



Peach-Faced Lovebirds (*Agapornis roseicollis*)

- **Disclaimer:** The following is intended to be a guide only and may not present all aspects of care - please consult an avian veterinarian for specific health questions. Personal views *are* included.

(Click on map to enlarge)



Overview

Peach-Faced lovebirds are small parrots (6 inches) with big parrot personalities. They don't require as much room as the larger parrots nor are they as messy. They do hang upside down from cage tops and are great climbers. They occasionally use their feet to eat but don't lift food to their beaks like the larger parrots. They possess the ability to mimic whistles and noises but don't have the capacity to speak like the larger parrots. This doesn't mean that they can't speak. Lovebirds that do learn to talk have a small vocabulary and a squeaky voice.

Natural History

Peach-faced lovebirds are found on the coast of southwestern Africa. They inhabit the dry savannah regions but are never far from water supplies. Peach-faced lovebirds were first imported from southwestern Africa to Europe in the mid-1800's. Birds are no longer exported from Africa and today's bird keepers have a wide choice of domestically raised healthy birds that breed easily.

Peach-Faced lovebirds are the most common of the nine lovebird species in captivity. They are the easiest to breed in captivity and because of this they are found in many beautiful mutations. The green body with peach mask is the normal type (the color most often found in the wild).

Lovebirds in the wild are strong fliers with their short rounded wings and fly several miles daily. To compensate for the lack of activity due to being tame birds should be given time outside the cage under supervision to stretch their wings.

In the wild and in captivity, lovebirds will constantly groom one another, especially in spots where the bird can't reach by itself. This gives them their often misleading name of lovebirds. They seem to spend an almost equal time bickering with each other about minor things. Rarely do they injure each other in these arguments but a close eye is always a good idea. It's an old wives' tale that lovebirds must be kept in pairs or they will die of loneliness.

Most live for about 10 years although 20 is not unheard of. They are acrobatic, chatty clowns that are capable of being sweet loving pets.

Tame or Not?

([Guide To a Well Behaved Parrot](#) can answer a great deal of questions and can give insightful advice.) This is something you need to decide before you get in too far.

If you want a pet you can touch, teach tricks and if you're extremely lucky get to say a few words - then get a single handfed baby right after it's been weaned. Lovebirds wean between 6 - 8 weeks of age. They are imprinted on people and tend to bond with people easily. It's untrue that you must handfeed a bird to have it bond to you. A new owner inexperienced with hand feeding could injure the bird - the baby could aspirate the formula, they could be underfed, the crop could be burned with too hot of a formula, cold formula can cause crop stasis. It's safest to leave the hand feeding for the breeder.

If you want just to enjoy their colors, antics and maybe babies, then get an unrelated

pair. Single handed birds are easier to keep tame and may or may not make great parents later in life. Lovebirds tend to bond closer to other birds than to people - if they have a choice they will bond to a bird. What this means is that if you add a bird to your existing tame bird's cage more likely than not you will have two unmanageable birds before you know it.

Tame lovebirds also need to be handled every day - give them time outside the cage to play with you and with toys. This gives you time to enjoy them and to reinforce the bond between you. Toys are extremely important to keep the single bird occupied while you are gone. When choosing toys, be sure to get Cockatiel sized and not plastic toys made for parakeets (budgies). A lovebird's strong beak can easily shatter plastic toys and be injured by the pieces.

Breeders also should have some toys to occupy them as well. Be sure the toy was made for birds and has no breakable or small parts that can injure the bird! No lead - it's toxic!! Polly Dolly and Fowl Play are two good bird toy companies (see bibliography).

Cages and Accessories

Always get the largest cage your living arrangement and your money can allow. A good minimum cage size for a single bird is one that measures 2 ft long by 1.5 ft wide and 2 ft high. A pair will need more room than that to fly and to play.

Get one with doors large enough to get your hand with a bird out of the cage easily. A tray that pulls out of the bottom facilitates cleaning. Wire cage floor are great and keep the bird up off its droppings and discarded food.

Line the cage bottom with newspaper and change the paper at least twice weekly - ideally daily. The cage needs a full scrub down (minus the birds of course) once a month. 10% bleach and water work as do vinegar and water. Be sure to rinse well and let dry before returning birds to the cage.

Perches are something else that should be in your cage. Discard plastic perches as they are not good for their feet. Natural wood (fruit trees free of insecticide) or wooden dowels are more preferred. If you chose to use rope perches be sure to trim off loose thread immediately so they don't get wrapped around the birds' feet or toes! The diameter should be large enough that the toes don't meet as they wrap around, but not too large that they can't get a good hold without falling off the perch. $\frac{3}{4}$ " or larger should be adequate. Having more than one perch of differing diameters to provides exercise for your birds feet. Be sure to scrub perches during the monthly cage cleaning.

Food dishes should be made of strong plastic or sturdy stoneware. Bowls that hold fresh food should be changed out and thoroughly cleaned daily. Bowls that hold seeds or pellet should be washed weekly (unless they get laden with droppings and should be washed as needed). It's a good idea to get dishes with wide bases so that they are difficult to tip over.

Water can be provided in an open dish or in a small hamster bottle. Open dishes need to be cleaned more often due to bird droppings and discarded food ("Poop Soup"), but air bubbles trapped behind the steel bearing in the water bottle can block water flow -

tapping the bearing will release the bubble. Each way has its advantages and disadvantages. I personally use water bottle for all my birds. Water should be changed everyday regardless of the type of container you use. Bacteria can grow quickly and it's best to provide fresh water daily. One word of caution - **don't add vitamins** to the water. They just speed up the bacteria growth in the water.

Bathing is an important part of a lovebirds life and a shallow dish with warm water can be provided every other day or weekly. If you don't provide them with a bath dish, they will use their water bowl, which will dirty up their drinking water. You can if you prefer, lightly mist the birds once a week instead of offering them a bath dish. Most prefer to bathe themselves however.

Lovebirds should **only** be provided a nest box if they are to be breed. Single pets can become territorial and aggressive towards their owners with a nest box. A nest box can also stimulate egg laying in a single female (which, if chronic, can jeopardize the hen's health). For comfort, a single pet can be provided with toys such as a Polly Dolly or, my favorite, the Birdie Buddie - a triangle of faux fur that ties to the cage wall next to a perch and provides a nestling spot.

Place the cage in a area where the family spends time - like the living room or den. Make sure the cage is in a stable position and up from other pets like cats and dogs. **DO NOT** place the cage in the kitchen or bathroom as chemicals and strong odors can be harmful to the birds health. Bird's respiratory systems are much more sensitive than humans - remember the canary in the coal mine? Miners would take a caged canary down with them in the mine. If there was a gas leak, the bird would die giving the miners a warning to get out.

WARNINGS! Teflon is a killer! Anything made with Teflon to create a non-stick surface can give off poisonous gases if overheated (not harmful to humans) - this means self cleaning ovens, waffle iron, clothes irons, bread makers, certain pans - be careful! Check manuals and information on new products to see if it contains Teflon. Another possible new danger is a product called Febreze - used to remove odors from fabrics. This product has allegedly killed quite a few birds due to it's use in the proximity of birds! Birds are sensitive to fumes so be careful with scented candles, perfumes, incense, cigarette smoke, paints and aerosols around birds - provide adequate ventilation. Anything that has a strong odor can damage a bird's sensitive respiratory system so be careful!

Nutrition

Diet is a very important - seed vs. pellets is not a topic I want to get into because many other more qualified people have already done so. A good source is [Feeding Your Pet Bird](#) by Petra Burgmann, DVM (Barron Publishers).

My birds get a varied diet to help give them the nutrients they need. They are fed some safflower based seed mix (contains safflower, white millet, oats groats, canary seed, whole oats and whole wheat), [Roudybush](#) (or [Kaytee](#)) small size pelleted formula, fresh fruits (apples, kiwis, banana) and veggies (carrots, baked sweet potatoes or yams, broccoli, corn on the cob) and a cornbread recipe I love to use (jiffy corn bread, baby

food - like yams, or bananas, frozen veggies and pellets).

The birds get fresh food everyday in the morning. I also provide either a bowl of seeds and a bowl of pellets in addition to the fresh food.

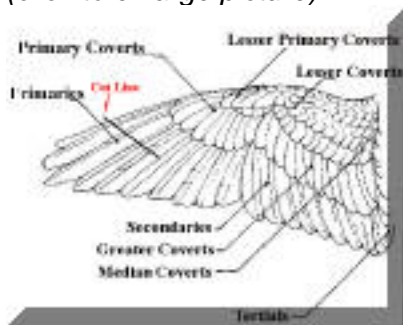
Foods to avoid! **NO** Chocolate, **NO** avocado, **NO** Alcohol, **NO** caffeine and avoid concentrated salt and sugar. These all can have detrimental effects on birds.

The important thing about the fresh food is to remove the bowl after 3 hours. Bacteria can reach harmful levels in a short time. Don't leave fresh food out if you aren't going to be there to pick it up before it spoils. The bread seems to stay fresh longer and because of that I feed it in the morning (since I can't be home to pick up the bowls after 3 hours).

Always provide a cuttle bone and a mineral block for added nutrients. Do not add vitamins to your birds water as this can encourage unhealthy bacterial growth in the water. Everyone does diet differently but no bird should be on a one item diet - fresh veggies (and fruits) are very important. Please refer to the above book for more details.

Grooming

(click to enlarge picture)



All my pet birds have the first 4- 5 primary feathers trimmed back so that they can't gain altitude but can glide to the ground without falling and injuring themselves. The birds wings aren't clipped the first time until after they've learned to navigate well. I find it to be very important for a bird to learn to fly with all it's flight feathers before they are clipped. Birds that don't learn to fly correctly can be shy, nervous and lack confidence because they know they can't get away - they can't fly. Wing clipping keeps the bird more dependent on you and can help prevent tragedies such as flying out an open house door, flying into a moving ceiling fan or flying into a plate glass window or a wall. A healthy lovebird molts out old feathers 1 – 2 times yearly so check the wing feathers monthly to see if they need to be retrimmed. New feathers come in covered by a waxy sheath, (they look like porcupine quills) that the bird preens off in time New feathers have a blood center that nourishes the feather while it grows. Make sure you don't trim back a primary blood feather. As normal feathers grow, the blood supply dries up.

Nail tips should be removed monthly to help prevent snag in fabrics and damage to your own skin. Use an emery board to file tips down or use a human fingernail clipper to remove sharp tips. Keep styptic powder, regular flour or corn starch available to staunch any bleeding that may occur if you clip the nail too close to the quick (blood vessel in

nail).

Beak tips shouldn't need to be trimmed or filed. If you notice an overgrowth, contact your avian vet to handle it. There could be an underlying problem.

Conclusion

Lovebirds are wonderful, colorful, lively pets that can provide years of enjoyment and companionship with proper care and diet. Please use this as a reference and continue learning by subscribing to Bird Talk (bird magazine), joining a local bird club or joining an email list.

Bibliography

If you only buy one lovebird book - make it this one
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*denotes personal favorites

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