

The Top 10 Best Pet Birds

These pet birds are the top! BIRD TALK readers rank the top 10 best pet birds.

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Cockatiels

Of all the surveys we received, the bird that rated No. 1 was the cockatiel, with 23 percent of the votes. This bird was a favorite with both beginning bird owners and experienced birdkeepers who still could not resist their charms.

First-time bird owner Danielle Aamodt of Virginia voted for cockatiels because of the affection her cockatiel, Angel, gives her. "She will snuggle up to me when I'm tired, she likes to give me kisses on the nose, she'll whistle to me every time I pass the doorway of our dining room where her cage is and she loves to play with my hair and tickle my ear," she wrote.

Cathy and Sandy Giancarlo agree with the assessment that cockatiels are very affectionate pets. Although they also own a lovebird, a budgie, a crimson rosella, a red lory, a rosy Bourke's, Gouldian finches and a canary, they chose a cockatiel as the best bird. "Aladdin likes to be scratched behind her head and wants to stay with me the whole time she is out of her aviary," stated Cathy.

Another aspect that encouraged people to choose cockatiels as the best bird is the fact that they are a relatively inexpensive and easy species to maintain. "My cockatiel is not expensive to care for because the cage is not huge, his toys are small, and he does not destroy them, either," wrote Therese Heise of Illinois about her cockatiel Mr. Beeker.

Cathy Giancarlo mentioned this benefit as well. "Cockatiels eat such a small amount that I wouldn't consider them expensive to feed. The only part of keeping a cockatiel that I would consider to be expensive is regular veterinary annual exams. Caring for cockatiels doesn't take much time or effort, but they do appreciate time spent socializing with them daily."

However, Billie Archer of Tennessee, who is the proud owner of cockatiels Bonnie and Clyde, summed up cockatiel ownership in one sentence: "I don't know how it was before I had my birds."

African Grey Parrots

The second-place winner was African greys, with 20 percent of the vote. Grey's intelligence, sensitivity and quiet nature were some of the traits readers named as the reasons why they are the favored bird.

Ricky Lowrimore of Texas loves the way his African grey is both affectionate and independent. "Irma can astound me sometimes by answering my questions, then other times she can be like a baby and wants her way. But, I love her best because she knows when I'm sad and she will come to me and cuddle."

Another benefit of grey ownership is the size of the bird. "It isn't too large for a bird, yet it is a great size to handle," wrote Beverly A. Remington of New York.

Another thing potential grey owners need to keep in mind is the cost of the bird and its cage. However, this expense is not indicative of what the bird will cost over time. As Aditi Czarnomski of Minnesota, the proud owner of a grey named Jasmine, put it, "The initial investment in a bird and their supplies can be pricey, but after that the expense is minimal. I spend more on my dog per month than on Jasmine. Toys can add up in expense and so can high-quality pellets, but that goes along with the territory."

Budgerigars

Budgies took home 8 percent of the total vote, placing them third out of the top 10 birds. The fans of these birds remarked on their playfulness, their affectionate nature and that they were easy to maintain and cost much less than other birds.

On the practical side, many voters mentioned their small size, and the benefits that accompany that, as one of the major advantages of the species. "Their size fits into most any home. Their noise level is low, they do not damage furniture and

their toys are not destroyed as fast," wrote Sue Dial of Michigan, who owns budgie Gina.

However, although owners may think that their budgies take up very little space, their pets frequently believe differently. As Californian Ifsha Rahman, owner of budgie Junior, stated, "Space requirements are not too much: a large cage, ladder and a play pen (although my budgie thinks he owns the place and walks over to dance in front of a full-length mirror)."

Budgies are also loved because of their charm and talking ability. Dial wrote that they are "good talkers, affectionate and energetic," while Sarah Stern of Florida remarked that, "Budgies are very easy to care for and they make great company — they love to show off when they play."

Cockatoos

Cockatoos also took 8 percent of the total votes. The species that got the most votes within the cockatoo category was the umbrella cockatoo, with 38 percent.

Owners of umbrella cockatoos raved about their bird's pet qualities. Michigan resident Sandra Wood's comments about her umbrella cockatoo are just a few examples of the qualities owners love about their pets. "Joey is the nicest bird I have ever seen. She is gentle, loving and extremely intelligent. She talks but doesn't have a large vocabulary yet. She knows three tricks (play catch, play basketball and roller skates) and she also knows verbal commands (Go to sleep; Be quiet; Go to your cage)."

Some readers preferred certain sexes of umbrella cockatoos. One such reader is Jennifer Bethke of Connecticut who owns an umbrella cockatoo named Charlie Girl and a Moluccan cockatoo named Squeakie. "I think female umbrella cockatoos make the best pets. They are sweet, love to cuddle and are not quite as noisy or demanding as the other cockatoos (either that or I've got the pick of the clutch). They are neither so small as to lose them, nor are they so large that they need a room to themselves. In my humble opinion they are the perfect bird."

Umbrella cockatoos are one of the larger birds, and umbrella cockatoo owners reaffirmed that taking care of their fair feathered friends comes with the territory. Bethke wrote, "My cockatoos have the largest Prevue-Hendrix cage made to share. They also have many homemade perches and T-stands. They are expensive — I think most of my grocery bill goes to them (not including pellets), and they just love destroying those expensive toys. They don't really take any more time than a young child would."

Conures

Conures received 7 percent of the total vote. Among the conures, green-cheeked conures were the favored bird with 25 percent of the vote.

"Green cheeks are really great, especially for the first-time bird owner who wants a little more interaction than is usually possible with a cockatiel. Ninety-nine percent are naturally gentle, usually quiet (except for alarm calls) and can speak a few words. They are also very loyal. They aren't extremely messy and they don't destroy their toys," wrote Michigan resident Rae Owen, owner of Cheeky, a green cheek.

Another reader agreed with the belief that green cheeks are the best: "I think the best pet is my green cheek because she is the most affectionate, lovable, sweet and smart bird ever. You can teach her anything and she picks it up immediately. In the past two months she has learned 12 tricks, and she got them down in less than 15 minutes each. She loves to snuggle under my bathrobe at night and she follows me wherever I go around the house," stated Rose Adler of Massachusetts, owner of green cheek Dixie.

However, Dixie is more than just a great pet — she is a great watch bird as well. "She can tell me if something is wrong. A number of times she alerted me when my son was crying in his room. I couldn't hear and she was going frantic trying to get to him. When I let her out of her cage, she went straight up the stairs and kept scratching and chirping at his door until I let her in. She is also a very good guard bird, letting me know if anyone is on my property. In the winter, when my husband has to work very late or overnight, I'm nervous about being alone with just me and the kids. But, Dixie makes me feel safe," stated Adler.

Green cheeks also do not take up as much space as some of the larger parrots. Additionally, Owen wrote that her green cheek is not any trouble to own. "Cheeky hangs off the front of my shirt while I do chores and takes a bath in the bathroom sink while I'm getting ready for work. I don't feel he is expensive to keep — his biggest love in life is hanging on his favorite human," she stated.

Macaws

Macaws received 6 percent of the total votes. Blue-and-gold macaws and Hahn's macaws tied for the most popular macaws, with 29 percent of the vote each.

"The Hahn's macaw is the best pet by a mile. Mine is the sweetest, smartest and most affectionate bird. He greets us when we come home. He says "Bye-bye. Be good" when we leave. He even greets my terrier when he comes in through the pet door by saying "Hi, Rocky." He plays well on his own, is not too noisy and talks very well. The Hahn's is a true delight and the love of my life," wrote Pam Ericson of Florida, owner of Hahn's macaw Abbey.

BIRD TALK's own Ask The Experts columnist Gail Worth wrote about Hahn's macaw Globo: "This is a small species with a huge personality! Hahn's macaws are extremely personable and interactive with people, and they have marvelous mimicry ability. This species is quite hardy and has no special dietary requirements, but they should be fed a large variety of vegetables and grains. Their medium-small size is easy to cage properly and they are generally not overly noisy. This species will often be friendly with a number of people and has a large macaw personality in a small package. Additionally, they enjoy tearing apart paper plates and cardboard roll inserts from paper towels and are thus easily and inexpensively amused."

On the other side of the fence, the blue-and-gold macaw owners raved about their pets. "I personally feel that a blue-and-gold hen makes the best pet. Great disposition, great talker, super intelligent, very sweet. Overall a good friend — so dedicated and loving," wrote Dy Anna Robinson of Texas, owner of blue & gold Yettie.

However, the larger macaws cost more and are more time-consuming to feed and keep clean. Robinson clarified this when she wrote, "Macaws need nice big cages, as big as you can afford. If I am going to invest in a bird like this, I am going to house it equally. I have large macaw cages with built-in cup holders (dump proof), nice perches and a lot of toys for each bird. Once you have the bird, toys, food and a system it is more fun than work. I clean all the cages and cut fresh fruit and vegetables daily."

Shawn Snead of North Carolina, who tends to blue & gold Milo agreed with Robinson. "She is somewhat expensive to keep because she shreds her toys in no time at all. I spend a lot of time with her, I give her a shower each day and play with her indoors and outside. Her curiosity knows no bounds and she keeps us on our toes. Yes, she takes up most of my time, but I think that she is well worth it."

Poicephalus

Poicephalus parrots also received 6 percent of the total vote. Senegal parrots were by far the favored Poicephalus with 57 percent of the votes in that category.

Minnesota resident David P. Cole, who owns a Senegal named Zoey, thought Senegals were the best bird because they are "usually not loud; they make decent apartment pets. They are natural acrobats, so it is easier to train them to do "stupid pet tricks" than other bird species. Their antics are amusing, and their personalities can be very human in terms of shyness or boisterousness. They will bond to their human owner very quickly."

Senegals were also popular because they are smaller than many other species, making them easy to take care of. Scott Fields, owner of Senegal Chobi, wrote about how easy it is for him to take care of his Senegal. "She does not need that much space — just a corner. It takes about 20 minutes to clean, feed and water her. The time she spends out of the cage with me is not considered taking my time because that is the best part of my day."

Amazon Parrots

Amazon parrots received 5 percent of the total votes, with yellow-naped Amazons taking a third of those votes. These independent birds were voted best bird by their owners because of their strong personalities and affectionate natures.

Sunny Updegrave of Ohio, who has two yellow napes, Jalapeno and Miss Rocco, wrote, "We love our yellow-naped Amazons because they have so much character. They also have great body language — we know their moods pretty quickly. We were surprised at how affectionate and loving they are, yet we love how feisty they are and how specific their needs and wants are."

Also mentioned was the softer side of Amazons. "My yellow nape Spanky is special. He cuddles with you when you are sad and plays all the time. He was born to talk. There isn't much he doesn't say. We love him and he lets us know that he loves us too," wrote Robin Kresel of New Jersey.

Quaker Parrots

The charming quaker parrots took 4 percent of the total votes. Their powerful personalities and penchant for fun

made them winners to their smitten owners.

"The quaker is my favorite. He is so full of personality that I have a hard time thinking of him as a bird. I love the way he is the smallest bird and he's the boss. Three of my friends who are 'nonbird people' have fallen in love with Shakey, my quaker, and now want to get a quaker. He's a ham!" stated Jane Bravo of Illinois.

Anne Lindgren of Virginia agreed that quakers are the best pets. In response to the question, "If you could only have one bird, which species would it be," she responded, "Definitely a quaker! They're not too loud, are very sweet and can be very good talkers. I really consider them the perfect parrot, and now they come in a variety of colors — that's exciting!"

Quakers are also relatively easy to maintain, according to their owners. As Bravo stated, "The quaker is lower maintenance because he likes inexpensive toys — paper towels, toilet paper rolls. But his favorite toys are us. He is an attention hog! He always needs to be on us and he always needs to be pet. Our household needs to revolve around him. If he's unhappy, he'll let us know."

Lindgren also stated that her quaker Jacob "is not a high maintenance bird, and that's perfect for me because I am on a fixed income. Caring for him is easy because he loves a varied diet and is not a destructive bird, so his toys last longer."

Pionus
Finally, Pionus parrots got 2 percent of the total vote, with blue heads and Maximilian's splitting the votes evenly.

Taryn Bates of Washington, who owns a Maximilian's named Brio wrote that the "Maximilian's Pionus is an almost perfect pet. It doesn't know how to scream or shriek. He is quiet most times, or he is talking. He learns words quickly and also learns their meaning and who to use them appropriately. He is not high strung nor nippy. He is usually not inclined to bite strangers. I can trust him to behave. He likes attention, but he is also fine alone."

Additionally, wrote Bates, Maximilian's are not difficult to house or feed. "Nineteen by 24 by 33 inches is the largest cage I've found for him. It is a good size with plenty of room for his antics and toys, swing and perches. He is not expensive to keep. He eats a standard parrot mix diet with thawed frozen vegetables."

The other half of the voters, however, raved about the blue-headed Pionus.

"The blue-headed Pionus makes an excellent pet parrot for first-time owners. They are easy to care for, very loving, playful and they have a mellow temper. They can make great apartment birds," wrote Silvia Schwarz of California, owner of blue head Aegis.

Blue-headed Pionus are also not difficult to keep. "Caring for a blue head is not expensive, and they are easy to maintain. I spend about 10 minutes a day preparing food and servicing the cage. The cage is dome shaped and does not require much space," wrote Schwarz.

No Best Bird?

A number of the survey respondents did not vote for a best bird because they believed that it is impossible to rank one bird as best. Many of them stated that one bird cannot be a best bird for all people — a bird that is great for one person is terrible for another. As Florida resident Linda Grulke put it: "The best bird depends on many factors: previous bird experience, how much time you have, money needed to spend on their needs, how much space you have in your home and even you personality."

Bonnie Kenk, director of the Parrot Education and Adoption Center in California agreed with the respondents that stated that you can't pick just one bird. She stated, "If you are interested in a certain species, you need to learn everything you can possibly learn about parrots in general and that species in particular before you bring the bird into your home to make sure that it will in fact fit in to your lifestyle." Sidebar:

Medical Concerns

Another consideration is what kind of diseases each species is prone to get. Although there are diseases that all birds can get, some species are more inclined to have certain medical problems than others.

Cockatiels:

Giardiasis: A disease caused by a gut parasite. Symptoms include painful feather picking and passing of whole seeds.

Candidiasis: A disease caused by a yeast that is common in hand-fed chicks. Antifungal medicine is a current course of treatment.

Chlamydiosis: This disease should always be ruled out in sick cockatiels. Conjunctivitis and sinusitis are frequently the only symptoms seen.

Chronic egg laying, egg binding: These frequent problems can cause the death of the bird. Treatments include environmental manipulation, hormonal therapy and hysterectomy.

African greys:

Feather picking: This can be caused by physical, behavioral or environmental problems.

Hypocalcemia syndrome: This is low blood calcium, which can result in seizures. Birds aged 2 to 5 are most commonly affected.

Aspergillosis: Many African species seem to have problems fighting off this fungal disease. Warm, moist environments frequently cause more infections.

Budgerigars:

Neoplasia (cancer): Budgies are reputed to have more tumors than any domestic species. Tumors of the kidney, ovary, teste and liver are common.

Mites: Scaly-face mites are common and are treated with Ivermectin.

Cockatoos:

Blood parasite problems: These parasites may be associated with kidney disease, and most of these birds are immunosuppressed.

Behavior problems: Self-mutilating cockatoos chew their bodies open, especially the chest and legs. This is extremely difficult to cure.

These are just a few of the problems that can affect these species. Discuss your concerns with a qualified avian veterinarian to learn more about these and other diseases.

The birds above are all fantastic pets when placed in the correct homes. When choosing your "best bird," be sure to educate yourself before you purchase the bird. Only you know what is right for you and your potential feathered companion.