

Water & Your Pet Bird: What You Should Know

When 75 percent of your parrot's body is made up of water, you need to read all about it.

By Rebecca Sweat

Kinds Of Water

In most situations, ordinary tap water is fine. "I don't think every bird needs to have bottled water imported from France in his cage," said Florida veterinarian Gregory Harrison, DVM. "If you feel comfortable drinking the water, then it's probably OK for your bird."

In most urban areas, the water goes through a treatment facility where bacteria, excess minerals, etc., are filtered out. That water will probably be safe for both you and your birds. On the other hand, if you live way out in the country and are drinking well water, sometimes that's a problem.

Well water often has an excessive amount of minerals from the ground, and the water may be pretty hard as a result. "Hard water can be potentially harmful, because there can be a lot of iron and other hard minerals in it that can, over a long period of time, affect kidney function," Burkett said.

The lead in hard water is especially a concern with lorries, mynahs and toucans, according to Harrison. "Iron causes hemochromatosis (iron storage disease) in lorries, toucans, mynahs. These birds need to be fed a low-iron diet — and they should be provided with water that's low in iron too," he said.

If you believe that your water is unacceptable, you might want to buy de-ionized water, filtered water or bottled water for your bird. Or, you could install an in-line water filter system, or have a filter put on your faucet to filter out excess minerals and bacteria.

One other issue relating to your bird's water has to do with adding vitamin supplements to the water. Vitamin supplements in the water may provide necessary nutrients in the water container for bacterial growth to occur.

"Bacteria need the same nutrients that birds and every other living thing needs. So when you put vitamins in the water to 'vitamize' your bird's nutrition, you do that to the bacteria too, and they grow even faster," noted Sydney, Australia, veterinarian Fiona Park, BCSC, MACVSC (avian health).

Changing The Water

Whether your birds drink from a bowl or a bottle, veterinarians generally agree that water should be changed daily. "Don't let the relative convenience of the water bottle give you an excuse to change it less frequently than you would a water dish," Speer said. "Both water bowls and bottles should be cleaned out daily and refilled with fresh water."

Even if a bird is using a water bottle — and therefore it's not defecating in and "making soup" in its water — bacteria is still a concern if you let it go more than a couple days. Water does stagnate. "There's bacteria everywhere, so it's going to be in the water," Burkett said. "But it's in low enough numbers in fresh water that the bird's immune system can deal with it. However, if you let the water in the bottle go for more than two or three days, it too can start doubling, and this water can become foul."

Make it part of your daily routine to clean your bird's water containers, and refill them with fresh water at a certain time every day. A good time to do it is in the morning before you leave for work. Don't let yourself get so busy with work, errands, social activities, etc., that you let this important task slide.

Keep in mind, your bird can't go over to the sink and wash the water bowl itself and get clean water. Your bird is relying on you to do this for it. "When birds live with us," Park said, "we're imposing the rules. And so we have the responsibility to provide them with the best care possible — and that includes an adequate supply of clean, healthy water."