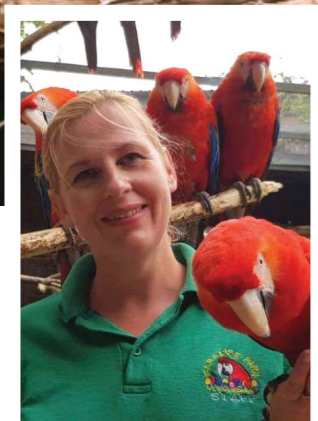


Your Feathered Friends' Feet

Whenever your bird is not flying it will be using its feet. It is therefore crucial to keep them exercised and healthy.



Louise Caddy, Head of Parrots at Paradise Park, UK (home of the World Parrot Trust) gives advice on how to provide the best foot care for your bird.

When looking at the underside of a healthy foot, you should be able to see clearly defined individual pads. The pads should have visible, distinct scales with no hard skin, deep cracks or fissures, and the bird should be able to grip comfortably with all its toes.

Overweight parrots are more prone to foot problems caused by increased pressure on the feet. If your parrot's feet are sore, it will sometimes compensate by using its beak to get itself around the cage.

Foot issues can also be caused by perches that are smooth and of the same diameter that will not exercise your bird's feet and toes. A typical example of this is wooden dowel. Constantly sitting on this type of perch will result in stress on specific areas of the foot, eventually leading to pressure sores.



Bird-safe branches include: pear, apple, beech, aspen, sycamore, hawthorn, oak, ash, poplar, willow, elm, Buddleia or grapevine.

All should be unsprayed, clean of sap, and needle-free. Use grapefruit seed extract (GSE) or vinegar to scrub clean. Heat sterilize in an oven at 250°F for an hour or dry in hot sun (UV rays will help to sterilize).

Photo © Paradise Park



Pressure sores are generally graded from 1 to 5. Grade 1 means the skin on the bottom of the foot is smooth and hardened. Grade 5 is a serious condition where the foot has become swollen and infected, and requires a trip to a veterinarian. This condition can lead to problems with the bird's tendons and ligaments.

Also, it's important to monitor your bird's toenails, as many parrots need regular nail trimming. To check if they are the right length, stand your bird on a flat surface such as a table. When the foot is flat on the table, the tip of the nail should just touch the surface without causing the toe to raise.

Providing the best perches

One of the most important things you can do is to provide the best perches possible. A good quality cage can easily cost several hundred pounds, yet many still come with inadequate perches. There are several different perch types on the market, ranging from plastic to rope. A popular choice are those made with sand and cement that have a 'rough gritty' finish, but they are too abrasive on your bird's feet. Never use plastic or metal perches, as they are too hard and unyielding on your bird's foot pads.

In my experience, nothing beats making your own wooden perches. Not only will they be a fraction of the cost of shop brought perches, but you can also adapt them to fit whatever size cage you have.

Using natural branches reduces repetitive pressure loading on the same area of the foot. This allows the feet and toes to be constantly stretched and worked as would be the case in the wild, reducing the chance of foot problems.

By far the biggest benefit of natural perches is that they will vary in diameter and shape, so your bird's feet will be constantly exercised.

To determine the ideal diameter of a perch that will allow your bird to settle comfortably, you need to look at its feet. As a guide, your bird's foot should only encircle the perch halfway and the toes should not meet. If they do, it indicates the perch is too small,

making the bird feel unstable with a preference to hang off it rather than to sit contentedly on it.

When looking at where to place perches, remember that birds will naturally choose to roost at the highest point, so try to provide one or two at different heights. Also, consider where the feed bowls will go; you do not want your bird sitting overhead and messing in its food and water.

In sum, keeping your parrot's feet healthy is easily done with frequent introductions of new, natural perches and browse for exercising, and frequent exams and care of toenails - actions that will help to make your bird happier and fitter overall. 📧



This image shows flattening and beginning to wear on the centre of the foot but shows a complete wear of scales on the base of the toes.

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