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## ***LARGE AND EXTRA-LARGE BIRDS***

### **1. Large Macaws: Blue & Gold, Green Winged, Scarlets, etc.**

*"Comparative Pet Impact Statement:"*

*Size=7 to 9, Space=7 to 9, Noise level=7 to 9, Playtime=7 to 8, Destruction=7 to 9, Talking=4 to 7*

The larger macaws are extremely colorful and catch the eye of many a first-time bird buyer. Hand-feds are very playful and will roll around with toys on the floor reminiscent of puppies. These active intelligent birds will talk some but would rather spend time exploring and testing with their powerful beaks and feet or playing with their mate or owner.

Cages must be large enough for these long-tailed two to nearly four foot birds to play around in comfortably along with a few sturdy toys. A strong enclosure is in order as its weakest joint will be subjected to the onslaught of a beak capable of cracking Brazil nuts.

Macaws can scream! The loudest calls can be heard blocks away so apartment dwellers must reconsider this potential problem carefully.

Macaws need a lot of daily attention to thrive. Interaction is the name of the game. If you can't give the bird at least two to three hours or more each day of active play outside of the cage please reconsider this commitment. A bored or mishandled macaw may feather-pick, scream, or become a lunging biter. Most macaws are headstrong birds that should not be allowed above your eye level if you are to remain the boss. Hen macaws do tend to be more docile than males and many can be nice pets. These showy birds can often be seen amusing the public at bird exhibits. Professional trainers can coax them to push or pull toys, roller skate, peddle a bike, wear

hats, clothing, or perform other human-like activities. I prefer them to act like macaws and enjoy the streamlined majesty of free flight as they cruise about and upon landing blend into the dappled sunlight and tropical vegetation of their natural habitat.

It is gratifying to watch macaws in beautifully immaculate plumage playing among branches or working at cracking open a hard nut. Yet I see too many large macaws with heavy tail damage and beat up dusty plumage crawling around endlessly in a cage. They do not seem content but are merely surviving.

Remember, when you purchase a macaw or any other large parrot, that these birds have intelligence close to that of the great apes. Longevity is a remarkable seventy to one hundred years. It is only fair and humane to provide these birds with an environment suitable for their psychological and physical well being. Keep this in mind.

## **2. White Cockatoos: Umbrellas, Mollucans, Sulfur Cresteds, Corellas, etc.**

### *"Comparative Impact Statement"*

*Size=5 to 8, Space=6 to 8, Noise level=5 to 10, Playtime=6 to 10, Destruction=7 to 10' Talking=3 to 6*

The captivatingly majestic white cockatoos with their expressive crest, breathtaking beauty, and clownish antics are favorites of the public. These complex sensitive birds require a nurturing love from their owner that only hours of competent daily handling can provide. Cockatoos are not noted for great talking ability but I have seen some that do quite well, it depends on the training and the individual bird. Cockatoos are great showoffs and will perform trained acts in public with ease. They seem to enjoy the applause and attention.

No other bird I know of craves physical handling and preening as much as a cockatoo. If this is not kept in balance by the keeper a sweet loving cockatoo can turn into a demanding spoiled brat.

Feather-picking and/or screaming is common among neglected cockatoos. These pathetic neurotic birds face a very difficult life in captivity as they are passed on from one well meaning owner to the next or given mates for breeding in confinement without choice or proper socialization. Yet a healthy posturing and, yes, screaming cockatoo in full vibrant courtship is something to behold as it spreads its wings, tail and crest in a magnificent daunting display.

Cockatoos are surely among the dustiest birds available. Petting one will coat your hand with a talcum-like feather dust powder. Most people with dust allergies will not be able to tolerate a cockatoo in the house.

Cockatoos like to chew and need to chew a lot for their own psychological wellbeing. These birds regularly grind two-by-fours down to kindling with ease and dig through wallboard as easy as you or I might cut through butter! The destruction a dedicated cockatoo can inflict in just minutes of unsupervised play is not to be believed until you own one; we have some house damage from our own birds!

Cages must be large and strong. Cockatoos must be supplied with toys and objects to chew on, pull apart, unscrew, and destroy. Make sure cages are not placed where the cockatoo can reach draperies, walls, table tops, pictures, power chords, etc. for sooner or later damage will most certainly occur.

It may be desirable to install an air purifier near the cage because everything in the house will need to be dusted more often when a cockatoo is present.

If you are still thinking about a cockatoo realize most hand-fed babies work out great in the beginning as cuddly lovable youngsters but be prepared for what can happen in future years as the bird matures. I believe, in general, that the larger cockatoos do best in a professional full time training regimen or breeding program while smaller varieties might be kept as private pets by the right person. There are always exceptions though and some

special individuals of most any species of cockatoo can make beautiful pets in the right home.

### **3. Amazon Parrots: Blue Fronteds, Yellow Crowneds, Orange Wingeds, Red Headeds, etc.**

*"Comparative Impact Statement"*

*Size=5 to 7, Space=5 to 6, Noise level=6 to 8, Playtime=4 to 7, Destruction=4 to 7, Talking=5 to 9*

Parrots of the Amazon genus are what people are most likely to picture in their mind's eye when they hear the word "parrot". These birds are not so large as to intimidate someone unfamiliar with birds or so small as to be passed by.

Amazons do okay in a suitable caged environment and can make nice pets. Talking ability varies between species and individuals with the yellow crowned group; including yellow naped, double yellow headed, and Panamas achieving highest honors. Close behind are the blue fronted amazons who are not as outgoing, boisterous and noisy as the yellow crowned. Blue fronteds make good pets and many talk very well. Other common, less expensive, amazons such as the Red Headed, Lilac Crowned, Orange Winged, Red Lored, White Fronted, etc. can be nice companion birds but in the amazons price pretty much reflects the average talking ability within a given species.

My first introduction to what a high quality hand-fed parrot was really like came in the form of a six-year-old yellow naped named "Corky". Not only would this bird talk but he would respond with words appropriate to a given situation. If play became a little rough and he bit too hard so I said "ouch" Corky would answer "does it hurt?". When he flew up onto the furnace pipes this parrot would call out "where am I where am I". At mealtime the phrase "yum yum, fruits and vegetables, good food" would greet me as I offered him dinner. If I started vocalizing Corky would begin singing right along - this certainly was strange singing a duet with a bird! To my regret Corky sold easily at a bird fair. He was

the star of the show. Don't expect your amazon to be a "Corky". He was one of a kind. I use him to illustrate just how much of a personality a "mere" bird can have.

When shopping for an amazon, or any parrot, it is very important to select one that seems to take an initial liking to you. This may seem obvious but if people don't take into account the personal likes and dislikes of the bird being picked out as a pet it may be harder to develop as close a relationship than if the bird liked you from the start. It is truly amazing how birds will prefer the mannerisms, looks, and voice of one human over another.

Before you buy that amazon there are a few other facts to consider. Amazons tend to become dusty with a particular amazon odor about them if they are not bathed regularly. Some birds become nippy when they are not in the mood for play. If you learn the bird's "mood signals" much of this can be overcome but it does take a little effort.

Amazons do like their own space at times and the cage should be their refuge. At the same time the pet owner must assume a nurturing yet dominant role and set consistent rules for the bird to follow. Remember; a parrot has no instincts to guide him in this (to him) completely unnatural master/pet social structure.

Many hand-fed chicks do not completely forget they are parrots so when sexually mature the breeding drives will be present and may turn a former sweet bird into a nippy, ill-mannered, protective, noisy, strutting tyrant. Life for these birds is full of conflict and confusion. Individual experience tells them they are human while age-old instinct prompts them to court a suitable mate, find and defend a nest site from all comers, breed and raise young.

Do not take these actions personally. A bird is a bird and humans are human. We cannot expect a bird to permanently give up its own identity to serve the whims of human desire and vain imaginings. This is not fair to the birds in our care or to ourselves

if we truly have the welfare of the birds at heart. Some birds may simply need to be set up for breeding and allowed to live out their lives at least a little closer to what tens of millions of years of evolution has fashioned into their being.

#### **4. African Grays: Congas, Ghana's, Timneh, etc.**

"Comparative Impact Statement"

*Size=5 to 6, Space=5 to 6, Noise Level=4 to 6, Playtime=4 to 7, Destruction=4 to 6, Talking=6 to 10*

Without doubt the most gifted all around mimic and talker among the parrots is the African gray. Grays have received so much attention from researchers and praise from the press that, in the eyes of the present day public, this bird has become the one to own.

The intelligence of these birds is truly legendary. Grays have been proven to recognize and associate words with numbers, colors and shapes. Some grays may even ask for a specific kind of food and not accept a substitute! The clarity and timing of a gray interacting with its human flock is so precise as to cause confusion among the household as to who is really saying what. In addition, their natural calls are a pleasing blend of whistles, conks, and other varied "jungle" noises. Grays do not possess the raucous screams uttered by most birds in the parrot family.

At first glance the African gray does seem to be the ideal choice for a pet but their very high intelligence, coupled with a rather shy sensitive nature, can cause problems if not dealt with correctly. Grays like set routines. For some birds any change or even a new toy in their cage is seen as a threat. New clothes or a different hairstyle may cause panic. A simple move to a different cage or location often creates major trauma. Also these sensitive parrots tend to develop bad feather-picking habits easily and, of course, boredom is a constant issue. However, If a baby gray is well socialized from the start; offered a rich nurturing, stimulating and challenging environment; encouraged to interact regularly with

all family members and not allowed to become set in its ways; an African gray can truly become an exceptional pet.

### **5. Eclectus: Solomon Is., Red Sided, Vosmaeri, Grand, etc.**

#### *"Comparative Impact Statement"*

*Size=5 to 7, Space=5 to 7, Noise Level=4 to 7, Playtime=4 to 7, Destruction=3 to 4, Talking=5 to 9*

Eclectus are probably one of the most successfully bred group of the larger parrots in captivity but the general public remains surprisingly unaware of this uniquely colored distinctly different bird.

This species gives new meaning to the term "sexually dimorphic". All eclectus show an intense coloration that is strikingly different between the sexes. It is hard for one used to the more common scheme of things to believe how such contrastingly colored birds could actually be a pair of the same kind. When first discovered male and female Eclectus were listed as separate species. Only when they were observed nesting did ornithologists believe the natives who knew all along what was going on and worshipped the Eclectus as gods.

Cock eclectus are a vibrant deep green with crimson red under the wings which extends onto the sides of the chest, hens are primarily a bright red. Some hen subspecies have a deep blue/purple chest while others have a beautifully contrasting bright yellow on the tail with a softer shade of purple on the chest. All eclectus are beautiful.

The eclectus personality is also distinctly different from any other readily available parrot. Most uncomfortable threatened parrots will attempt to flee, threaten or fight in some active way while an eclectus will simply "freeze" motionless on the spot. This led to the eclectus receiving an undeserved bad reputation as a pet for imports were looked upon as lethargic stupid birds. To compound this problem the dietary needs of eclectus were poorly understood and many fared badly in captivity. Modern-day

eclectus are healthy, active, playful, trusting, inquisitive parrots that take kindly to people who don't abuse them. As an added bonus bonded pairs will reproduce willingly for their owners.

When a group of eclectus are playing the sounds they make sound something like a combination of monkey and puppy noises. You can definitely hear their antics but the noise level is not as high as that produced by macaws, conures, amazons, or cockatoos. Eclectus do possess a loud alarm call but it is infrequently uttered unless there is a reason for it.

Somehow talking ability has been overlooked in these birds. This is a complete mystery to me for I know of several that are good talkers picking up new words with ease. Eclectus are also reported to sing complete tunes.

When eclectus are handled they must be treated more as a friend than as a dog. These parrots do not like to be overly handled or intimidated. The eclectus nature reflects more of a "wait your turn" policy which must be respected for the bird to be a happy well adjusted pet. Treat the bird with courtesy. Don't expect the bird to play until it has finished eating or napping. Wait until it is done "doing it's thing" just as you would any other family member - the parrot has rights too.

I consider an eclectus to be one of the most practical pets among the large to medium-sized birds. They will not demand attention but will comfortably wait their turn and then enjoy your company. They are not destructive chewers so all items last longer in their presence. They tend to accept most anyone who is kind as a friend and generally do not bond to only one person.

However, eclectus parrots do vary greatly in pet quality between individuals. Some are shy and/or temperamental while others are in varying degrees more outgoing and/or playful. Some will scream while others are quiet. A jewel must be hunted for but the right eclectus might just well be the nicest all-around pet parrot you could own. >go to Part 3 "medium Parrots at

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