

## Bird Bowls And Crocks

**Learn more about the safety of these bird cage accessories**

*By Rebecca Sweat*

Water bowls should be placed so that they're above perch level to prevent contamination by fecal material. Courtesy Fredena Grinnell, Texas

The traditional way to provide water is in a bowl or crock. Richard Nye, DVM, a veterinarian in Illinois who sees birds and exotics, prefers crocks and water bowls. "It's a more normal manner of drinking for the bird," he said. "The bird can stick his whole head in and splash around and take baths, which is a fun activity for the bird. And bowls are easy to clean; you just dump it over, wipe it out, and fill it back up."

The down side to bowls is that birds can easily foul the water by defecating in it or making "soup" out of it. Also, if the bowl is lightweight and not latched onto the side of the cage, a bird could knock over its water supply. If the owners are away at work, the bird will not have anything to drink until they come home and realize what happened.

Because of the above-mentioned reasons, water bowls should be placed so that they're above perch level to prevent contamination by fecal material and latched firmly in place. Or get the type of water dish that sits outside the cage, so that the bird cannot perch over it.

For a bird that's a "dunker," Florida veterinarian Gregory Harrison, DVM, suggests you give the bird water in the morning when you first get up, then take out the water dish and put in the food. After the bird has eaten its breakfast, put the water back in, and go to work. All day the bird will have water available. When you get home at the end of the day, take the water out of the cage, give your bird its dinner, and then put the water back in before you go to bed. "This way there's never water and food in the cage at the same time," Harrison said.

Another idea is to provide two water dishes in the cage, Nye said. One bowl would be a large, heavy crock or ceramic dog dish [Make sure that the dish is shallow to prevent accidental drowning. — Ed.] that you put on the bottom of the cage, so that your bird has somewhere it can bathe when it wants to. Then put a second dish in the cage that's a lot smaller and too little for the bird to get its body into, which will be for drinking only.

Water bowls and dishes are available in stainless steel, glass, plastic or ceramic; crocks are typically ceramic. All of these work fine, Nye said, "although plastic does have a tendency, if things sit in it for a long time, to absorb bacteria." Harder plastics are less absorbent than soft plastics, he said, so if you're going to use plastic, hard is best.

Stainless steel, glass and ceramics are probably the top choices for water dishes. They do not absorb bacteria at all. Galvanized crocks and bowls are generally not recommended. They can oxidize, are harder to clean and pose some toxic risks to your birds.

### Water Bottles

Your other option is to provide your pet bird with a water bottle. Birds can drink water from a water bottle the same way guinea pigs, hamsters and other pets do.

Water bottles are made from plastic or glass and hang on the outside of the cage. The metal drinking tube is inserted between the cage bars, allowing access from inside the cage. Inside the tube is a metal ball bearing that releases the water when pushed. This enables the bird to freely access fresh water at anytime.

### Train Your Bird To Use A Water Bottle

Try these steps to switch your bird over to a water bottle. [Click Here>>](#)

Those who prefer water bottles believe it's an excellent way to prevent contamination. "Water bottles are a closed system, so that if you put fresh water in the cage in the morning, your birds get fresh water all day," said North Carolina veterinarian Gregory Burkett, DVM. "Every time they drink, the drinking tube gets flushed clean, fresh water keeps coming out and, by the evening, that water is just as fresh as when you put it in that morning."

Because the bottle is not open to the atmosphere, birds can't dunk their food in it, defecate in it or wash their beak in it, Burkett said so the bacterial content stays very low. (The only bacteria that's in the water in the bottle is the minute number of bacteria that's in the water to begin with. There are no additional bacteria being introduced by the bird defecating in the water, etc.) Owners must still clean the water bottle and change the water daily.

The water bottle should be mounted above a perch, at the level of your bird's head. Fill the bottle completely, so there are no air bubbles. Put the stopper in, and turn it over. One or two drops of water will escape to form the vacuum. Tap the metal ball at the end of the tube to make sure water comes out.

Check the bottle at least once or twice a day to make sure that water still comes out. Water won't flow if the bottle is not hung properly or if there isn't enough vacuum pressure in the tube. Sometimes birds think it's fun to stuff wads of wet newspaper strips, sunflower seeds, moistened pellets, cooked vegetables, pieces of toys, etc., in the spouts of their water bottles, which, of course, clogs up the tubes.

Both Julie Burge, DVM, a private practice veterinarian in Missouri and Brian Speer, DVM, an avian veterinarian in California and co-author of *Birds for Dummies* (IDG Books, 1999) said they have seen several birds die of dehydration because their owners did not realize that the birds couldn't get at the water in their water bottles. "You should get into a habit of thumping on that water bottle whenever you walk by the cage to make sure you see a drop come out," Speer said. "If you're not doing that, you're setting the stage for a potential crisis."