

PARAKEETS or BUDGERIGAR: *Melopsittacus undulatus*

Virtually every child wanting their first pet bird is familiar with the budgerigar or “parakeet”. This hardy little green parrot comes from the interior of Australia where the Aboriginal people identify them as “betcherrygah” or “something good to eat”. The British naturalist John Gould brought some back to Europe where they were well received. During the mid 1800’s to the early twentieth century tens of thousands were shipped out of Australia to become pets and breeders. These seven-inch long grass parakeets were the first parrots to be captive bred on a commercial scale. This success made it possible for the average person to acquire, enjoy and even breed the shell parakeet in their own home. Since then the ever more popular budgie has been judged at many shows and can be found in many beautiful colors. Now they are found in pet shops everywhere.

Male and female normal colored green or blue budgies look very much alike except for the cere (nose) color. Adult cocks have a dark blue cere while hens in breeding condition will be seen with a nut-brown cere. All adult birds have a clear colored forehead. Parakeets with striping most of the way down the forehead and showing a pinkish cere are young juveniles. The colors seen on babies are much like those found on adults but will be of a softer shade. Some mutations such as lutino or harlequin lack the blue colored cere so males are harder to sex accurately.

Budgies are naturally found in large flocks but will do well as single pets if their owner plays with them every day. Tell the petshop clerk you want a tamable pet. Many adults are very hard to tame. Babies just out of the nest always make the best pets. Feel the breastbone for thinness and the vent area for dirtiness. See if the bird will comfortably climb onto your finger. Do not look for the most colorful bird in the group unless you know it is a baby. Budgies can live well over ten years so take your time making a selection, then take the bird home and enjoy your pet.