

10-Step Guide to Vacation Food and Water

Tips for traveling and an avian travel supply list.

By Susan Chamberlain

1. Resist the urge to share “fast food” or even restaurant food with your birds. Sure, that burger you got at the drive-through is delicious, but it may be contaminated with enough E.coli to make your bird desperately ill. Tasty tacos, embellished with cheese and salsa may be loaded with enough sodium to cause salt toxicosis in your bird. You’re miles from a familiar veterinarian.
2. Bring along a supply of bottled water for your bird to drink. Water supplies along your route may be “safe” for you to drink but may upset the system of a possibly stressed bird. You’ll rarely know in advance if the water along your route is well water or reservoir supplied. Once at your destination, you can gradually introduce your bird to the local water. I’ve done this by mixing increasing quantities of local water with water brought from home.
3. Substitute juicy produce for water while in motion. Most birds drink little, if any, water while actually in transit, or the water provided may be spilled. Spillage can be reduced by using a water bottle, mounted to the travel cage or carrier, but be aware that birds or the motion of a vehicle can cause these to drain as well. To provide necessary hydration, install a dish of juicy fruit and vegetables inside the travel carrier. This is especially important when your bird is traveling separately, perhaps in the cargo hold of an airplane.
4. Pack a sufficient supply of seed and pellets in non-breakable containers. Those with screw-on tops are best, because they will not pop off if the container is dropped. Place containers where they will not be subjected to direct sunlight streaming through car windows.
5. Store perishable food, fruit and vegetables in containers inside a cooler. I seal ice cubes inside re-sealable plastic bags, so the food doesn’t end up under water at day’s end. Replenish the ice at the hotel when you stop for the night.
6. Allow plenty of time for your trip. Check into your motel early in the evening, so your bird will have time to settle down, eat and spend a little time out of its cage. Some birds, like my Senegal parrots, refuse to eat a morsel of food while inside a car, so it’s important to schedule overnight stops on long trips.
7. Feed fresh food sparingly before departure. Go easy on the “heavy foods” like eggs and table food, because a bird with a tendency toward motion sickness may vomit the contents of the full crop. When traveling, I like to awaken early, prepare my birds’ breakfast and allow them time to eat while I shower and re-pack the car. You may further reduce the risk of carsickness by covering carriers or cages with a white or light-colored cloth while in transit. Birds will be able to perceive daylight, but will not be subjected to the sights of the road. Take your pet on several short drives prior to departing on a long trip so you can observe its reaction. Consult your avian veterinarian for specific advice regarding motion sickness.
8. One dish filled with seed/pellets and another stocked with fruit and vegetables is all most birds require while on the road. My Amazons followed their regular eating patterns on the road: breakfast at the motel in the morning, then toward dusk, I’d hear the crunching of seed and pellets from the back seat of the car.
9. Use a mess-containment device to reduce cage fall-out and spillage in your car and in hotels. They are available in a variety of sizes and come in handy at home and away.
10. Remove hanging toys, treats, swings and other accessories from cages and carriers while traveling. Install dishes securely. Allow your bird to spend time in and on its travel carrier well before your departure date. Offer a favorite treat or two, so your pet will associate the temporary home with something pleasant. My Amazons are still so attached to their travel cages that they insist on spending some time in them every day!

Travel Supplies

1. Supply of bird’s regular food, seed, pellets and treats.
2. Fresh food, packed in containers inside cooler.
3. List of avian vets in the area you are traveling through
4. Box or carrier for bird food and supplies

5. Cooler
6. Reclosable plastic bags for ice cubes
7. Sharp knife for cutting fruit and veggies
8. Plastic spoons
9. Small cutting board
10. Vegetable washing solution
11. Anti-microbial soap
12. Unbreakable food containers
13. Bottled water
14. Electrolyte replacement beverage for birds that suffer from stress while traveling (Pedialyte or similar product; consult your avian vet for specific advice)
15. Portable water filter
16. Extra dishes for stands or travel cages
17. Mess-containment device for cage or portable stand
18. Paper towels
19. Immersion heater or "hot pot" to heat water or baby food.
20. Thermometer, if you're hand-feeding baby birds
21. Small trash bags
22. Hand-held vacuum