

Top Hazards to your Pet Bird's Health

1. Dehydration and Starvation

Dehydration: This most commonly happens when a water bottle malfunctions. If the tube's ball or bearing sticks, or if a bird stuffs an object into the tube (toy pieces, food items and such), the bird may block the tube and no longer have access to its water. Another reason for dehydration is the failure of kids or less-than-attentive adults to keep their pets' water dishes filled.

- [More information on dehydration](#) (diagnosis and treatment).

Starvation: Parents trust their children with the care of their pet birds and one sad lesson learned is that they may be too irresponsible to be trusted with the life of another living being. All-too-often birds starve to death because their food dishes are not refilled. It also happened that bird owner glanced at a food dish and assumed that there still were seeds in the food dish when all that was left were the hulls.

Parental supervision is crucial - children of any age cannot fully be trusted to take care of pets. **Carefully checking on the food and water dishes** of pet birds should become part of the daily routine.

2. Unsupervised Out-of-Cage Activities

Wing-clipped Birds:

Wing-clipped birds face multiple dangers -- the danger of being stepped on, for example. A bird walking on the floor, especially a small one, may be easily injured by people who don't see it. Very few survive being stepped on. Or they can't escape away from dogs or cats that come into the home and show aggression towards them.

However, in households with kids it is usually advisable to clip a bird's feathers as flighted birds are also at risk (please refer to below). The feathers should be clipped in a way that enables the bird can still glide gracefully and safely to the ground - not drop down like a stone. A professional (breeder, vet or vet technician) or experienced store employee should probably do it -- and maybe show you how to do it correctly.

Flighted birds can easily get hurt when flying into windows and mirrors. Although birds rarely break their necks with such an injury, often compression fractures in neck vertebrae result from flying into objects. Birds can develop concussions, bleeding inside the brain, fractures, lacerations, ruptured air sacs

and other potentially deadly injuries. They can fly into pots of boiling water, open commodes and lighted fireplaces - to name just a few more household hazards. An open door or window can cause the loss of a pet. Many pet owners take their pet birds outside feeling certain that their pet will never fly off -- but many of them do as they get spooked by some noise or frightened by a perceived or actual danger (such as a bird of prey in the sky). However, flying is a wonderful exercise for our birds and is, therefore, health promoting ... if all precautions can be met to keep a flighted pet bird safe, it would be optimal to allow a bird to remain flighted.

It is important to assess your own situation and make a decision as to what is right for you and your pet.

3. Accidents

Birds get killed by being closed accidentally in doorways, vacuumed up, squished by recliners and foldout beds and also by owners sitting on them when they have crawled under cushions. Birds can also be electrocuted by chewing through electrical cords.

4. Toxic Fumes - There are quite a few dangers under this heading to be aware of.

Teflon / Non-stick Coating: Non-stick cookware and other household items possessing a non-stick surface made from polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) are toxic to birds. The gas released is extremely dangerous to birds and can result in death within minutes. It does not have to be overheated either, even with normal usage, some fumes may also be released and you will never smell anything. Anything with a PTFE coating should never be used around birds period. Remember virtually "ALL" non-stick cookware, indoor cooking grills, drip pans, self-cleaning ovens, clothes dryers, new hair dryers, space heaters, irons, ironing board covers, waffle irons, deep fryers, heat lamps and other small appliances or their components may be coated with PTFE. If anything says "non-stick" be aware and leery. Unless the manufacturer can verify, in writing, that the product in question does not contain PTFE producing elements, assume it has them.

Passive inhalation of cigarette, cigar and pipe smoke by birds can cause chronic eye problems, skin irritation and respiratory disease. Birds that live in homes with smokers may develop coughing, sneezing, sinusitis and [conjunctivitis](#) which often goes away when the bird is removed from the home. Birds exposed to chronic second-hand smoke can also develop secondary bacterial infections which can prove fatal. Second-hand smoke from marijuana can also cause severe depression and regurgitation in birds.

Many common disinfectants and household cleaning agents release fumes that

can be toxic or fatal to birds. Chlorine bleach, phenols and ammonia can all have dangerous vapors that can cause irritation, toxicosis and even death in pet birds. Common household aerosol products, such as perfume, deodorant and hairspray, can cause respiratory problems in birds as well. This may cause severe inflammation and difficulty breathing, and after large or direct exposure, death can occur. Cleaning products such as carpet cleaners or fresheners, upholstery cleaners or fresheners, or any similar cleaning product can be quite deadly to your bird.

New products such as new carpets can contain Formaldehyde in their glue and can be deadly. Paint and varnish can also emit deadly fumes. (Please refer to [Non-toxic paints.](#))

Natural gas leaks can cause sudden death in birds. Any type of heater, used improperly or with inadequate ventilation can be deadly to birds. Carbon monoxide, an odorless, colorless and tasteless gas, can also be fatal to birds and anyone with pet birds should have a working carbon monoxide monitoring device in their home and preferably in the room where the bird is kept. NEVER use Kerosene heaters if you have birds

Burning foods, overheated cooking oils and smoke from a fireplace can also cause fatal inhalations.

Scented candles, potpourri, incense, plug-ins, as well as other products containing a high concentration of volatile oils (essential oils) can cause either stimulation or depression of the central nervous system, as well as possible irritation to the eyes, nose and upper respiratory tract, depending on the oil and concentration used. Birds are very susceptible to the effects of inhaled volatile toxins, including essential oils. Any volatile oil (fragrance) has the potential for causing illness and possible death in birds. Obviously the concentration in a product and the length of exposure are factors to be considered. Many manufacturers have started making their cleaning products more pleasing to the senses by including these essential oils also. Products containing a high concentration of volatile oils should be avoided completely if you own a bird. Usually the more "perfumey" the smell, the more toxic the product.

Bug sprays can be very deadly to your bird. If your local pest control company claims their product is perfectly safe, ask them put it in writing. You may be surprised at how fast they will back off their claim of "perfectly safe". Birds should be removed from the home for at least 24 hours whenever pest control measures are used.

The metal round Protective Mite Killers you hang on the side of a bird's cage are toxic to birds and their effectiveness to prevent or treat any mite infestations are questionable.

Never clean your bird's cage with anything other than approved bird-safe products purchased at your bird store, plain soap and water or a diluted mixture

of household vinegar and water. All other cleaners can be toxic to your bird. (Please refer to article on the negative effects of anti-bacterial soaps) **PLEASE NOTE:** HEATED vinegar emits toxic fumes similar to carbon dioxide. Bird owners have lost their pets by adding vinegar to their dishwashing cycle, or used it to clean coffee machines.

Any product that states it is "safe" for animals, does **NOT** mean it is necessarily safe for birds. Birds are very different from dogs and cats.

5. Other Pets in the Home

Many birds have died as a result of another pet either "playing" too exuberantly with a bird, or from the pet biting or stepping on the bird.

Birds may also injure each other. Toes are often the most commonly injured body part but [bleeding](#) may be serious, and can be even fatal. Larger birds may kill smaller birds and it can happen in an instant.

Cat bites should be considered the most dangerous, as the Pasteurella bacteria commonly found in the feline mouth, are extremely hazardous to birds. Even a simple puncture by a tooth can result in a fatal infection. Scratches from claws are also extremely dangerous, as the risk of infection is very real.

Any animal bite should be considered extremely serious, possibly life-threatening. The bacteria found in the saliva and the mouth of a mammal can cause fatal septicemia (infection in the bloodstream) of a bird.

6. Toxic Foods or Plants

There are some foods which can be very toxic to our birds.

- **Chocolate**, metabolite theobromide, is very toxic to both animals and birds. Although baker's chocolate and dark chocolate are the most toxic, milk chocolate is still a forbidden food for birds. **Caffeine** is metabolized differently in birds which also results in toxic compounds so caffeine drinks such as coffee, tea and sodas should not be given to our birds. **Avocados** are toxic to birds, with perhaps the skin and pit being the most dangerous parts. **Raw onions** should never be fed either. **Many indoor and outdoor plants and trees** can be toxic, even fatal, to birds. So when in doubt, throw it out. Find out more [about toxicities](#).

7. Hand-Feeding Mistakes

Unweaned baby birds should not be sold or given to inexperienced hand-feeders as many babies die needlessly because of handfeeding mistakes. It is not necessary for a baby bird to be hand-fed by the family purchasing it in order for it to become "bonded" to them.

The most common mistake is probably keeping the baby at the incorrect temperature. Food that is fed at too low of a temperature can result in a slowed down gastrointestinal tract which can be fatal if not corrected in time.

Babies who are forced to eat may struggle and end up inhaling the formula which results in aspiration pneumonia. If a large amount of food is inhaled, the baby will die immediately, but if a small amount of food ends up in the respiratory tract, the aspiration pneumonia may result in the baby suffering for days, trying desperately to breathe before it dies. Bacterial infection, fungal infection and polyoma virus infection are the most common infectious diseases in baby birds, all can prove fatal, and are often not found in time by inexperienced handfeeders.

8. Exposing Pet Birds to Infectious Diseases

Unnecessary contact with other birds should be avoided at all cost!!! Many diseases of birds are airborne. A bird can carry a disease and be able to pass it to others without ever appearing ill.

[Proventricular dilatation disease](#) (PDD), [chlamydiosis](#) (psittacosis), [Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease](#) (Pbfd) and Pacheco's disease may all be spread by birds that appear healthy in physical appearance. [Giardia](#), a one-celled protozoal organism, can be spread by a bird ingesting food or water contaminated by the droppings of an infested bird. Exposing your pet bird to other birds, especially outside of your family, should be avoided whenever possible, or kept to an absolute minimum.

Many bird owners make a common mistake when adding a new pet to the family. Regardless of where the bird came from it should be quarantined for a minimum of at least one month. If the new bird is harboring an infection, the stress of moving the bird to a new home may cause the bird to become ill. Quarantine protects your other birds from the risk of disease as well as protecting the new bird if one of your birds already living in the home has a sub-clinical infection that it could pass to the new bird. So quarantine protects the new bird and the existing flock.

Birds should never be allowed near their owner's mouths. Humans carry bacteria and fungi that can cause serious infection, or even death, in our birds. Birds should never be kissed with an open mouth, nor should birds be allowed any contact with the owner's teeth, tongue, lips or saliva

Never place a bird's cage where a heating/air-conditioning vent can blow directly at the bird. Such placement can cause respiratory problems and/or pneumonia resulting in a critically ill bird that may not recover.

9. Heat Exposure

Although our exotic birds live naturally in warm, tropical climates, they just like us cannot tolerate excessive heat. Children, dogs, cats, other pets and birds should never be left in a car during hot weather, even with the windows partially lowered. Temperatures inside a car can rapidly reach lethal levels.

Also you should never place your bird's cage outdoors unless you know for a fact the bird can move into the shade if it becomes overheated at all times when outside. If the sun covers the cage completely as the day progresses, and the bird has no place to escape the sun, a bird may rapidly develop hyperthermia and die.

An overheated bird will begin panting, and with panting, will also begin getting dehydrated. Most birds suffering from hyperthermia will try to get out of the sun, and may try to bathe to cool off. If the bird's body temperature rises high enough, it will suffer a [seizure](#) and die.

Hyperthermia can also occur if a bird's cage is relocated by a window indoors with no shade to escape the sun.

10. Sleeping With Birds

Birds that are allowed to sleep in bed with their owners are at serious risk for suffocation or life-threatening trauma. There is always the chance that the bird will get lodged between the mattress and frame, smothered under a pillow, or be rolled over on by their owner as they sleep.

If you choose to read or watch television in bed or on the sofa with your bird and you are starting to feel sleepy, it is important to return your pet to its cage.

Species Research by [Sibylle Johnson](#)

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