

Pet Bird Travel Tips

Travel safely and happily with your pet bird by following these tips

By Connie Cho

Regularly traveling with your bird can prepare it for longer car rides or a flight.
Courtesy Missi Brody, Florida

Before you even step out with your bird, acclimate it to its carrier. Place the carrier near the cage, playgym or other birdie hang out spots until your bird gets accustomed to it, recommended Linda Morrow, a professional bird trainer and author of "Clicking With Birds: A Beginner's Guide to Clicker Training Your Companion Parrot." Put your bird's favorite treats inside the carrier and praise it for each small step it takes toward going inside, she added.

"Once your bird starts going in voluntarily, close the carrier door. Repeat this step and gradually increase the time your bird spends in there." Morrow also suggested using a verbal cue, such as "kennel," so it knows that it is time to go inside the carrier. To make your bird more comfortable, maintain a positive and upbeat attitude during training sessions. "Praise with a smiling face is a great reinforcer," said Morrow.

Next, take a few short trips to places that will be fun and interesting to your bird (not the vet's office!) to prepare it for longer car rides or a flight.

Regularly traveling with your bird can also help ready it for a possible emergency situation. Morrow, who lives in "hurricane ally," is always prepared to evacuate her birds. "I stress to folks who don't live in severe-weather areas that emergencies can happen," said Morrow. "If you add stress, to an already sick or injured bird by sticking in a scary carrier he has never seen before, it can complicate an already difficult situation."

Safety Tips

For all type of trips

Add a favorite toy and perch to the carrier to ease your bird's stress.

Secure toys so they don't hit your bird while the carrier or vehicle is in motion.

Partly cover the carrier with a light-colored sheet to block sunlight and allow your bird a little retreat.

When traveling by car

Secure your bird's carrier in the backseat with a seatbelt. Airbags make the front seat a dangerous spot for birds due to their small size.

Never allow your bird to ride unrestrained in the car, either on your lap, a perch or shoulder. "This is an accident waiting to happen," said Morrow.

Each bird needs its own carrier to prevent injuries. (Some manufacturers offer dual carriers for two birds — see sidebar.)

When traveling by air

Contact the airline well in advance for instructions on the type of carrier you need and any other regulations. "Call the airline the month, the week and the day before your departure date," suggests Cathy A. Johnson-Delaney, DVM, Dip. ABVP — Avian Practice of the Eastside Avian and Exotic Animal Medical Center in Washington.

Your bird will need a health certificate to cross state lines and board a plane. Schedule the appointment with enough time to make your flight but not to far ahead that the certificate expires. "Some travelers have stopped in on their way to the airport for a check up," said Johnson-Delaney. "I have to tell them they might not make their trip."

Overseas travel requires a CITES (<http://www.cites.org/>) permit, which can take weeks to process.

Trim your bird's wing feathers pre-travel to prevent escapes at security checkpoints, or add an extra layer of protection with a harness or flight suit.