

## Small Pet Bird Cages

**Sizes, shapes and housing tips for budgies, cockatiels, lovebirds, parrotlets, finches and canaries.**

*By Rose Gordon*

Budgies are small parrots and need a cage that is at least 24 by 24 by 24 inches.

When purchasing a small pet bird cage, don't think minimum size, try to size up. "So many people buy the finch-size cages for budgies," said John Miles a judge for the American Budgerigar Society ([www.abs1.org](http://www.abs1.org)) and a budgie breeder. But really a budgie needs a cage that is at least 24 by 24 by 24 inches. Miles prefers a flight cage about 3-feet-long to allow the birds to fly around within the cage.

Unfortunately, some finch-sized cages don't provide enough room for even a finch. Pet finches and canaries often spend most, if not all, of the day in a cage, which means there should be room to fly back and forth in the cage.

For waxbills and canaries, Ian Hinze, a finch expert and former BIRD TALK columnist, recommends a box cage of 4-feet long and 2-feet square for a pair of birds. Then, if you no longer want the birds to breed, you can divide the cage in two and still have room for each individual bird to live comfortably.

Most experts insist that finches be kept in pairs. Canaries, on the other hand, males in particular, can be housed separately. "The biggest mistake I see people making is thinking a male canary needs a partner," said Darrell Horst, a canary breeder for 12 years. "A single male canary is just fine by himself. He will actually sing more when housed by himself."

When housing male canaries together, Horst recommends keeping three or more rather than just two males. "Housing just two male canaries together means the aggressive male only has one other bird to pick on," Horst said. "With other males in the cage that aggressiveness is more evenly spread around and the more timid males can get away for a while and rest."

Cockatiels, too, are often kept in cages too narrow for them, said Julie Allen, president of the National Cockatiel Society ([www.cockatiels.org](http://www.cockatiels.org)). "It is important to have ample room for play toys and swings in addition to space for the bird to stretch and flap his wings for exercise."

Bill McElveen, president of the American Cockatiel Society ([www.acstiels.com](http://www.acstiels.com)), suggested looking for a cage with a large door, "60 percent or more of the cage front," as well as a smaller inset door. "This makes getting the birds in and out of the cage much easier," he said.

Lovebirds and parrotlets are truly large parrots in little bodies. These birds are active and voracious eaters and chewers. Because of their activity level, both of these birds require as large a cage as possible — 24-inches square is ideal.

When sizing up on cages for all small birds, don't forget to check the bar spacing. A larger cage may mean larger bar spacing, which isn't good for tiny heads, toes and beaks. Aviculturist Penny Corbett recalled budgies that broke wings in inappropriate cage bars, and McElveen knows of 'tiels that stuck their heads through 1-inch bar spacing, but were unable to pull their heads back in and were strangled.

### Don't Forget Small Pet Bird Toys

Small parrots may not chew through their toys the way a macaw or cockatoo does, but it's important for all birds to have access to something to chew on. "People neglect giving the littler guys things to chew," said Corbett. Also, rotate new toys in frequently — whether chewed through or not — to keep birds interested.

Sandee Molenda, owner of The Parrotlet Ranch in California and co-founder of The International Parrotlet Society ([www.internationalparrotletsociety.org](http://www.internationalparrotletsociety.org)), gives her parrotlets cockatiel-sized foot toys, such as barbells and sturdy balls. Swings are essential too. Lovebirds enjoy rope toys and little balls to toss around. Miles puts untreated 2 by 2s on top of his budgie and cockatiels cages.

#### Small Pet Birds Forage At The Cage Bottom

Wild lovebirds, budgies, parrotlets and cockatiels forage for food on the ground, so your bird, too, will hunt for food at the bottom of its cage. Margaret Madison, a BIRD TALK reader, encourages clean foraging behavior in her 15 cockatiels by scattering food on a tray on top of one of the cages. "... I lay out paper — to help prevent droppings and other things from falling back into the cage below — and I place a tray of fresh foods [there] every day," she said. "Today, it happens to be pieces of corn, celery tops, carrots and multi-grain bread."

#### Small Bird Quirks

"Small birds" is a term used loosely to describe a bird smaller than a conure, but each type of small bird has its own individual quirks. Here are just a few:

**Finches:** Finches love swings and will also play with small toys in their cages.

**Canaries:** "Too many daylight hours will send a canary into molt and totally confuse their internal clocks," said Horst. "Many people write asking why my canary stopped singing. I've found the No. 1 reason is amount and consistency of light they are receiving."

Canaries, too, enjoy swings but they don't climb the way hookbills do so a ladder isn't necessary except as an extra perch, Horst added.

**Budgies:** Budgies enjoy "bonk" toys, such as a springy one or the classic bouncy penguin toy. Because of their acrobatic nature, budgies also need swings and plenty of things to hang upside down on.

**Parrotlets:** "A parrotlet's home is their castle," said Molenda so any perceived intrusions might be met with a bite. Molenda recommends removing your little parrot during cleaning. Swiftly offer your hand inside the cage for a "Step up" and then place the bird on a playgym. Parrotlets have voracious appetites, so Molenda keeps four food dishes in the cage at all times. One might offer pellets or seed while another holds fresh food. They're not typically water-dunkers, but a tube waterer cut downs on contamination and frees up another dish for food.

**Lovebirds:** "Lovebirds make soup of everything," said Edwards. They put everything in their water dish whether it is food or a piece of newspaper (they love to shred newspaper). This means frequent water changes to keep the drinking water fresh. These birds are crafty escape artists.

**Cockatiels:** Some cockatiels are prone to night frights and many people recommend keeping a night light on to reduce this phenomena.

#### Recommended Cage/Flight Sizes

Remember, always size-up if you can when choosing a cage. Additional cage width is more beneficial to birds than height, especially for these small birds that enjoy flying from perch to perch. (Recommendations are for a single bird, except finches.)

**Finch (pair):** 24-inches-long by 24-inches-deep by 24-inches-high; 12 inch or less bar spacing

**Canary:** 24 by 24 by 24 inches; 58 inch or less bar spacing

**Budgie:** 24 by 24 by 24 inches; 12 inch or less bar spacing

**Lovebird:** 24 by 24 by 24 inches; 12 inch or less bar spacing

**Parrotlet:** 24 by 24 by 24 inches; 12 inch or less bar spacing

**Cockatiel:** 24 by 24 by 24 inches; 34 inch or less bar spacing