**Beginners Guide to Budgerigars**

**Introduction**

Today's domesticated and exhibition Budgerigars (Melopsittacas Undulatus), possibly the most popular bird kept throughout the world today, originated in the wild in the green form as a native of Australia. It has been known under a variety of names, Shell Parrot, Undulated Parakeet, Grass Parakeet, Scollop Parrot, all of which have given way to the original native name "budgerigar" although the spelling and pronunciation has included but not confined to Budgerygah and Boodgereegar. It appears that these native aboriginal names were derived from the name meaning "good food".

The native Budgerigars are widespread throughout the interior of mainland Australia, usually in large flocks that inhabit the open grassed country interspersed with timber and scrubland.

Before buying your first Budgerigar, or start building an aviary, you are well advised to take a little time reading up on the subject and asking advise from experienced birdkeepers.

The best way to learn about Budgerigars is to join a local club and make contact with other fanciers who are usually only too pleased to show you around their own aviary to look at their methods.

This enjoyable and fascinating hobby brings many fanciers together, forming many friendships throughout the country with one thing in common, the love of Budgerigars.

**Choosing a pet cage**

Pet budgerigars are easy to keep and, as long as you follow a few basic rules, their cheerful nature, eagerness to please and the ability to talk make them the ideal companion for all ages. They are also inexpensive to purchase, feed and house.

Select for your Budgerigar the biggest cage you can afford, or have space for. Your bird must have room to stretch its wings, fly from perch to perch, climb or play. The cage should have several good perches of different thickness to allow your bird to exercise its feet. Place the cage at about shoulder height in a cool, ventilated environment where there is plenty of light, but away from draughts and direct sunlight.

**Choosing a bird**

It is important to choose a healthy Budgerigar whenever you purchase a bird. You should look for a registered breeder or a good pet shop when acquiring your Budgerigar. The Budgerigar Society can also tell you about breeders in your area from whom you may be able to purchase your bird, and are willing to give help and advice. Prices will vary depending on variety and quality and availability.

Newcomers to the fancy are usually eager to obtain birds. It may take time to develop an "eye" for a good bird so in the beginning it would be wise to take the advice from an experienced breeder you can trust.

Usually it is wise to give preference to young birds over older birds when making your first purchase (1 to 2 years old).

To manage your birds effectively you should already have your aviary prepared.

**A good diet**

In their natural environment Budgerigars feed on a variety of seeding grasses as well as the leaves of plants when available. It is for this reason the birds need a balanced seed mix of canary and millets. Many suitable mixtures are available from your pet shop or produce merchant. Only buy seed that is free of dust and does not have a musty smell.

A regular supply of fresh green leafy vegetable, fruit or seeding grasses will certainly benefit most birds, however any old or stale food should be removed.

Clean water should always be available.

Your birds will also benefit from a supply of good grit, which is required to digest their food and a source of calcium. Cuttlefish is also a good source of calcium, which is needed to replace growing lost feathers and bones. An iodine block is also a good source of calcium and helps keep the birds beak trim.

**Your bird's health**

A healthy Budgerigar is bright-eyed, alert and smooth feathered. You should get to know your bird's normal appearance. If the bird is unusually still, the feathers are fluffed or the bird is huddled up in the corner, seek advice. Check the droppings, they should be solid in appearance, not watery. At the first sign of sickness seek expert advice.

**Colony breeding**

An aviary containing Budgerigars provides an attractive focal point for any garden, large or small and the requirements are few. A flight with a waterproof, and more importantly a draught proof shelter where the birds can go in inclement weather are all that are needed. An aviary 1.8m x 1.8m x 1m will generally house approximately 30 Budgerigars.

Open flights should face away from the prevailing winds and where possible face north.

In designing your aviary, first you should consider how many birds you are intending to house. Initially an aviary with one or two flights and a small breeding room may be sufficient for your needs. This aviary should be designed with the facility to extend, should you decide at a later date to house additional birds.

Aviary size is up to individual choice and your situation, but plan for the future, it is easier to build a structure that is adaptable to growth, than to have to add on now and again due to overcrowding in your flights, with more birds than what your original intentions were.

When using new galvanized wire on any type of bird cage, make sure you wash it down with a mixture of 1 part vinegar to 10 parts water. This will kill off the zinc accumulated in the galvanizing process, and alleviate any problem of zinc poisoning.

Treated pine should not be used in the aviary construction as the chemicals used will be deadly should the birds chew into this product, as they certainly will, if given the opportunity.

The size of perches in an aviary is of the utmost importance. Varying sizes will be an advantage to your birds, as they will exercise their feet as they land on different sizes. Try to emulate natural branches as often as possible.

The basic requirements are to avoid overcrowding, having equal numbers of cocks and hens and introduce nest boxes when spring arrives.

To avoid squabbling among hens it is best to put up additional nest boxes to the number of breeding pairs. Hens often prefer the highest nest box, so problems can be avoided by fixing all of them at the same height, near the roof of the shelter.

Let nature take its course, and remember expert advice will not be far away.

**Control breeding**

The difference here is that the breeder chooses the pairings and that cages are used so that there is certainty about the parentage of chicks. You need only limited facilities, a small area containing a few cages.

A breeding cage for a pair needs to be at least 60cm long x 45cm high x 40cm deep. Larger cages give chicks more room when they leave the nest box. Budgerigar breeders are fortunate because their birds are very easy to please about the boxes in which they will breed.

Nest boxes may be positioned either inside or outside of the cage and are usually made of plywood although other materials have been successfully used over the tears. The minimum size would be 20cm x 12cm x 12cm with a 5cm entrance hole.

Nesting material such as wood shavings (not treated pine) or rice hulls should be provided.

An average clutch is 5-6 eggs and are laid on alternate days, taking 18 days for each egg to hatch, so chicks in the average nest will be hatching for up to two weeks, leaving the nest at about five weeks of age. Some hens will not start to sit until she has laid the 2nd or 3rd egg.

Chicks are usually rung with a closed aluminium ring available to members of the Society at around 5-10 days old. These rings will carry the year and an individual number for every Budgerigar you breed.

Control, or selective breeding is used to produce either chosen colours or to improve upon show points of exhibition birds. It is why the exhibition Budgerigars of today are so different to their cousins in the wild.

Attempts to control colour can sometimes be surprising, as the colour make-up of Budgerigars involve hidden factors that can come out in the chicks. It is not unusual to breed Blue chicks from Green parents and it is even possible to produce Albinos from two Green birds.

**The Ideal Budgerigar**

The ultimate aim of most controlled breeding is to produce a Budgerigar that approaches the "Ideal" as laid down by the Australian National Budgerigar Council in its "Standard". The measure of how well breeders achieve this objective can be measured at shows - another fascinating aspect of Budgerigar keeping.

**Exhibiting**

The main reason for benching birds at shows is to let breeders compete with each other. However, there is much more to Budgerigar shows than that. They provide a meeting place for enthusiasts. Some will be on the lookout for new stock, while others look forward to seeing old or new friends who they may meet as little as once a year.

Showing is structured so that newcomers compete with other relatively inexperienced breeders, while still giving them a chance to beat the 'big boys'. There are three status levels: novice, intermediate and open. Progress through the levels is governed by success.