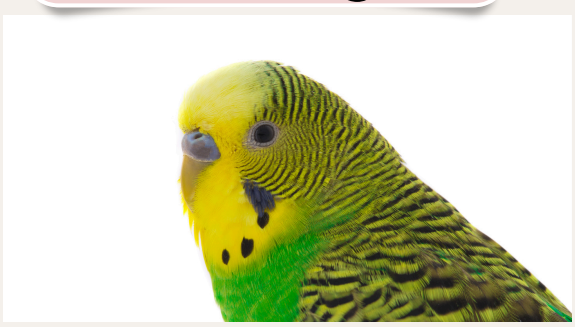


Look for fully feathered budgies with head barring that has started receding!









Breeders, Rescues, and Pet Stores

There are your most common options when it comes to welcoming a new budgie into your home.

- Work with a reputable breeder
- Work with a reputable rescue
- Buy them from a pet store
- Adopt from another person directly

Budgies from all different sources generally do fine with proper care if they are not ill, but it's important to know what to expect when getting a budgie from any of these sources since each source has budgies with very different backgrounds and expected behaviors.

Breeders

If you want your budgies to come in and integrate well into your home fairly quickly, especially if this is your first time with budgies, then looking for a high-quality breeder will likely be your ideal choice. This is really how all budgies should be raised and where I think most beginners should start.

When you adopt from a reputable breeder, you should be receiving a budgie that has gotten a good start in life, has been exposed to a varied diet including pellets and fresh produce, and is already familiar with navigating a home on the wing and comfortable with human interactions. This is usually going to be a small scale, hobby breeder who has a small flock of budgies in their home that are very comfortable with humans. When the babies exit the nest, they copy the parents and interact with humans right away. There's a lot to learn as a first-time budgie person, and it'll be much easier if you have a budgie that already knows how to handle themselves and is confident being around people and flying in a home.

Often times people can feel obligated to "rescue", but I want to make this statement very clear. Only take in a bird from a rescue if you want to, not because someone is pressuring you to. It is completely okay to want a predictable and well-raised budgie for your home. It is completely okay to want your budgie to be comfortable fairly quickly, especially if it's your first time having them!



If you want a properly raised budgie, you must find a good breeder. However, most top-notch breeders are hobby breeders, meaning they do not breed budgies as their primary source of income. They raise these birds out of love and care, put a lot of time and money into them, and don't expect to profit at all. Most probably are knowingly losing a lot of money but breed because they love these birds.

As a result, these breeders don't breed a lot of budgies every year and also are not big operations. They're often just a family with some pet budgies of their own who have a clutch or two a year so if you want a budgie from a good breeder, you might have to be willing to wait several months for them to be born and raised!

Here's a list of questions that a responsible breeder should have no problem answering:

- How old are the budgies leaving your home? (Selling unweaned babies is a major red flag.)
- Have your baby budgies been introduced to seeds, pellets, and fresh produce in the home?
- Have your budgies been socializing with humans from a young age?
- Do your budgies have experience living out in the home and navigating a house on the wing?
- Can you point me toward the most experienced avian vets nearby?
- Can you tell me more about care, cage setup, and diet?
- Do you clip your budgies' wings?
- Are your budgies hand-raised or parent-raised? (Parent-raised birds with early human socialization are the most preferred raising method.)
-
- Do you keep records of your breeding pairs and hatching records?

When buying from a breeder, always screen them carefully and don't be afraid to walk away if you feel the breeder isn't up to the criteria you want.

Shelters and Rescues

Another option is to work with a reputable rescue. A major advantage of doing so is that a reputable rescue will screen all of the incoming birds before they are put up for adoption. Many will get a check from an avian vet and will evaluate the birds with their staff before adopting them out.

They also will likely have some information about the bird that the previous owner told them prior to the surrender. Their staff may have also evaluated their behavior to some degree.

Many rescuers spend time training and doing food introductions, so their budgies might already have some familiarity with human handling, even if they didn't come in with any. Even if the budgies don't have additional training and fear human interaction, this would essentially be the same as a budgie from most pet stores. But at a rescue, you at least get access to the local support network and connections to people with parrot experience which is a major plus.

By adopting from a rescue or shelter, you are giving these budgies a home and the rescue can open space to take in another bird. Parrots continue to flood shelters constantly due to impulse purchasing so if you feel you want to adopt, working with a reputable rescue is a great way to go.

When adopting from a rescue, be sure you're working with a reputable group. Reputable parrot rescues are usually filled to the brim and very busy, so they don't typically go online and advertise everywhere that they will take a bird in.

If a "rescue" is advertising on Craigslist or similar sites, these are most likely from parrot flippers, not legitimate rescues. These people take in surrendered parrots and immediately sell them for profit. Additionally, if an organization has poor-quality living enclosures or is unwilling to show you their facilities, this can be a sign they are struggling to properly care for their animals.



Just like breeders, it's important to screen shelters as well. Here are some things I expect of a reputable parrot rescue or shelter:

- Registered as a 501c(3) non-profit organization
- Has access to avian vets that do health checks on incoming budgies and can recommend nearby avian vets to you
- Has quarantine procedures (incoming budgies live alone until their health check is cleared)
- Shares high quality photos of their facilities and living enclosures
- Carefully screens potential adopters to ensure a good match between parrot and owner



Pet Stores

Last, let's talk about pet stores. Pet stores source their budgies from breeders and they should therefore measure up to the same standards as any other breeder. However, this is rarely the case. Most stores you encounter will be big chain pet stores and some will be specialty parrot stores. Now that you have some knowledge about what to look for, you will probably quickly realize that many pet stores do not measure up to the criteria of a good breeder.

Typically, these budgies:

- Have not been introduced to a home environment.
- Were removed from their parents before they finished their post-fledging socialization.
- Have not received a varied, high-quality diet and are eating only seed.
- May have had their wings clipped at a crucial time in their life.

All these factors combined produce budgies that have early lives marked by significant challenges, requiring a substantial amount of work, behavioral knowledge, and handling skills to work through their fears. Training a budgie in this condition is very doable for somebody who can make the commitment and access the right information, but many people are looking to start with a budgie that is a lot more comfortable with humans. Unfortunately, this just isn't what most pet stores provide.



Pet Stores

If a budgie with no human handling experience came to me, after a few weeks of training, they'd be perfectly comfortable.

For first-time budgie people, however, this can be a heavy load to carry. It can seem like no matter what they do, the bird is so afraid of them.

If you find yourself in this situation, don't panic! You haven't done anything wrong or irreversible. This is where most budgie people start from so if this is where you are, know that are by no means alone in this.

It will take some dedication and commitment to learn the behavior knowledge necessary to create the relationship you're looking for where the budgies are comfortable interacting with you, but it is 100% doable.

I've walked many first-time and experienced budgie people through the process and I am happy to support you through it, too.

You will not get judged for buying a budgie from a pet store or having an untame budgie who has been that way for years.

I am here to support you and help you get to your budgie goals with confidence and feel empowered to interact with them.

Pet Store or Rescue?

Whether you go to a rescue or a pet store, there's a good chance you'll find budgies with little to no handling experience. The training journey would be the same, but if you choose to adopt from the rescue, you'd likely have the added benefit of some support from the rescue.

As another advantage of adopting, many shelter budgies are already past puberty, so we can be fairly certain of their sex based on cere color and behavior.

Age doesn't really matter when it comes to teaching budgies new behaviors. There are some outdated ideas that budgies cannot be trained when they're past a certain age, but that information is decades out of date.

With our current understanding of animal behavior, training a 5-year-old vs. a 5-month-old budgie to have a basic level of communication and relationship with humans are both completely possible.

Private Adoption

Adopting from another person privately is probably the hardest to predict in terms of what you will get. In most cases though, you can expect a budgie with minimal training and on a seed diet, similar to one from a pet store.

Always try to get as much info about the bird as possible, but in the vast majority of cases, these birds are unlikely to be "hand tame".

One Budgie or Multiple?

Budgies have evolved to live in family groups and flocks numbering in the hundreds, so they thrive off socializing with other budgies. This also means they watch each other and travel as a flock, learning and observing each other's movements. Budgies have fantastic observational learning skills and can do very well learning basic behaviors in pairs or groups.

Old information will say that budgies need to be alone to be trained, tamed, or bonded with, but this is yet another result of lack of animal behavior knowledge many years ago. It's just that training multiple budgies introduces the complexities of the budgies interacting with each other and reacting to the other birds' behaviors. Therefore, working with multiple budgies requires a bit more knowledge and expertise on the part of the trainer, which is why beginner owners sometimes find it tricky.

This is, again, why I recommend first-time owners first get themselves familiar with the species by working with well-raised budgies first. You could adopt 2 or even more budgies at once who already live together well and are comfortable with humans. You can easily develop a relationship with all of them at once because they already know their basic behaviors. You are just transferring those behaviors from their previous owners to you, not teaching them from scratch.

What if you already have your budgies and they're afraid of you? Even if you are starting with multiple budgies with zero handling experience, with the right knowledge and expertise, it is absolutely possible to develop a relationship with multiple budgies at a time. Talk to me about live training if you'd like help with this!

In general, it is very much preferred for budgies to have a well-integrated flock as part of their permanent living arrangement. These animals are highly intelligent and sociable, and while they can live alone, budgies that live by themselves tend to show a lot more abnormal behaviors from the lack of stimulation and socialization compared to their counterparts in well-integrated flocks. They have evolved so many senses and instincts surrounding the flock dynamic. Having just a single budgie deprives them of a large part of their natural behaviors, which limits their wellbeing and welfare.



Flock Dynamics are Crucial!

Now, while budgies are social animals, that does not mean we can just take any two budgies, put them in a cage together, and expect them to be happy. Flock animals have important social dynamics, and conflict can arise when the wrong budgies are forced to live together. This is why I emphasize a well-integrated flock and not just having multiple random budgies. This way, the budgies get the benefit of living with a happy family group without the threat of constant conflict from a poor flock pick.

If you are starting your flock for the first time, pick two budgies of similar age and the same sex that have already been living together comfortably. If you're working with a rescue or breeder, ask them to choose budgies based on the existing dynamic and biological factors like age and sex.

For beginners, having an all-male or all-female flock is generally easiest. A single male female pair can also work if you manage the diet properly to keep them out of breeding and know when to give your female some alone time from the male trying to court her.

Social dynamics are extremely important in these animals and one of the main keys to having a fun, low-stress budgie owning experience is having a cohesive flock. This way, you won't need to deal with sudden conflict while you're still in the process of learning to care for your new budgies.

Never add a new budgie directly into a cage with an existing budgie or flock!

It's always important to choose your flock members with intention to create a well-integrated flock that is free of major conflict.

CHAPTER V

Choosing The Right Cage

The Importance of Cage Choice

Purchasing a cage is one of the bigger investments you'll make in your budgie journey. Since your budgie will spend a sizable portion of their life in their enclosure, choosing the right cage is critical for their long-term health and safety. Having the right cage can even give you a leg up on training later on.

The three factors we'll discuss when it comes to cages are material, bar spacing, and design.

Bar Spacing

Bar spacing is the most crucial safety feature when it comes to buying a budgie cage. The bars need to be narrow enough that the budgie cannot stick their head or other body parts out, but wide enough to allow climbing.

Overly wide bars are a safety hazard because budgies can get stuck while trying to squeeze out. While escape is bad enough, if your budgie gets stuck in the process, they can panic and thrash around hard enough to cause serious fractures, injury, and even death. The recommended bar spacing for budgies is 3/8"-1/2" (i.e., 0.375"-0.5") wide.

Material

There are several different types of material we see being used for budgie cages on the market. The primary ones are:

Coated Steel Wire

While being the smallest and least expensive cages, these also tend to be the weakest. They are prone to bending and warping and usually only in smaller sizes. They also show wear-and-tear the fastest. If you want something that is going to last, coated steel wire cages usually won't give you the best bang for your buck, but it will be the most affordable and fine to grab if you need something in a hurry from a nearby store.

Aluminum or stainless steel

These materials are high quality and do not rust, but they are expensive to make and are not usually found in stores. They're generally not required for indoor use with budgies.

Powder-coated wrought iron

These are the cages I personally use and recommend. They are widely available, not overly heavy, and when made with good craftsmanship, last a very long time for an affordable price. To get the best craftsmanship, go with brands that specialize in parrot caging and avoid generic pet store brands. These generic brands tend to have inferior coatings that begin to rust in just a few years of light use, which does not happen in high-quality powder-coated cages. I have had cages like these for many years and they still look completely new, no paint chipping or scratching despite having been through several major apartment moves.

Never clean these cages with acidic cleaners like vinegar because it will rust the iron.

Design

The design of a cage is crucial for long-term use and, when chosen correctly, will give you a nice leg up in your training journey and provide your budgie with the most ideal living space. Budgies fly horizontally, not vertically, so avoid cages that are skinny and tall and instead pick a cage that is adequately wide.

For ease of use when training, choose a cage with large doors that swing open. This will give you the best access to the space and will help keep your budgie from feeling cornered when you reach in to change their food and water.

I recommend avoiding cages with small sliding doors as their main door. These doors are tiny and hard to work with and stick hands through, causing us to inevitably bang into it, rattling the whole cage and startling the budgies in the process. It limits our movements and doesn't give us easy access which slows training.



Look for a rectangular or square shaped cage. You may be tempted to look for cages with fancy shapes, but these are usually quite small, are an inefficient use of the space, and eliminate your ability to use the top of the cage as a training platform. In my experience, training on the top of a flat top cage is very convenient, especially if your budgie is just starting out on their training journey and is too scared to step up on other training stands. Using this technique, I've been able to accelerate my training progress dramatically. I can also easily mount cage lights in my flat top cage.

Some stores also sell play top cages. You'll want to remove the tray so that inside is not so dark but in general, I prefer to build my own. With a flat top cage, I can build my own play top using tree stands and other perches and customize it so that it perfectly suits the exact budgie I am working with. I'll also be able to vary it as my budgies become more and more capable and familiar with the space, increasing, or decreasing the difficulty and adding new items to keep things fun.

Shopping for a budgie cage?

Shop My Amazon Store!

How Big is Big Enough?

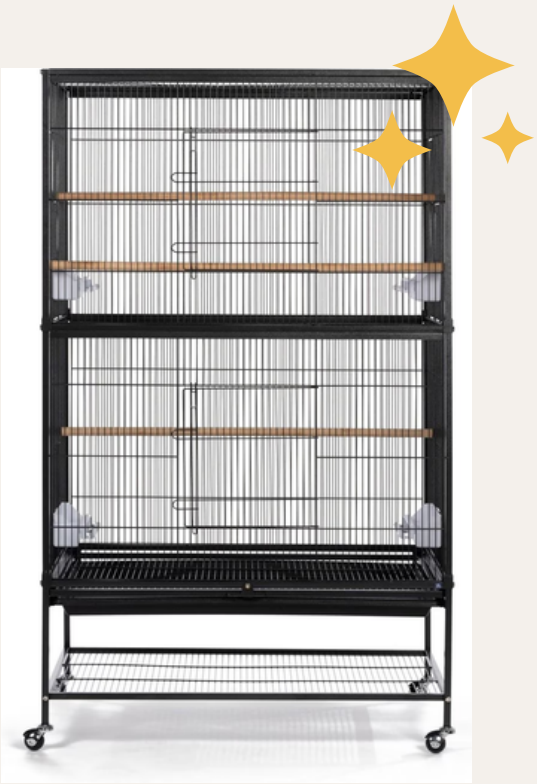
When thinking about choosing a cage, I usually recommend getting a cage that is large enough to allow some flight inside, especially if you know your budgie is going to be spending several hours a day inside the cage. Essentially, the more time the budgies are spending in there, the more beneficial it would be to have a more spacious setup.

Having a larger cage is useful for a few reasons. One, you will be able to offer more enrichment options inside compared to a smaller cage. Second, it will make training much easier because it allows your budgie more freedom of movement. By providing more freedom and choice, you can reduce their fear and stress level faster, resulting in a budgie that is in a comfortable mindset for training and bonding.

You will also be able to train a lot more behaviors from the safety of the cage, building your relationship in a safe space prior to working with them outside the cage. For example, in a larger cage, you can train your budgies to move to your hand and back to their perch, all without making your budgie leave the safety of their cage. In a tiny cage, there simply isn't enough room to do this kind of training, so you will be forced to take the budgie out of their cage potentially earlier than is ideal because of the cage size limitations.

The minimum cage size often recommended is about 12 x 18 x 18 inches. While these tabletop cages can certainly make a decent home base for budgies that are spending most of their time free ranging a much larger space, if your budgie is spending several hours inside the cage every day while you're at work, I would recommend something slightly larger.

For most owners with one to four well-integrated budgies, I would consider a cage that is roughly 30 x 20 x 32 inches to be a good place to start that isn't overly large and is a good proportion of width to height.



Click to Shop!

As a quick note, you'll see lots of different cage companies label many different cage styles as "flight cages" because it sounds nice. The reality is that not all cages labeled "flight cages" are created equal! Many are way too small to support more than two or three flaps once you add perches and other objects, especially if they're also a strange shape like a house.

Can a cage be too big?

If your budgie can fly, then there's really no limit to the size of the cage you can have in your home as long as the bar spacing is adequate. Most traditional budgie keepers house budgies in large aviaries rather than smaller cages. If your budgie is clipped or has some other reason they cannot fly, then choose a cage that is wider but not very tall so if they do fall, they won't hurt themselves.

In general, if you have a healthy budgie that is able to fly (or will be able to fly, once they regrow some flight feathers), they do benefit from the extra space. Just make sure it fits well into your home.

Where should you place the cage?

When adding a budgie cage into the home, it's important to choose the right location. We want to provide our budgies with a location that they feel safe in, but we don't want to lock them away where they don't have access to the social happenings of the home. Generally, this means you want to place the budgies in the main living space, against a wall furthest away from the door so that they can observe the happenings of the room but aren't being surrounded on all sides and are protected from doors opening right next to them suddenly. It's also important to place the cage away from any doors that frequently open to prevent startling them constantly and causing a high level of frustration and uncertainty.

Remember your budgies don't know when someone is going to open that door and so being near a door would cause them to get startled all the time. Over time, they can even become conditioned to seeing you at the door right when they get startled and associate you with the startle response.

CHAPTER VI

Diet and Nutrition

Food In The Wild

Budgies in the wild travel long distances to obtain grass seed in the arid regions of Australia. When conditions are dry and rain is scarce, budgies survive on drier, less nutritious varieties of grass seed as a survival food. They eat mostly this type of food until conditions improve. This is a big part of why budgies can seemingly stay on deficient, inadequate diets for so long before symptoms of deficiency become apparent.

In dry regions, plant life has adapted to unpredictable weather conditions. When rain finally arrives, many plants rapidly produce and drop seeds to the ground. These seeds gather up the precious moisture and sprout into tiny plants to start their life cycle. These seeds are high in protein and micronutrients, fueling growth and breeding. Budgies and other birds flock to these areas, feasting on the seeds and newly sprouted plants. This sudden abundance of food provides an influx of excess calories which, along with the consistent rain and adequate temperature, stimulates them to breed.

Soils in these regions are also high in calcium; thus, so are the plants. This provides breeding budgies with a rich source of calcium for laying eggs. Additionally, compared to human-cultivated seeds, these wild seeds are high in protein, fat, vitamins, and minerals, all of which support the nutrient demands of a budgie's breeding cycle.



Food In Captivity

In captivity, many budgies are placed on "all-seed diets." An all-seed diet refers to budgies that are eating exclusively seed mixes as their primary or only food. Your budgie is probably more than happy to eat seeds all day long—as a food source, they are very high in calories, carbohydrates, and taste great! However, most of these mixes are very simple and contain only 3-4 seed types: usually white millet, red millet, canary seed, and oats.

These seeds are popular, cheap and widely available. They were specifically bred for their high carbohydrate content and palatability to people. But because of this selective breeding, they have a completely different nutrient profile from the seeds that budgies eat in the wild. These simple mixes are often composed of more than 70% carbohydrates, and their protein profiles are incomplete. They also have almost no precursors for the formation of vitamin A, contain extremely little calcium, and are low in essential amino acids like methionine and lysine.

In total, these simple seed mixes are typically deficient in over 30 nutritional categories while being excessively high in calories. Paired with the low daily activity level of the captive budgie, this results in reduced lifespans, obesity, calcium deficiency (which can cause soft-shelled eggs that get stuck inside laying females), and other metabolic issues.

In an effort to make up for the missing nutrients, you'll often see bags of seed mix have a long list of supplements in the ingredient list or be mixed with small pellets. While the bag claims that this food is now balanced, we have many decades of scientific and life experience that show these mixes are highly ineffective. The added vitamins are simply sprayed onto the seed shells, and since budgies don't eat these shells, very few vitamins actually end up being consumed. The added pellets are often low-quality, and most budgies simply pick around them. This means whatever analysis or guarantee is printed on the bag is no longer true because the budgies are only eating the seed and the pellet never makes it into the bird. Even when they do eat the pellet, the mixes are still too high in calorie and not balanced in fatty acid profiles and I routinely see clients with budgies on these diets with severe health problems due to nutritional deficiencies.



Diet Conversion and Introducing New Foods

Budgies learn to discriminate between food and non-food items at a very young age. Surrounded by all kinds of vegetation in their natural habitats, it's beneficial to learn which plants can and cannot be eaten. Young budgies accomplish this by observing their parents and flock and paying careful attention to what other budgies are eating. They rapidly learn to reject unfamiliar food items.

In captivity, a responsible breeder should allow young budgies to fledge (leave the nest box) but remain with their parents and the flock so they can learn the flock behavior patterns and food sources. During this crucial time, they should be introduced to a wide variety of different foods so when they go home with a new owner, they are comfortable eating a high-quality mixed diet.



Unfortunately, this doesn't always happen. We talked more about less-than-desirable rearing practices in the "Where to Get a Budgie" section, but ultimately, many budgies adopted from many sources go to their new homes having only ever eaten all-seed diets. Consequently, these budgies don't recognize other foods and never had a chance to develop their confidence and independence.

This is why it's so important to never convert a budgie cold-turkey or all at once onto a new diet. When your budgie turns their beak up at a new food, they aren't being picky, stubborn, or dramatic. Either the food being served to them is not a realistic expectation for their species, or they simply don't realize it's edible! Budgies have been known to starve to death in cages with full bowls because they don't think there's any food to eat.

If your budgie is coming into your home on an all-seed diet, you'll need to teach them to eat new foods very gradually. Food introduction and diet conversion can take weeks to months but rest assured: it is 100% possible to teach any budgie to eat new foods without harsh measures, regardless of age or how long they've been eating all seed.

The key is to understand their biology and how they evolved to learn new foods and use that to introduce new items to them.

Our Signature Diet Conversion Method

This is why I developed my signature diet conversion method using what we know about the science of how budgies eat. In this method, we provide our budgies with a series of smooth transitional phases from what they already recognize to the new foods we are introducing. By understanding the science behind how budgies perceive the world, we can ease them into a new diet with little concern about weight loss because they will happily eat the new food offered to them right away.

Some methods recommend that you weigh your budgies constantly throughout the conversion process. For many owners, however, this presents a difficult problem. Your budgies may not be comfortable enough to step up, be taken out of the cage, and stand on a scale. Doing so every day can cause major stress to the budgie and completely undo any daily attempts at training.



Traditional methods also don't prioritize relationship building with our budgies. Food is such a core part of an animal's existence, and our budgies are already going through a seriously stressful process. They've been yanked out from everything they know and have ended up in a new, unknown place with people they don't even recognize! To then be denied the only food they've ever known and have to eat something else to survive only adds to the stress. While this kind of forceful deprivation can result in a budgie that is much more motivated and desperate to work for a bit of seed or millet, there is a major difference between being interested in millet because it's a yummy food and being extremely desperate because they are so deprived of the only food they recognize and want.

In focusing hard on getting your budgie on a healthy diet, it's easy to lose sight of how your budgie is feeling throughout the process. The result is that twice a day, your budgie sees you approach them, but all you offer is a strange new food they haven't yet learned to enjoy. In this scenario, we lose out on two massive bond-building opportunities every day. The budgies begin to learn that sometimes, they shouldn't bother looking forward to our arrival because nothing exciting will be offered.

In some cases, switching food suddenly when a budgie arrives causes them to be highly motivated for millet at the beginning out of extreme hunger, making it seem like you're making good training progress. However, if they do make it through that initial phase and learn to eat the other food being offered, they will get used to that food and no longer be starving and desperate. Now, they can suddenly want nothing to do with you! This is because they were never comfortable in the first place. They just interacted because they were so hungry they had no other choice. Eventually they get used to the new food because they no longer want to deal with the frustration and that is why you can see a big regression.

This then puts you in a sticky situation of your budgie only wanting to interact when they are extremely hungry and desperate. You also don't want to be in a place of strategically starving your budgie just to train. This is no fun for you as an owner, knowing that your budgie won't interact with you unless they feel desperately hungry. Plus, it's no way for your budgie to live, either from a welfare standpoint.

Done correctly, my diet conversion and training methods are paired together to create a flow of positive associations for my budgies. Every day, I bring them a food mix that is exciting and tasty, but still healthy. Then, I consistently reinforce behaviors and good choices by providing extra special food treats. At every turn, I am building associations in their mind that I am a bringer of things they value and worth interacting with anytime of the day, not just when they're desperately hungry.

Maximizing choice and freedom is a key part of animal welfare. Outright depriving a bird of the only food they recognize and enjoy is not only unnecessary, but it also produces poor results in the form of slow conversion speed, danger of starvation, and concerns about our animal's mental wellbeing. At The Budgie Academy, we believe in always finding the most humane and ethical methods to introduce new things to our animals.

This is why we developed our signature diet conversion method using the most up-to-date scientific and behavioral knowledge. We provide budgies with food they recognize and love, so they don't go hungry like in traditional diet conversion processes. Then, we use that food as a base to slowly add new items into the mixture, allowing us to introduce everything from sprouts to veggies to pellets without ever worrying about them rejecting the food and going too long without eating.



The Ideal Diet For Your Budgie

For most owners, I strongly recommend feeding a pellet with a fresh food mix. A properly formulated pellet is a powerful nutritional tool that has been carefully designed to meet your budgie's nutritional requirements. It will have a balanced amount of all essential macro and micronutrients and will match your budgie's total calorie and protein requirements. Choosing a species-appropriate, high-quality pellet will make the diet conversion process much smoother. We also provide a mixture of fresh foods alongside the pellet, like cooked grains and produce, to add enrichment, choice, and additional nutrients. From over a century of exotic species research, we know this approach produces the best overall health results in the general population.

The beauty of feeding a mixture of formulated and fresh foods is that you can get the best of both worlds. You have a pellet that is properly supplemented and can also provide an exciting fresh food mix every day for enrichment and foraging. The pellet will also provide you with a "fallback food" in the event that you are unable to prep or serve their fresh food.

Budgie-specific nutrition is key!

PhD nutritionists and knowledgeable parrot owners have been feeding their parrots this way for 100+ years with excellent results. Being budgie owners, we have the unique privilege of having one of the most well-studied of all the parrot species and therefore have access to multiple food products that fit their needs perfectly.

Budgies are unique from other parrots in that they have very low calcium requirements when not in breeding but when in breeding, they require similar calcium levels to other parrot species. Budgies fed excessive levels of calcium can result in calcium depositing in the kidney and contribute to declines in kidney function either acutely or over a lifetime.

Knowing exactly the nutrient levels of everything we are feeding is key to formulating the correct mixed diet for your budgie flock.



CHAPTER VII

Grooming

Now that you've got some knowledge about the biology of budgies and the conditions they've evolved to survive and thrive in, let's talk about their grooming needs in the context of captivity.

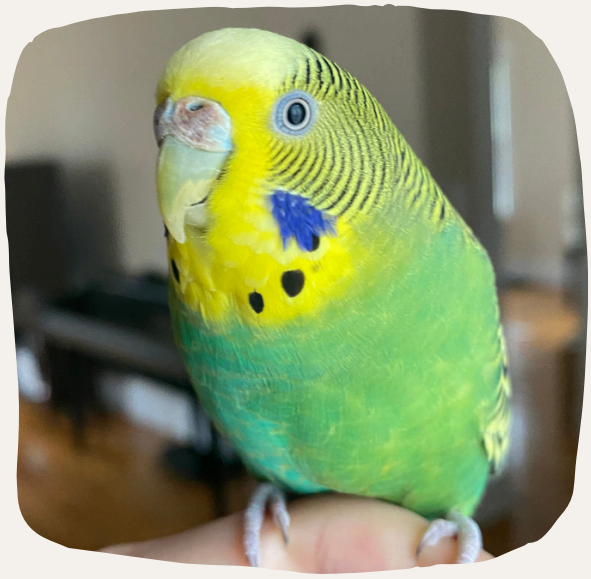
Beak Trims

Let's first talk about things your budgie does not need. Your budgie does not require regular beak trims. Many pet stores and even veterinary practices don't have the most up-to-date information and still recommend beak trims to owners as a necessity. They're either out of date or trying to sell you a service to make money.

First, let's look at a healthy beak (right). Budgies are parrots, and parrots have a distinctive hook in their top beak that comes down over their bottom beak. This is the normal, healthy shape.

Budgies grind their own top and bottom beaks together every day while eating and getting ready to sleep. This keeps their beak nice and trim, regardless of whether they have chew toys or not. Cuttlebones are also not related to beak maintenance, despite what their marketing might say. If your budgies are on a proper diet, cuttlebones are not necessary. At this point, they're actually an outdated and inferior way of providing calcium compared to a proper pellet in the diet.

If you find that your budgie's beak is overgrowing, this is a sign that your budgie may have an underlying illness such as fatty liver disease or a parasite like scaly face mites. In rare cases, a budgie can be born with a beak deformity which causes an overgrown beak. Talk to your avian veterinarian to diagnose the underlying cause and discuss a treatment plan.



Bathing

Budgies are from the arid regions of Australia, where rain is highly unpredictable. This means budgies rarely have access to large amounts of water, and their feathers and skin stay in perfect condition even in the driest of droughts.

There is some misinformation on social media that parrots need to be bathed every week. This comes from a misconception that bathing keeps reproductive hormones down and can prevent feather damaging behavior or plucking. Neither of these two things are true. Unfortunately, it's very common for conspiracies to get amplified as fact and get ingrained into world just from enough people repeating it. Budgies naturally clean themselves through preening and molting their feathers, so regular bathing is not required for cleanliness. Budgies are perhaps the best example of this because in the wild, in times of drought, they may go years without stable access to an abundance of water.



Bathing also places birds in a vulnerable place. The water weighs down their feathers, making it hard to fly. Budgies are very aware of this and will not bathe unless they are comfortable with their surroundings. When they bathe, they generally will not get themselves completely drenched. They jump into a small puddle or rub themselves on wet greens to get their belly and edges of their wings wet.

When your budgie is new, they generally will not bathe. This is OK! Bathing is not immediately required for their health and budgies can go months, even years without a bath and be perfectly fine. They're dry area parrots after all!

When they become more comfortable, budgies will choose to bathe in a few ways. Some may like a gentle mist, some prefer wet greens, and some prefer a small dish. They will also choose their own bathing frequency.

Focus on working with your budgie so that they are comfortable and make a dish of water available. They will bathe themselves when they are ready and at their preferred frequency. Once they're comfortable, we can also offer a mist with a spray bottle and see if they enjoy that format.

Not all budgies bathe at the same frequency. This is completely normal!

Never force your budgie to bathe if they don't want to!

Nail Trims

Nail trimming is another common grooming task that does not need to happen routinely. In fact, most parrots don't need their nails trimmed at a pre-determined frequency.

Many people feel (or get told) they need to keep their budgies' nails very short, but this misguided belief stems from a lack of understanding of budgie biology. Budgies use their nails to grip, climb cage bars, and grasp branches.

Cutting them excessively short is a disservice to their mobility and many people will observe their budgies falling more frequently afterwards. Unfortunately, even many veterinarians continue to insist nail trims need to happen every few weeks because they are still working with out-of-date information.

It's also important to know that budgie nails, like human and dog nails, have a blood supply inside. Cutting them excessively short is risky, and even experienced individuals may nick the blood supply and cause bleeding.

If it's not a routine care task, when do we need to trim nails?

Typically, nail trims are reserved for when we can observe the nail is long enough to be an obstacle to their movement, foot positioning, or our ability to handle them in some way.

Budgies are so small the weight of their body rarely causes the nails to be uncomfortable on our skin, so it is really only if I see their nails frequently getting caught on fabric or is growing excessively long and causing their foot positioning to be poor that I decide to trim that specific nail.

This is relatively infrequent and usually only requires us taking a tiny bit of the tip of the nail off of the affected nail. It is not necessary to trim all the nails at once even if we do see one nail is affecting the foot movement.

Of the 6 budgies who have been in my permanent flock over the last decade, 5 of them have never needed (and probably will never need) a nail trim. Neither of my cockatiels have needed nail trims, either. Only FitC has one larger front toenail which slightly rotates her toe where I might trim it once a year, sometimes less.



Wing Clipping

The last grooming topic we'll talk about is wing clipping. You will likely hear (or have already heard) a lot of mixed messages around wing clipping online so let's set the record straight on what is the most up-to-date information.

It may seem like there's a lot of controversy around wing clipping, but this debate is largely confined to the realms of social media. If you were to stand in a room full of highly trained animal professionals, you would find no controversy at all. We have known about the biology and behavioral effects of wing clipping for decades so there is really nothing new or controversial about it.

Wing clipping is when humans limit the flight of a bird by cutting the flight feathers on their wings, shortening them so the birds cannot catch enough air when they flap to get proper lift. Depending on how extensive the clipping is, this can do anything from slightly impacting their flying ability to rendering them completely flightless.

What does this do? By limiting flight in the bird, they are more limited in their movement around the home. For budgies, this is their dominant means of self-defense and their main mode of transportation.

This practice developed to prevent parrots and other birds from moving freely in the home and from accessing things that humans in the home may not want them to access. Their limited flight also made them more reliant on humans for transportation. There were also ideas that this made the birds more "tame", which we will address later.

There's no doubt that having flighted birds in the home requires some more preparation and knowledge on the part of the human than having non-flighted birds. It can seem like the birds move so fast and are hard to control, which understandably can be quite unnerving! But don't worry, with a strong understanding of behavioral science, you'll find that you can get your budgies to adhere to a good routine and respond to you without needing to limit their movement directly.

Flight is so integral to the nature of this species that I would highly recommend keeping budgies flighted when possible. I have adopted budgies who can and cannot fly, and I personally find budgies who can fly much more fun to interact with because they are able to move more freely and independently in the home.

So, when looking to add budgies to a home, strongly consider keeping them flighted or, if you would prefer a pet not to fly, consider adopting budgies who already have limited flight capabilities or a non-flying animal.



Flight is an integral part of the budgie's biology!

Let's recap some of the top myths about wing clipping.

Myth 1: it prevents them from flying out of doors or windows.

This is completely untrue. If we clip our birds such that they can still fly somewhat in the home, then even a tiny gust of wind could carry them miles away, and any doors and windows would still need to be closed as if the bird was fully flighted. If we clip the bird to the point where they get zero lift, when they eventually get spooked by something and instinctually try to take off, they will fall to the ground and likely hurt themselves. Cracked beaks and cracked keel (chest) bones are fairly common injuries from these types of falls.

Myth 2: it prevents them from crashing into walls.

It is common for owners to be misled when purchasing their birds. They are told that wing clipping is required to keep birds from crashing into walls when they fly. Typically, these birds are young, raised in a small container, and have not yet had a chance to fly in a large space. They are like toddlers learning to walk! Light bumps here and there are normal. With a little management to protect them from windows and other home hazards, they learn quickly. However, because if they get clipped, the bird never truly learns to be a proficient flyer, so every time they attempt to fly, they seem clumsy—thus reinforcing what the owner was told. In reality, it was the clipping that caused the issue in the first place. Had they been allowed to fledge properly, they would have learned to be skilled fliers and crashes essentially never happen.

Myth 3: wing clipping is required for taming.

We've known this isn't true for more than decades, so if somebody gives you this sweeping advice, it should tip you off to the fact that the individual's advice is extremely outdated. Behavioral science has come so far in these last few decades, and we now have an intricate understanding of how budgies think and see the world. Giving animals additional freedoms and allowing them to choose to interact with us gives them greater control and builds relationships faster than restricting their freedoms. This is why many owners think their budgies are "tame" when clipped, but the moment their wings grow back, the birds seem to avoid them at every turn. It is because the budgies were never comfortable in the first place. Once they regain their ability to avoid the source of this discomfort, they will do so. However, if we build a strong relationship based on trust and regular reinforcement (providing them with things they desire), they will do the complete opposite. They will actively seek us out and use their wings to do so. Members of my flock fly next to me or across the home to find me every day, and it's an absolute joy.

CHAPTER VIII

Training and Behavior

How to "Tame" A Budgie

"Taming" is something many budgie owners find themselves needing to do. While it can seem daunting, it's actually straightforward once you have the right information. "Taming" isn't a great name for what we're trying to accomplish. The word is a remnant of an older time when people had the misconception that animals needed to be forcefully controlled to be subdued. Today, we have a much clearer and accurate understanding of animal behavior. What we are actually trying to do is build a mutual relationship with our budgies so that we can live together comfortably.



Ultimately, we want our budgies to be comfortable in their daily routines, know what their day-to-day is going to look like, seek out human caretakers without fear, freely express their natural behaviors, and respond to our cues when we ask for a behavior.

Animals are always looking to move towards reinforcement (things they value) and away from aversives (things that cause them fear, pain, and/or discomfort). We want our budgies to be comfortable around us (i.e., we don't want our presence to be an aversive factor), and we want them to associate us with reinforcers so they feel compelled to seek us out.

How do we achieve this? We discuss the topic at length in our Budgie Taming and Training course (coming soon), but in short, we are looking to create a predictable base routine and then introduce items of value when they do the behaviors we desire so that those behaviors become more frequent. We can also build behaviors that don't yet exist (such as stepping up or flying to you) using these methods.

For many budgies, it can seem like they do not want anything to do with you. They just want you to go away! That is quite normal for budgies who have not been given any prior training. Owners mistake this for their bird having a history of abuse but usually, it is the instinctual fear of seeing a giant, moving creature that they know nothing about and cannot control.

In the training course, I will talk about how to use reinforcement to overcome these behaviors and shape the final behaviors we are looking for.

Good diet = More Motivation

When it comes to training, one of the most important things to understand is that diet is CRUCIAL to the success of this process. Why?

First, a budgie on a poor diet will likely lead to poorer health and it is very hard to train a sick bird. Even though a bird might like healthy on the surface, they may and likely will have underlying nutritional deficiencies.

Second, the diet may be causing them to be in breeding conditions. This will shift their priorities more heavily onto breeding behaviors, making it more difficult to create the behaviors we want.

Third, we want to use highly desirable food reinforcers (i.e. food treats) to teach our budgies new behaviors. However, it is very hard to do that when they are getting an unlimited supply of that same or very similar item as their base diet.

What Not To Do

Older methods of budgie "taming" still linger on social media but are decades out of date. They often involve using force on your budgie and result in substantial fear.

Examples of highly discouraged methods include:

- ❌ Sticking your hand into the cage every day so they learn to "deal with it,"
- ❌ Grabbing or chasing your budgie to force them onto your hand,
- ❌ Forcing your scared budgie out of their cage immediately upon arrival.

All these methods use something called "flooding:" forcing the animal into a situation where they no longer have any choice, regardless of how fearful or stressful the situation is. A "flooded" budgie may seem still and allow themselves to be pushed into things (which often gets misinterpreted for comfort by the owner), but they are actually in a state of acute stress and fear which can be mistaken for "calm".

How Long Does It Take?

The timeline of getting to a goal behavior depends on two things: the skill level of the trainer and the learning history of the budgie.

Good training is all about providing a series of choices for your pet in a carefully designed environment where the desired behavior is the one that makes the most sense to them. When they make that choice and perform the desired behavior, you need to promptly deliver a positive outcome. Having seen that their choice resulted in a positive outcome, they are more likely to perform that behavior again. The more skilled you become at laying out these choices in a straightforward way and delivering positive outcomes quickly, the faster your budgie will learn the desired behavior.



Learning history is a major factor affecting how quickly our budgies can learn behaviors. A budgie that has already had a substantial amount of training from a breeder or rescue already has a lot of experience performing certain behaviors, so there is much less ground to cover compared to a budgie who has almost no experience with humans prior to coming home and will need to be taught everything from scratch.

It is not just your budgie that will be learning new skills. Over time, you will become more adept at laying out training scenarios and understanding what your budgie needs to learn effectively. Though it takes patience and flexibility, building this partnership with your budgie through training is well worth it.

For me, it takes 2-3 weeks for a budgie who has zero handling experience to become fluent in their essentials of taking food, targeting, coming out of the cage on their own, and stepping up. For someone new, it will more likely take a few months.

It is usually faster if incoming budgies have good flight skills, as they have more confidence of movement and therefore learn to advance forward and back more quickly and take more chances. This gives me more chances to reinforce the behaviors I like, and it takes less time for them to pause and think between behaviors, naturally moving their training along a bit faster.

CONCLUSION

The Beginning of A Journey Together

You made it! That is much to take in on the journey of budgie ownership, but I am excited to go on that journey with you.

By reading this e-book, you are already doing the most important thing for good budgie care--prioritizing your own education—seeking out reliable, up-to-date, science-backed information from trustworthy sources is an investment in your pet more valuable than anything money could buy.

Just by being here, you have already taken the first step toward becoming a confident and informed budgie person. But there is so much more that can't fit in this guide without it becoming a novel! It is my sincere hope that The Budgie Academy will become a trusted support system in your budgie journey and help you get the relationship with your budgie you have been looking for.



NEXT STEPS

Ready to dive deeper into budgie care?

You've taken the first step by learning the basics—now it's time to dive deeper and become part of a community that supports you every step of the way. As a Junior Scholar, you'll gain access to exclusive resources and personalized guidance to help you and your budgies thrive.

Here's what you can expect:

- Personalized 1-on-1 Support: Get your specific budgie care questions answered directly by Dr. Amy Zhao through private messaging. No more guesswork—just clear, expert advice tailored to your needs.
- A Supportive Community: Connect with fellow budgie enthusiasts who share your passion. Whether you're celebrating milestones or troubleshooting challenges, you'll never feel alone in your budgie journey.
- Live Q&A Sessions: Join regular live sessions to ask your questions in real-time and learn from the experiences of others in the community.
- Exclusive Discounts: Enjoy special rates on consulting packages and other premium resources to further enhance your budgie care knowledge.
- Early Access to New Content: Be the first to explore new courses, guides, and tools designed to help you become the best budgie caregiver you can be.

Join us!

Register here!