



Safe Toys for Your Parrot

Introduction

As we become more aware of our birds' emotional and psychological needs, enrichment in the form of toys, foraging opportunities and items to destroy becomes an important part of a bird's daily life. In the wild, parrots will use nuts, branches, leaves, shed feathers, and fruit for play. In captivity, this will also include almost any attractive or interesting object, not all of which will be safe.

Unfortunately, there are currently no regulations that govern the safety of parrot toys. Simply purchasing a toy marketed for parrots is not a guarantee that it is safe for your bird. Ideally, toys that are safe for parrots are ones that can be safely consumed, torn up, or chewed without resulting in injury. This information sheet provides some practical guidelines for choosing safe toys for your parrots. Parrots are intelligent and innovative creatures. ALWAYS introduce a new toy under OBSERVATION. Birds are very inquisitive, and have a knack for discovering new ways to get into trouble with toys.

Metal/rusty toys

Many toys have metal parts. Some metals, such as lead, zinc and copper, can be extremely poisonous for birds. However, stainless steel is safe, so toys made of this are suitable. If nickel plated, aluminum or chrome parts are used, be certain to remove the item as soon as there is any discolouration, rust or flaking.

Items to avoid include:

- mirror backs, leadlight, stained glass windows, solder, pewter, electrical wire, glazed ceramics, foil from over champagne and wine corks
- Weights – curtain weights, fishing and diving equipment, self-righting toys
- Lead shotgun or rifle pellets, lead based paints (some lead free paints have leaded drying agents), varnishes, lacquers
- Linoleum & roofing felt, electricians cable clips, batteries (household), light bulb bases, plaster and putty
- Costume jewellery
- Car exhaust fumes, seeds for planting (coated with lead arsenate)
- Bells – check for lead clappers
- Galvanized wire, nails, clips, padlocks and feeding bowls especially when new (brushing with a wire brush and vinegar reduces, but doesn't eliminate the risk)
- "White rust" on older galvanized products, shiny 'silver' coating on cage bars, wires used as hangers for chew-sticks
- Metal monopoly game pieces or similar and some coins

Fibre Ingestion and Constriction

Many birds will chew at rope or fibres; most will spit out the fragments, but some will swallow them. These can build up in the bird's crop and stomach causing serious problems requiring surgery. Fibres that have been removed from birds include cotton, plastic rope and human hair. Unfortunately, sisal and other natural fibres have also caused problems. Particular problems are seen with cockatiels and lorikeets, but any species can be affected. While some owners will continue to place these items in the enclosure, we recommend finding alternative sources of environmental enrichment. Prevention is much better than cure!

In addition to ingestion, fibres can wrap around body parts, especially the legs and toes, causing constriction. Left untended for long enough, a thread can tourniquet a leg sufficiently to cut off all circulation. Monitor your toys for threads that could cause entrapment, and be vigilant for sore or swollen toes, feet or legs.

Foreign bodies

Apart from fibres, birds can also ingest other foreign items such as plastic rings, balls and metal chain. Ensure that any component that could become separated from the toy is either too big to fit into your bird's mouth, or is completely biodegradable. Be aware that a toy that may be safe for a cockatiel may NOT be safe for a macaw or cockatoo!

Toxins

There are many other toxic substances (glues, dyes, etc) that can appear in bird toys. Use your nose – any strange odour should alert the bird owner to avoid that toy. As a general rule, child safe glues and food dyes are likely to be safe for birds. Untreated pine is good for general chewing, but avoid treated wood – it often contains arsenic.

Other dangers

Parrots can get their beaks or limbs caught on split rings, clips or hooks. Be vigilant against sharp spikes as well. Ensure that all toys are fastened to the cage in ways that avoid the bird getting caught. Ensure that any ring is either too small for the bird's head to fit through, or large enough for the entire body!

Toys that SHOULD be safe

- Branches from non-toxic trees, hard-shelled nuts (Brazil nuts, hazelnuts) or soft shelled nuts open easily (pecans, almonds).
- Food items are often popular toys. For example, placing a clump of broccoli on the top of a cage where the bird can pull it through the bars is a good method of getting the bird to eat broccoli and a time-consuming occupation as well. Unsalted peanut butter thinly spread on the inside of a half-coconut shell, with the flesh still attached, will keep a bird busy.
- Natural toys, like vegetable tanned leather, natural wood, untreated pine and native seeds and flowers, give hours of fun.

