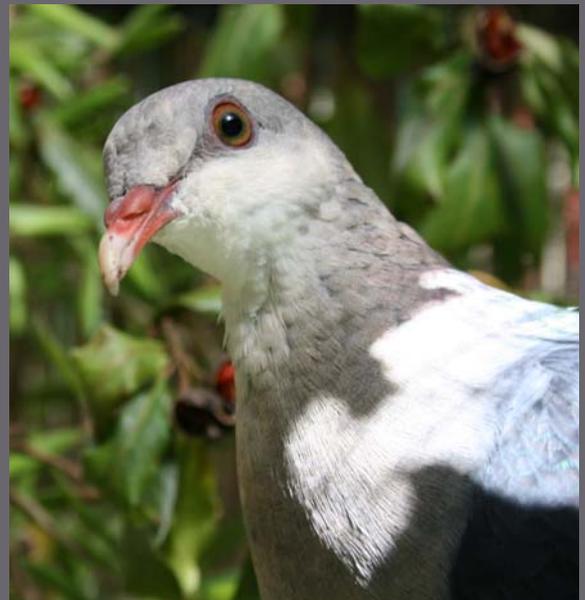


# Caring for Native Birds



Jill Dark

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## **1. IDENTIFICATION**

This is very important. If you do not know what species of bird you have rescued you will not know what to feed it, how to house it, or eventually, where to release it.

Some points to consider:

### **Size of Bird**

Is it larger or smaller than a magpie, as small as a canary?

### **Type of Bird**

Is it a duck, parrot, magpie, honeyeater, etc.?

### **Beak - Shape and Size**

Is it pointed, hooked, curved like a parrot's? What size is it in relation to the size of the bird?

### **Feet - Shape and Size**

Are they webbed like a duck, strong feet for walking or slender claws for perching? Number and placement of toes?

### **Legs**

How long are the legs? What colour are they? What shape?

### **Colour**

What colour is the bird?

### **Obvious Colour Markings**

What colour is the head? Body? Eyes? Does it have any stripes or spots?

A field guide to Australian birds is essential for accurate identification. There are 4 good field guides to choose from:

Pizzey & Knight Field Guide to the Birds of Australia

Slater Field Guide to Australian Birds

Simpson & Day Field Guide to the Birds of Australia

Morcombe Field Guide to Australian Birds



## **2. INTRODUCED OR FERAL BIRDS**

These are birds which have been introduced into Australia and have established breeding colonies here. Many are very aggressive and take over the nest sites and food supplies of native birds, forcing the native birds out.

### **WE DO NOT REHABILITATE OR RELEASE FERAL BIRDS.**

We are not permitted under our licence to release these birds.

These are the most commonly encountered feral birds, with a few hints to help you identify them: you will find pictures and a more detailed description in your field guide.

### **Spotted (Turtle) Dove**

This is the common dove found around the towns, particularly on the plains and in the lower Blue Mountains. Adults have black spots around the back of the neck, immatures have no spots.

Nestling turtle-doves are covered in a sandy-coloured down and have a large, broad beak.

Spotted doves build a very scanty stick nest, often in a pine tree and can breed at any time of year.

**NB.** The crested pigeon is native and the nestling has cream-coloured down. The crest develops when the bird is quite small.

### **Feral Pigeon**

This is larger than the turtle-dove and the colour can be very variable. Nestlings are large and lumpy, covered in yellow down.

They usually nest on building ledges or under eaves.

### **Common or Indian Myna**

A brown bird with a yellow bill and legs and bare yellow skin around the eye, this bird is usually found around the towns. The babies are mostly bald, sometimes with a wispy bit of grey down. They have a large yellow gape and bill, yellow eyes and feet and a bare patch of yellow skin around the eye.

Mynas build a large untidy nest of twigs, grass, paper and other rubbish, often in buildings, sometimes in hollow trees. They have been known to take over parrots' nests, killing the baby parrots in the process.

**NB.** The native Noisy Miner is grey, not brown. Noisy miner chicks have brown eyes and feet and a small patch of yellow skin behind the eye. They also peep incessantly.

**House Sparrow**

Sparrows need no description and like to build their bulky, grassy nests around buildings, in gutters, roofs, wall cavities, etc.

Baby sparrows are naked and pinkish with a yellow gape, dusky bill and brown feet.

**Common Starling**

These birds are glossy black, with a fine pointed bill. Juveniles are a plain mousy-brown, with a pale whitish throat. Nestlings have greyish down, bright-yellow inside the mouth and a long, pointed bill.

Starlings nest in tree hollows, evicting native birds in the process, also in buildings - wall cavities, roofs, etc.

**Common Blackbird**

The male bird is black with a yellow bill, the female and immatures brown. Nestlings are covered in buffish-grey down and are slightly larger than starlings.

They build a cup-shaped nest, using grass, twigs, bark, mud etc. This is usually placed in a large shrub.

**Red-whiskered Bulbul**

Brownish bird with erect black crest, the bulbul is common in gardens. Nestlings are born naked with a black bill and feet.

The nest is an untidy cup made of bark, grass, rootlets etc. in a bushy shrub.

**Remember:**

1. Feral birds are usually found around the towns, few of them venture into the bush.
2. Birds nesting in buildings are usually feral, except for swallows, which build mud nests attached to walls or beam, and very occasionally parrots.
3. Many callers have no idea of size - try and relate the size to something familiar, eg. Is a baby bird the size of a golf ball, tennis ball, etc.
4. When a call comes for a baby bird always ask the caller if the parent birds are around. This makes identification easier and if you are certain it is feral it does not have to be rescued.

### 3. RESCUE EQUIPMENT

- a) Animal Report Form
- b) A pet carry basket or cardboard box (**note:** make sure the box has not held strong-smelling chemicals, eg. soap powder) in a suitable size for the bird to be rescued.
- c) Towels and/or blankets (make sure they are in good condition, with no holes or loose threads). Polar fleece is excellent.
- d) Pillowslip or calico bag (turned inside out)
- e) Hot water bottle filled with **warm** water
- f) Long-handled net for ducklings, etc.
- g) Street directory
- h) Binoculars
- i) Torch

### 4. QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU GO

Get all the information that you can from the co-ordinator. **Ring the caller to let them know you are on your way and double-check the details.** Remember the bird may have recovered, escaped or died in the meantime.

**What is it?** Do you know the species? How big is it, etc.? Is it a baby or an adult?

**Where is it?** Have you caught it or is it still loose in the yard?

**What happened to it?** Has it any obvious injuries?

**Where did you find it?** In your garden or street or 100 km away?

**How do I get to your place?**

## **4. THE RESCUE**

### **Public Relations**

This is very important. Appear confident, be patient and polite. If you feel nervous because it is your first rescue, explain to the caller that you are “new on the job”. Always thank the caller for their concern and leave them a brochure if you have one. Let the caller know what happens to the bird.

### **If the Bird is Already Caught**

If the caller has caught the bird, you should have an initial look at it, preferably without handling it. If it seems settled in the caller's box don't transfer it, just cover the box with a towel. If you have to transfer it to your container, cover the bird with a towel, carefully but firmly pick it up, and place bird and towel in your container.

**NB.** Small birds can be placed into a calico bag. Tie the neck of the bag and place it in your carry box.

### **Catching and Handling Birds**

If the bird you are about to rescue has not been caught, observe it for a short time. Are the wings in the correct position, eg. a dropped wing could be broken or dislocated. Is it using both feet? If the bird is sitting still, feathers fluffed up and eyes partly closed, it is a very sick bird.

To catch a bird that is moving around but is unable to fly, place a towel gently over it. The aim is to catch the bird calmly and quickly with as little handling as possible to minimise further stress. Place bird and towel into your box and fully cover the box with another towel. Be aware that many birds have sharp beaks and sharp claws.

### **Catching Cockatoos and Parrots**

Cockatoos and parrots can give you a nasty bite if you let them. Large cockatoos should be treated with respect and handled with care. Place a large towel completely over the bird, and pick it up taking care not to get your fingers near the beak. You may be able to get a grip behind the head and your other hand around the body. Place the bird in your pet carrier still wrapped in the towel. Cover the carrier with another towel. Do not transport a cockatoo in a cardboard box as it may chew through it.

### **Catching Pelicans, Swans and Herons**

Throw a blanket over the bird's head and body. With one hand gently but firmly hold the bird's neck just below its head and place your other arm round the body. Place the bird in a cardboard box still wrapped in the blanket.

**NB.** Herons have a long neck and a very sharp bill and they will try and strike at your eyes.

### **Catching Raptors (Birds of Prey)**

Caring for Raptors requires a special licence and you will only be called upon in an emergency or a case of misidentification, eg. a Boobook Owl misidentified as a Tawny Frogmouth. Remember, raptors have very strong legs and very sharp talons and can give you a nasty injury if you let them. They will often roll over on their back and try and strike at you with their talons, so keep your face and hands clear. Give the bird a rolled up towel to grip, then throw another towel over it and place the bird, still covered in the towel, in a cardboard box. Make sure the box is lined with a towel, not newspaper. Keep the box covered and the bird quiet and dark until you can contact your raptor co-ordinator. NB. Never place a raptor in a wire cage.

You must contact your raptor co-ordinator, or if he or she is not available, another licensed raptor carer, immediately.

### **NESTLING AND FLEDGLING BIRDS**

If you rescue a nestling or fledgling bird you must contact your co-ordinator or an experienced foster-carer immediately.

### **RESCUE SITUATIONS**

#### **CAUGHT IN BIRD NETTING OVER FRUIT TREES**

Cut the netting off the bird with a small pair of rounded nail scissors. Be careful not to cut the bird or its feathers. Make sure that there is no fine netting tangled around toes or wings, as this may cut off the blood supply. Take to an experienced carer to check.

#### **TRAPPED IN A BUILDING**

Birds often become trapped in large factories or buildings. The bird's natural reaction is to fly upwards and the bird is usually in a panic. The best time to try and release it is when the factory is quiet and the bird normally active, eg. early morning or late afternoon before sunset. Open doors and turn off lights. If windows can be opened, open them. If not, cover them if possible. If the bird does not fly out contact your co-ordinator for advice.

#### **FROM A SWIMMING POOL**

Ducks and ducklings often take refuge in a swimming pool. Make sure the filter has been turned off and gently try to herd them into a corner where they can be scooped out with a net, taking care not to drown them. If an adult duck is present try and catch it first, then catch the ducklings. Place into a warm carrier as soon as possible.

NB. Ducklings can squeeze through very small spaces and can jump quite high. Make sure your container is escape-proof.

#### **CAUGHT UP IN A HIGH TREE**

This can be difficult as the bird is often on the end of a branch and very high up. Magpies often become entangled in materials they have gathered for nest-building.

**NB. Do not endanger yourself for the sake of the bird and never attempt to get birds off powerlines.**

You could try:

- An extension ladder if you have a good head for heights.
- High pruner or pruning saw with extendable handle.
- Contacting Council, SES, Integral Energy or a local tree-lopper for a cherry picker if they can get access to the tree.
- Call your co-ordinator for advice.

## **6. TRANSPORT**

Your box or pet carrier should be secured so that the bird cannot escape and should be completely covered by a towel, blanket or polar-fleece.

Make sure that the container cannot move during transport.

Do not use a perch in your box - a rolled towel is better and try and ensure that the bird cannot roll around inside the box.

If possible position the bird with its head pointing in the direction the car is travelling.

Try not to have any noise in the car from radios, children etc. Leave pets at home.

In hot weather make sure the box is in the coolest part of the car. If you do not have air-conditioning, use damp towels over the box and have a window open.

In cold weather make sure the box is not in a draught.

**NB.** Line your container with a large towel or polar fleece, not newspaper.

## **7. FIRST AID**

Sick or injured birds are suffering from shock and unless the bird requires immediate veterinary attention, take it home and stabilise it first.

### **Symptoms**

- Decreased body temperature (bird can feel cold to touch)
- Increased heart rate
- Fluffed up appearance and dilated pupils
- General weakness and inability to fly
- Dehydration

### **Treatment**

Place the bird in a warm, dark place (hospital box, or even cardboard box with extra heating (28-32o). Line the box with a towel, not newspaper. At this stage perches are not required. For heating use a lamp with a 40watt globe (preferably coloured), placed to one side so the bird can move away from the heat if it wishes. Place a damp sponge in the cage to prevent further dehydration.

If the bird is well enough to drink offer lukewarm fluid. Use Spark or Polyaid at recommended strengths or glucose solution ( 1teasp glucose to 1 cup water).

If the bird does not drink of its own accord you can use an eyedropper and drip fluid onto the tip of the beak. Be careful not to drown the bird. Do not place anything directly into the bird's mouth. Administer fluid at every half hour for a least 2 hours and then once each hour.

Leave the bird quietly in the box for at least 2-3 hours.

**NB.** Do not try and feed any bird until it's body temperature is back to normal (39-43o).

Report to your bird co-ordinator, who will advise on the next stage.

## **8. EXAMINING THE BIRD**

You must know how to handle birds. If possible, take the bird to an experienced foster carer, watch that person handle the bird, then try it yourself. Try not to allow the bird to flap around, you risk further injury to it.

Observe the bird before touching it.

Check the bird's reaction to light, noise and movement.

Points to look for include:

- Wings. Is one wing higher than the other? Is one held closer to the body?
- Swelling. Has the bird any unusual swelling?
- Head. Is the head tilted to one side?
- Eyes. Are both eyes open and responding? Is there any blood in the eye?
- Legs. Is the bird standing normally or favouring one leg?
- Feathers. Do the feathers appear dirty or discoloured, are they broken or damaged?
- Fluffed Up. Does the bird look sick and fluffed up? Does it have diarrhoea?
- Weight. Does the breastbone feel sharp? Weight loss usually indicates sickness or a bird which has been injured for an extended time.
- Beak. Is the beak broken? Is there any discharge from mouth or cere? Is the beak open and the bird gasping for breath?

Restrain the bird while checking for injuries. Place the bird on a towel, cover the head and restrain the wings. Check carefully for wounds, bruising and missing feathers.

Check the eyes, beak and feet. Carefully stretch each wing out and check for fractures.

Examining Cockatoos and Parrots. These birds bite so it can help to have 2 people to examine them. Place a towel over the bird and hold it gently while you locate the head. Hold the head firmly with one hand so it cannot bite then carefully uncover one wing at a time to check for injuries. Then check the body, looking for wounds or bruising.

If there is no obvious injury put the bird in a cage in a quiet room and observe it regularly.

Contact Your Coordinator. When you have identified and stabilised the bird you must ring the coordinator with all the details. Contact the bird coordinator the same day. If the bird has to go to the vet you must take the animal report form with you. All details, including any medication the bird is on, should be recorded.

Specialist Care. Some birds require specialised care, housing and diets. You must contact the bird coordinator to organise this. The following groups of birds come into this category:

- All raptors - this includes hawks, eagles, falcons and owls
- Kingfishers
- Black-cockatoos and Gang-gang Cockatoos
- Water birds and wading birds, including pelicans, herons and swans
- Lyrebirds
- Some small insectivorous birds, eg. thornbills, pardalotes or robins
- Migratory or nomadic birds, eg. cuckoos or woodswallows
- Nestling and fledgling birds
- Sea birds
- Endangered species, e.g. Regent honeyeater, Major Mitchell's Cockatoo

## **9. COMMON INJURIES AND INITIAL TREATMENT**

### **Wounds**

If bleeding from an actively-growing feather shaft pinch the shaft until bleeding stops.

Clean the wound and bathe it with warm saline (salt) solution.

NB. **Never** use tea tree oil on a bird.

Check carefully for maggots and any sign of infection.

If the wounds are the result of a cat or dog attack, antibiotics will be needed as soon as possible.

After stabilisation take the bird to your vet.

### **Head Injuries**

Concussion is commonly caused by collision with windows or motor vehicles.

**Symptoms** - any or all of the following symptoms may be present:

- Lack of co-ordination
- Head twitching or tilted to one side
- Eyes closed or not focusing - pupils often different sizes
- Paralysis of feet - not able to stand
- Unable to fly
- Bleeding from nostrils or beak
- Beak broken (euthanasia may be necessary)
- Bruising of head

### **Treatment**

Place the bird in a warm dark place and provide extra heat if necessary.

Provide water with glucose (glucodin), Spark or Polyaid added.

Monitor regularly and if no improvement after 24 hours take to vet.

Eye injuries must be assessed by a vet before any treatment is given.

### **Fractures and Dislocations**

Expert advice will be needed. Either take the bird to a vet or an experienced foster-carer if a vet is not available.

The bird's lifestyle and long-term release prospects will need to be considered.

e.g. Does the bird catch its food on the wing? Is it a migratory bird?

Compound fractures and breaks occurring on joints usually have a poor prognosis.

If the wing is strapped, vet wrap or micropore tape should be used. Sticking plaster or Elastoplast causes feather damage.

Large, broad perches will be required as the bird's balance will be upset.

### **Oil Contamination**

Contact your co-ordinator at once. The bird may need veterinary attention for poisoning if it has ingested any oil. It should be transported wrapped in a towel with the head exposed to prevent preening and ingesting more oil.

### **Treatment**

Wipe the bird with clean paper towel to remove excess oil. Gently wipe around eyes, and beak with clean swabs. Flush eyes with saline solution.

Gently wash the bird in warm water with a mild detergent or soap added. Always wipe down the feathers. Pat the bird dry and keep it warm. Repeat as often as necessary over the next few

days. Do not allow the bird access to bathing water as the feathers will have lost their waterproofing.

**NB.** Do not use any solvents without consulting your bird co-ordinator.

### **Hyperthermia ( heat stress)**

This mainly occurs on hot summer days.

#### **Symptoms**

Panting or hyperventilating

#### **Treatment**

Place a damp towel over the cage and use a fan to blow cool air around the bird.

Offer a cool drink with glucose, lectade or polyaid added.

Keep quiet until recovered.

**NB** Birds have a higher body temperature than humans (39-43o).

### **Poisoning**

This can be caused by any number of chemicals, including garden pesticides, rat and snail baits. The cause can be very hard to identify. In rare cases poisoning can be caused by eating fungi.

#### **Symptoms**

- Convulsions, often with screaming
- Wings and legs stretched out and rigid
- Trembling and muscle spasms
- Diarrhoea
- Third eyelid across eye

#### **Emergency Treatment**

Place the bird in a warm environment and administer fluids (glucose or lectade solution) at regular intervals.

Veterinary attention will most likely be required when the bird's condition has stabilised.

### **Disease**

Some bird diseases can be transmitted to humans (see section on Psittacosis). Diagnosis can often be difficult.

#### **Symptoms**

- Feathers fluffed and eyes shut

- Sharp breast (keel) bone indicating weight loss
- Smelly, (often greenish) diarrhoea and dirty bottom
- Obvious breathing difficulties

### **Treatment**

Treat for shock before taking to vet.

### **Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD)**

This is a viral disease found in parrots and cockatoos

### **Symptoms in Parrots and Cockatoos**

- Feather loss or dirty feathers (birds have no powder down)
- Beak often overgrown or broken.
- Weight loss

Unfortunately the disease is contagious and there is no treatment so euthanasia is the only option.

### **Symptoms in Lorikeets (Runner Syndrome)**

- Broken or missing tail and primary wing feathers.
- Feathers may be varying shades of yellow.
- The affected bird is usually a juvenile.

### **Treatment**

Lorikeets sometimes do recover from this disease but can be in care for at least 12 months and often then they are still contagious. In most cases euthanasia is the best option..

### **Pox Virus**

This disease is contagious and is spread by mosquitoes and mites. It is usually seen in magpies, currawongs and cuckoo-shrikes, but can occur in other species.

### **Symptoms**

- Lumps, sometimes full of pus and blood, around the legs or head.

Lumps can be internal, in windpipe or digestive system, causing difficulties in eating or breathing.

### **Treatment**

There is no specific treatment. Many birds recover in time. Severely infected birds may have to be euthanased.

**NB.** Keep the bird isolated and the cage covered with mosquito mesh to prevent the disease spreading.

### **Bumble Foot**

This is a bacterial infection which occurs when the underside of the foot becomes infected. It can be caused by unhygienic conditions, eg. dirty aviary floors, soiled or wrong-sized perches for the bird's feet. It is commonly seen in magpies, raptors and waterbirds.

#### **Symptoms**

Swollen and inflamed joints of the foot.

- Bleeding or swollen lesions on the foot pads.
- Difficulty in perching.

#### **Treatment**

Take to vet for appropriate antibiotic.

Particular care should be taken with hygiene to avoid re-infection.

Make sure perches are the right size for the bird.

### **Parasites - External**

All birds carry some parasites but sick birds often have a heavier burden. Flat flies, lice and mites can easily be removed with any of the commercially available dusting powders. Be careful not to get powder into the bird's eyes, nose or mouth.

### **Parasites – Internal**

#### **Symptoms**

- Weight loss and lethargy.
- Droppings should be tested by the vet for diagnosis and treatment.

## **10. PSITTACOSIS (Chlamydiosis)**

This is a highly contagious disease which can be transmitted from birds to humans. It is also known as Parrot Fever or Ornithosis but Psittacosis is the name which is most familiar. It is caused by an organism called *Chlamydia psittaci*, and is spread through infected droppings or nasal discharge. It is most often seen in parrots and pigeons, but can cause disease in a wide range of birds and animals. Hygiene is of the utmost importance when handling any sick bird.

#### **Symptoms in Birds**

The infected bird is usually very underweight, lethargic, and with fluffed up feathers. It may have diarrhoea (often greenish in colour), laboured breathing and discharge from eyes or nostrils, but some birds can carry the disease without showing any symptoms.

#### **Symptoms in Humans**

These can vary but are often similar to a bout of flu. They can include chills, headache, light

sensitivity, weakness and atypical pneumonia. If you develop any of these symptoms after handling a sick parrot, tell your doctor, so appropriate treatment can be initiated early. Psittacosis is rarely fatal but can be very serious.

### **Precautions**

Don't take any sick bird into your house, keep them in a garage or out-house. Wash hands thoroughly after any contact. Wear gloves and a mask when handling infected birds. All soiled cages, dishes etc. should be thoroughly washed and disinfected before re-use to reduce the possibility of cross-infection. •

**NB.** If you suffer from asthma or other respiratory problems you should probably not be handling parrots at all.

When called to rescue a potentially sick parrot always warn the caller about the possibility of Psittacosis and suggest that they keep the bird out of the house and wash their hands thoroughly. Ring your co-ordinator or an experienced carer for advice if necessary. .;

## **11. FEATHER CARE**

Feathers are of the utmost importance to a bird. It is feathers that enable them to fly and feathers that insulate them against heat or cold. The outer feathers give the bird its colour, shape, waterproofing and ability to fly, while the inner “down” feathers provide the insulation.

Preening is essential to a bird's well-being. All birds spend a great deal of time cleaning, tidying and adjusting their feathers. This also distributes oil from a “preen” gland at the base of the tail, necessary for waterproofing the feathers. Birds in care should be encouraged to preen. If possible give them water to bathe in, if not, a light spray with water will often encourage them to start preening.

Moulting is the process by which old feathers are shed and replaced by new ones. With most birds this is a gradual process, which usually takes place every year after the breeding season.

Many birds come into care with feather damage and it is most important not to further damage feathers, especially flight feathers, while the bird is in care. If your bird is housed in a cage, make sure its feathers cannot be damaged against the wire. It is a good idea to line cages with shade cloth or sheeting. Perches should be high enough so that the tail is not dragging on the floor or squashed against the side the cage.

**NB** A raptor must never be housed in a wire cage.

If wing feathers have been damaged it is sometimes possible for a vet to remove these feathers but you must talk to your bird co-ordinator first. Tail feathers are not so important and many birds can be released without a tail. Discuss this with your bird co-ordinator or an experienced carer before release. With territorial birds, such as kookaburras or magpies, you have only a few weeks to get them back into their own territory. If feather damage is severe this will not be possible.

## **12. HOUSING**

### **CAGES.**

At least 1 cage is required, of a size suitable for the birds you will care for. Wire should be small mesh so the bird cannot get caught in it or escape.

A “cocky” cage lined with shade cloth or sheeting is very useful, particularly for tawny frogmouths, kookaburras or birds that stress easily.

**NB** Do not use chicken wire. It is very sharp and a bird can easily damage its cere or beak in it.

Budgie cages are only suitable for very small birds.

Place polar fleece on the base of your cage and change as often as needed. Remember sick birds need to be kept in a draught-free area and out of reach of predators or domestic pets.

Do not use pet carriers for more than a short time, and only if the bird needs to be kept immobilised.

Do not place your cage on the ground. It is less stressful for the bird to have the cage at eye level.

Adult birds should always be one bird to one cage.

### **Perches**

Perches should be clean branches of a suitable size for the bird's foot. The claws should reach about 3/4 way round the perch. They should not close around it.

New perches should be provided for each new bird.

### **Food and Water Containers.**

Stainless steel, glazed pottery or plastic containers of various sizes can be used.

**Never** use galvanised dishes for water, or you risk poisoning your bird

Food and water containers must be cleaned or replaced regularly.

### **Heating.**

Sick birds need to be kept warm. The heat source can be a hospital box, heat pad or 40watt light bulb. (See under First Aid)

### **Hygiene.**

This is most important. Cages and food containers must be cleaned often. Make sure that food and water containers cannot be contaminated by the bird's droppings.

### **Sunlight.**

Birds need sunlight to produce vitamin D. When possible place the cage outside during the day in filtered sunlight and sheltered from draughts. It should also be in a position well away from predators and domestic pets.

## AVIARIES

Birds need a spell in an aviary before release to build up their fitness and to make sure that they are flying well. An aviary should provide protection against predators, strong winds and heavy rain while providing exercise for the birds held. It should be escape and rodent proof.

### Aspect.

Ideally an aviary should face north or east to allow the birds plenty of sun and protection from southerly and westerly winds

It should be sited well away from noise, domestic pets and busy areas.

### Size.

This, of course, will depend on how much space and money is available. A large flight aviary is a wonderful resource but not many carers have either the space or the money for one. A useful size would be 3m long x 2m wide x 2m high. A rectangular aviary is better than a square one as it gives the bird a longer flight path. Height is important to enable the bird to fly upwards.

### Materials.

The frame should be made of metal, as parrots will chew through timber. It is also easier to keep clean.

Never use treated pine or you risk poisoning your birds.

Wire mesh should be small and as strong as you can afford. 25mm x 12mm is a good size.

**NB.** Birds are very susceptible to zinc poisoning. New wire should be weathered for at least 2 months or scrubbed with a weak vinegar and water solution to remove loose zinc oxide.

A covered section needs to be provided for protection from wind and rain, but do not cover the whole roof. These are wild birds, give them a choice.

Metal roofs can become extremely hot in summer. Placing branches on top can help reduce this.

The floor should be earth, or you could concrete under the covered section to make it easier to clean. All concrete should be covered with sand or earth. Many birds, such as magpies, spend a lot of time on the ground and are prone to diseases such as bumblefoot. Put lots of leaf litter or even a compost heap in your aviary. Litter should be changed regularly.

Rats, mice and other predators need to be excluded. This can be done by placing your aviary on concrete footings, or by burying a light mouse wire under the ground and securing it to the ground. Plants in the aviary are a good idea if you are planning to house insectivorous birds, but parrots will destroy them very quickly. Australian native plants are always the best. Think about using plants in pots which can be taken out when not required.

Parrots need fresh branches to chew. These should be replaced regularly.

Some birds, eg. bowerbirds, tend to damage themselves on the wire mesh. This can be prevented by lining the inside walls with shade cloth.

Perches should be natural branches, placed around the aviary to allow for sunbathing and also protection from the weather. Leave the bark on and leave plenty of room for flying practice. Do not use dowel or metal rods. Change the perches regularly to minimise the spread of disease.

Water must be supplied at all times, both for drinking and bathing. Dishes should be placed out

of direct sunlight and where they cannot be fouled by droppings. Make sure that birds cannot drown in the dishes.

### **HOUSING COMPATIBLE BIRDS**

Think carefully about which species of birds can be housed together. The total number of birds will depend on the size of the aviary and the type of birds.

Do not house diurnal (day) and nocturnal (night) birds together.

Birds of the same size and food group are generally all right together, eg. crimson and eastern rosellas.

Lorikeets can be aggressive and should not be housed with other birds.

Predatory birds such as kookaburras, currawongs and magpies should not be housed with smaller birds.

Be careful with kookaburras or magpies from different territories, as they can often be aggressive towards each other.

Always check with your bird co-ordinator before you mix bird species.

## **13. FOOD AND NUTRITION**

Birds, just like us, need proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins and minerals - the essential ingredients in a well balanced diet.

It is important to know your bird's natural diet so that you can mirror its requirements as well as you can. It is also important to provide a variety of foods, so the bird is obtaining the nutrition it needs. Wild birds often vary their diet according to the season and the availability of particular foods. For instance, currawongs will eat fruits in the autumn when they are available but need insects in the spring breeding season. Honeyeaters feed their young on insects, to provide the higher levels of protein necessary for growth and feather formation.

### **Food to Have on Hand**

- Seed for parrots and finches. Always use a good quality seed not Wild bird mix from the supermarket.
- Wombaroo Honeyeater and Lorikeet Mix
- Wombaroo Insectivore Mix
- Frozen meat, preferably heart
- Frozen mice of varying sizes
- Fruit and vegetables
- Live food, such as mealworms, cockroaches and crickets

When wild birds come into care they often take a while to settle in and sometimes will not eat well for the first few days. In many cases they do not recognize what you are providing as food. Always check to see that your bird is eating the food provided, and if not, seek advice immediately. Do not try and force feed any bird until you have checked with your bird co-ordinator or an experienced carer. It is very easy for the food to go "down the wrong way" and kill it.

## **BASIC DIETS**

### **Granivores (Seed Eaters)**

This group comprises parrots and cockatoos, finches, pigeons and doves.

These are the easiest birds to feed.

Seed of a suitable size forms their basic diet.

Also offer a selection of seeding grasses, gum nuts or other native fruits, peanuts, freshly sprouted seed, fruit or vegetables. Fresh eucalyptus branches or other native shrubs are often enjoyed. Some parrots also like mealworms.

**NB.** Do not collect grasses or branches from busy roadsides or from anywhere they may have been contaminated by dogs or pesticides.

### **Insectivores (Insect Eaters)**

Most small birds come into this category, robins, thrushes, whipbirds etc. They will often only eat live food and need to be tempted with mealworms, cockroaches, termites, maggots and whatever else you can catch or breed. Be careful not to collect insects which may have been contaminated by pesticides. Some ground feeding birds will also eat earthworms.

### **Nectarivores (Nectar and Pollen Eaters)**

Honeyeaters and Lorikeets are the main birds you will see in this group.

Honeyeater/Lorikeet Mix, mixed to a liquid according to directions can be offered in a budgie tube feeder attached to the side of the cage. In hot weather fresh food should be offered twice a day. Do not place the mixture in an open dish as the bird may fall in it. This mixture is very sticky and you do not want to have to wash an already stressed bird.

Honeyeaters also eat insects and sometimes fruit. They are especially fond of banana and berry fruits. Also offer fresh native flowers, eg. Grevillea or Bottlebrush, daily.

Lorikeets also eat fruit, which can be served chopped, in a small dish. They also relish native flowers.

### **Carnivores (Meat Eaters)**

Kookaburras, Tawny Frogmouths and Magpies come into this group. They love mice. The mice can be offered whole, or, if too large for the bird to handle, they can be chopped up. You can also offer large insects, such as cockroaches, grasshoppers or crickets. Pieces of heart, cut to a suitable size and dusted with Wombaroo insectivore mix can also be used.

**NB.** Tawny frogmouths do not drink. They obtain all their moisture requirements from their food.

### **Fruktivores (Fruit Eaters)**

Bowerbirds, orioles and koels are the birds you are most likely to see in this group.

Chopped up fruit, such as banana, pear, apple, rockmelon, grapes are ideal but you can also offer any berry fruits and native fruits, such as lilly-pillies, if they are in season. You should also offer insects. Experiment - you will soon find out what your bird likes.

### Omnivores (Mixed Feeders)

The commonest bird in the category is the pied currawong. These birds eat practically anything. You can feed them heart with insectivore mix, chopped fruit, seeds or live insects.

### Waterbirds and Waders

These are usually specialist feeders and you must seek advice from your bird co-ordinator as soon as you pick one up. Most of these birds will need to go to an experienced carer with the correct facilities.

Fish eaters, such as herons, can be offered whitebait, or any other raw fish cut to a suitable size. Do not use dog or cat food.

Grazers, such as wood ducks, need fresh grass and will often eat some bird seed or chicken crumbles.

## **14 RELEASE**

This is the culmination of all your hard work and it is important to do it properly and give your bird its best chance of survival in the wild.

Before release your bird should be:

- o Flying strongly, upwards as well as horizontally.
- o It should be waterproofed and all flight feathers in good condition.
- o It should be a good release weight for its species.
- o You must check with your bird co-ordinator before releasing any bird.
- Territorial Birds

These include magpies and kookaburras. These birds need to be released back into their own home territories, and within 4-5 weeks of being taken into care. If released into the wrong area they will almost certainly be attacked and possibly killed by the resident birds.

### Short Term Care Birds

These should also be released back in the area where they were found. While they may not be territorial they will still have the security of their own home range.

### Migratory Birds

Any bird with a regular seasonal migration must be released at the appropriate time. Check with your bird co-ordinator for departure times.

### When to Release

Always feed your bird before release. Diurnal (day) birds should be released in the morning. Nocturnal (night) birds should be released at dusk.

## **15. WEIGHT RANGES OF SOME COMMON BIRDS**

Australian King Parrot	150-200g
Australian Magpie	260-320g
Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	100-150g
Brown Thornbill	6-8g
Channel-billed Cuckoo	600-650g
Common Koel :	200-240g
Crested Pigeon	150-200g
Crimson Rosella	120-165g
Eastern Rosella	90-130g
Eastern Spinebill	11-13g
Fan-tailed Cuckoo	45-65g
Galah	300-380g
Grey Butcherbird	75-110g
Laughing Kookaburra	350-460g
Lewin' s Honeyeater	26-40g
Magpie Lark	85-130g
New Holland Honeyeater	20-25g
Noisy Friarbird 3 : "	100-130g
Noisy Miner	50-80g
Pied Currawong	270-320g
Rainbow Lorikeet	100-150g
Red Wattlebird	115-145g
Red-browed Finch	8-13g
Red-rumped Parrot	55-70g
Sacred Kingfisher	40-50g
Satin Bowerbird	180-225g
Silvereye	12-15g
Spotted Pardalote	7-9g
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	600-680g
Tawny Frogmouth	370-430g
Welcome Swallow	10-20g
Willy Wagtail	17-22g

## **16. SUGGESTED READING**

### **General**

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### **Bird Care and Diseases**

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