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Birds As Pets: Neophema grass parakeets: scarlet-chested, turquisine, etc. Rosellas: gold-mantled, Stanley, etc. red rumped parakeets, rock pebblers, cockatiels, lovebirds, budgerigars, Pacific parrotlets. etc

1.

“Comparative Impact Statement”

*Size=3 to 6, Space=3 to 8, Noise level=2 to 4, Playtime=2 to 5,
Destruction=2 to 5, Talking=2 to 5*

One can find any color of the rainbow present in vivid display somewhere within this incredibly diverse natural showcase of bird evolution. Contrast the brilliant red and blue of the Crimson Rosella with the soft pastel pink and blues on the Bourke’s parakeet; The lemon yellow, red, and green of the Rock Pebbler with the exquisite patterns of red, yellow, blue, and green found on the Scarlet Chested (Neophema) grasskeet! No human artist can match what millions of years of a seemingly mindless process with no recognizable goal in mind, called evolution, has accomplished!

Color is not the only attraction these birds have for humans. Instead of making noise that must be put up with by human ears the call notes and songs of the Australian grasskeets are rather enjoyably musical. The mood of my pair of gold Mantled Rosellas could be read by the musical interval within their calls. 3rds reported a state of comfort while 5th s and 6ths denoted a higher excitement level. Some are fair talkers but most grasskeets would rather whistle tunes or mimic the whistles of other birds such as Cockatiels.

Being as pleasant as they are these birds do not bond strongly as pets. Even hand-feds will not sit still on a hand or shoulder but will tolerate a short visit and then fly off to explore. This reflects the nomadic “grasskeets” nature of always being on the move. Needless to say, the typical parrot cage is not a kind environment. Much better is the longest enclosure possible. These are essentially aviary birds - not pets. They are so enjoyable as they are! Why try to make them conform to our

image of a parrot sitting on a shoulder and be forced to do things that are not in their nature?

Assuming they are not overcrowded, grasskeets can be housed with different families of birds such as finches, Canaries and Cockatiels. Do not put two males of the same species together or they will fight.

If you follow the rules nature has set the Australian grasskeets offer a fascinating view into an exotic world seldom appreciated. Healthy, properly conditioned birds will breed readily in captivity. All they ask for is a suitable environment and their own space.

1. Cockatiels: All colors and mutations.

“Comparative Pet Impact Statement”

*Size=5, Space=5 to 7, Noise level=3 to 7, Playtime=2 to 7,
Destruction=3 to 5, Talking=2 to 5*



Cockatiels (the littlest Cockatoos) are fast becoming one of the most popular pet birds around. These Australian “Quarriors” breed so readily in captivity that Cockatiels can be seen as essentially domesticated - new mutations are popping up all the time. Furthermore, serious breeders are showing birds that are judged by nationally recognized exhibition standards. Cockatiels are many generations removed from their wild counterparts and this, along with a friendly outgoing nature, make the ingredients for a nice pet. For those who want a medium-sized, readily available, inexpensive, interacting family pet the cockatiel easily beats the competition. Hand-fed babies are naturally

tame and easy to get along with. Even little children can handle a tame Cockatiel without fear of a painful bite.

These birds show a true kinship with the larger Cockatoos as a well-mannered tiel is friendly to anyone and enjoys being picked up, scratched, and played with. Of course, being a little Cockatoo means they have the same “talcum-dust” on their feathers but in a smaller dose.

This is another bird that would rather whistle than talk but many talk well enough to amuse their owners. I rather enjoy the “wolf whistle” variations performed by the male as he courts a mate and proclaims his ownership to a nest box. Some owners or neighbors may find the persistent whistling of a male cockatiel a bit annoying though so cock birds might not fit the bill for a good apartment pet. Hens tend to have a calmer disposition and are less vocal than males.

Single pets can do okay in a standard commercial cockatiel cage but need the exercise of flight to stay fit. Breeder pairs can be housed comfortably in 2’ square cages and then be given an annual 4 to 6 month break in a 6’ to 12’ flight. A healthy compatible pair of tiels will willingly breed. All they need is a nest box which acts as a catalyst to start the process going.



Breeding Cockatiels is contagious! Even if your goal is to donate a room to the birds and market some offspring it is best to curb ambition and slow things down a bit. Cockatiel breeders are prime candidates for “Bird Fever”. Those afflicted with this malady find every mutation enticing and owning new species of birds inviting. Acquiring too many birds leads to overcrowding and the inevitable consequences. Inadequate lighting, insufficient cage space, less individual attention, low maintenance, poor ventilation, higher stress levels and overwork for both keeper and birds - all contribute to lowered disease resistance resulting in frustration and frequent trips to the vet. Enjoy your pet, join a bird club, attend a few shows, breed a pair or two, but be a responsible servant to those in your care.

2. Lovebirds: Peach Faced, Black Masked, Fishers, etc.

“Comparative Pet Impact Statement”

*Size=3 to 4, Space=3 to 5, Noise level,=5 to 6, Playtime=2 to 8,
Destruction=3 to 5, Talking=1 to 3*

Lovebirds are stocky, smaller parrots that have been well established in aviculture. Much of their recent rebound in popularity is due to the explosion of colorful mutations. Breeders find endless opportunities to experiment and explore different color combinations and in doing so come to appreciate genetic principles and the laws of nature.

Lovebirds are not great talkers but instead emit short, staccato-like high-pitched “screeks”. They do have the ability to be playful amusing pets if they are handled on a regular basis. Long-term tameness requires a commitment to daily quality interactive playtime outside of the cage - most neglected lovebirds revert back to a fearful wildness that is difficult to overcome. These birds like to crawl in , around and under objects. They also have the playfulness to push and pull on items. This behavioral fearless curiosity makes the lovebird a good subject for learning to push carts, fetch objects, crawl through a tube, roll on its back, or do many other suitable tricks you might think of.

Breeding Lovebirds is easy if you have a true compatible pair. This may sound obvious but I have seen many “pairs” sold that were in reality just two birds thrown together. Both sexes look very much alike so blood-sexing is the only sure way to know what you’ve got. Lovebirds have been bred in colonies of three or more pairs. Birds are placed together as youngsters in a flight and given four or more nest boxes all at the same height. Hens can get pugnacious when choosing a favored nest site so fighting is common even within an established flock. If a strange bird is introduced it will promptly be injured by attack or killed. Even among flock members fights can cause picked feathers, missing toes or eyes. For these reasons it is really best to have one compatible pair per cage. Also, cage

breeding of single pairs is necessary for controlled production of desired traits and colors.

Lovebirds as a group are certainly one of the most colorful yet inexpensive birds around. Many people find them a joy to have around the house. Just remember their “screek” noises, but, in choosing your pet, also remember the playful side of the hand-fed baby Lovebird.

3. Budgerigars (Parakeets): American and English.

“Comparative Pet Impact Statement”

*Size=2 to 4, Space=3 to 5, Noise level=4 to 6, Playtime=2 to 8,
Destruction=2 to 4, Talking=2 to 6*

The ever-popular common little Australian shell parakeet is without doubt the bird most often chosen by parents as the “first pet” for their child. Budgerigars are a perfect size for the average household with an elementary-school child. A baby keet just out of the nest is easily tamed and while care is relatively simple the kids do experience the responsibilities of pet care. Budgies can mimic an astounding number of words and short phrases for their size however, these are uttered in a “budgie voice” often making it difficult for outsiders to understand what they are saying.



A pet budgie can become a playful interactive member of the family yet is not overly demanding for attention. Single birds do need some daily attention as they are naturally quite gregarious (which is what makes them bond to humans in the absence of their own kind.) Budgerigars will do well in a large cage if provided with one or more

companion birds. (I find the increased interactive activity of a group of budgies to be more satisfying than a lone one so desperate for company it accepts a human as a flock member.) If you house the birds in a cage large enough where they can play around comfortably with toys and let them out often for needed exercise and “people time” a budgie or two can make nice pets.

So many colors are readily available! sky blue, cobalt, yellow face, green, or violet mixed with lutino, pied, opaline, spangled, cinnamon, and more make for hard decisions at the pet shop. Most customers who do not know or understand which birds in a group will make the best pet material will simply pick out the prettiest, brightest looking parakeet and take it home expecting it to immediately hop on a finger and “talk”. Pet shops will not tend to discourage any selection for sales are the prime goal and older birds become a liability.

Beauty, of course, is in the eye of the beholder and in budgies is definitely more than “feather deep”. Selecting the right budgie as a pet is very important. The wrong choice will bring you painfully frustrating results. Adult hens are one of the most difficult of all birds to tame and the bite of an uncooperative parakeet is something to consider - it hurts!

There are important guidelines other than color to follow when choosing your pet. When selecting a single pet for your child be sure to pick a just-weaned baby that has good weight and is eating well. If the bird is active, bright-eyed, clean-feathered and easily handleable without biting it will probably be a good choice. Ask the shop to help you pick a baby. If they don’t know the difference between babies, juveniles and adults it might be good to shop somewhere else.

1. Parrotlets: Celestial or Pacific, Green Winged, Blue Winged, etc.

“Comparative Pet Impact Statement”

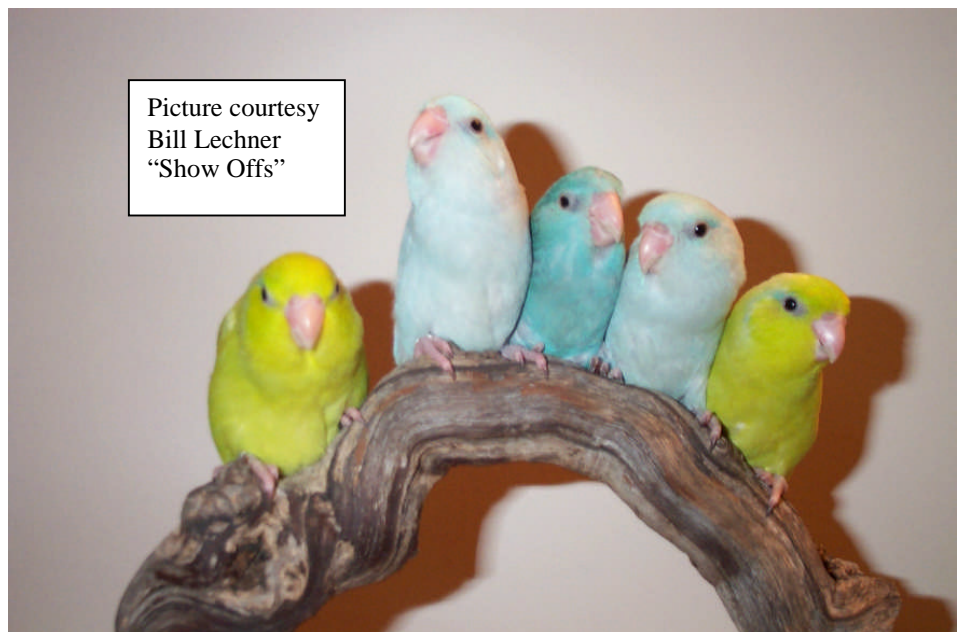
*Size=1 to 3, Space=2 to 3, Noise level=3 to 5, Playtime=2 to 8,
Destruction=2 to 4, Talking=1 to 3*

Parrotlets of the genus *forpus* are among the smallest representatives of the order of parrots in the world.

Being only a few inches in length has allowed them to be successfully bred in finch boxes - although a standard budgie box is more suitable.

These diminutive but mighty little parrots from Central America remind me of African lovebirds in their shape and personality but they are smaller and in no way related. All *forpus* parrots are sexually dimorphic with cocks displaying more blue on the wings, rump, and face than the hens according to their species. By far the most commonly seen parrotlet in aviculture is the celestial or Pacific.

They are a little larger and more colorful than other available species bred in captivity. The down side is Pacifics are also a bit more fearlessly feisty and pugnacious than the rest. I consider talking ability marginal but some owners out there do say they talk a bit. *Forpus* parrotlets can be entertaining little pets



with hens perhaps averaging a little more dominance in their personality than males. All must be handled routinely on a daily basis or pet quality will be lost. Noise is not a real problem. Parrotlets sound like quiet lovebirds but the *forpus* voice has a more pleasing chirping quality about it and so should pose no problem to close neighbors. Space demands are also minimal.

Parrotlets are one of the few species of bird that seem to tolerate small cages well. I consider them true "efficiency apartment" birds. Pacific parrotlets have prolifically bred in the medium to large sized commercial parakeet cages and do

fine on the corner of a shelf or table. Birds should have supervised playtime to crawl around, in and out of, and on top of toys for they are fearless little explorers and, when not breeding, need the diversion.

For the person with little space, little time, and little money; Parrotlets may be just what the doctor ordered.

[>See Chapter 5: Canaries And Finches](#)

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