

Grooming Perches For Pet Birds

Use a grooming perch in between bird grooming sessions to help keep your pet bird's nails and beak in good shape.

By Susan Chamberlain

Are you tired of lacerated shoulders and punctured forearms caused by your pet bird's sharp nails? While it won't completely replace regular bird grooming, a concrete-blend or bonded-sand perch can help keep you and your pet bird comfortable between grooming sessions.

I've been using such perches with my flock since I discovered them at a bird fair in Florida in the '80s. Marketed as nail-grooming accessories, the originals were basic, natural-colored, bolt-on perches, about 6 inches long. Variety and design have come a long way since then, with a broad range of styles and colors available. Swings, corner perches, stands and specialty concrete and sand-coated perches are available to suit parrotlet- to macaw-sized feet.

What's the difference? Quite simply, concrete-blend perches are fabricated of a cast material usually containing concrete and a plaster-like ingredient. A bonding process is used to make sand-coated wood or composite perches.

Perch Shape Matters!

Instead of a plain round perch, choose an oval shape or graduated diameter so your bird can choose its own comfort level. Active pet birds will be likely to wear down their nails as they climb from perch to perch. If your bird is somewhat sedentary, use of a larger perch will ensure that its nails come in contact with the rough surface.

Secure footing and nail blunting are just two of the benefits of these "pedicure" perches. Another advantage is that pet birds often hone their beaks on the rough surface. Observe your pet bird after it drinks water or eats soft food. It will most likely wipe its beak back and forth on its perch or cage bars. A concrete or bonded-sand perch placed near such dishes encourages such behavior and keeps the bird's beak smooth and trim. If you notice your bird honing its beak to the point where it gets very pointed and thin, remove the textured perch from the cage.

Scrub concrete-blend and bonded-sand perches clean using a nylon bristle brush and a nontoxic detergent. Some are dishwasher safe. Check manufacturer's recommendations. If you are concerned about the safety of dishwashing detergent, use a non-phosphate product, or simply run the dishwasher without using soap. Stains from droppings or fruit might remain on some perches due to the porosity of the material. Perches made of sand-bonded-to-wood should not be cleaned in a dishwasher because heat and moisture can eventually cause the wood to expand or split, thereby compromising the sandy surface. Return perches to cages only after they are completely dry.

Advantages of Grooming Perches For Pet Birds

- 1) The abrasive surface helps keep nails blunted and beaks in shape.
- 2) They provide secure, non-slip footing.
- 3) Many styles save space inside the cage. Half perches, corner perches and forked models are available.
- 4) Screw-on design makes these perches convenient to use in carriers and travel cages.
- 5) The perches are long-lasting and virtually indestructible.

Pet Bird Tips To Perfect Perching

- 1) Place abrasive perches near water or soft food to encourage beak honing.
- 2) Use a larger-sized perch so the bird's nails contact the abrasive surface.
- 3) Check the bird's feet often for signs of soreness on the bottom. Watch for excessive beak honing.
- 4) Always give birds other choices. Wood, cactus or cholla and rope perches provide variety and comfort.
- 5) For safety's sake, install heavy perches above a vertical cage support or just above another perch.
- 6) Textured perches don't eliminate the need for birdie pedicures and in some cases, beak grooming. Because overgrown beaks can indicate certain health issues, beak trimming should only be done by an avian veterinarian after a physical evaluation.