

Care of Lorries & Lorikeets



Lorikeets and lorries are some of the most colorful members of the parrot family. Native to Australia, Tasmania, and the South Pacific islands, many species are threatened or endangered in the wild due to habitat loss or trapping.

Lorikeets tend to be relatively small, slender birds, between 6-8 in (15-20 cm) in length with long, tapered tails. Lorries are slightly larger, stout birds with short, square tails. Not all species fall easily into either category, and the terms “lory” and “lorikeet” will be used interchangeably in this handout.

While not the best talkers, many lorikeets can easily learn to clearly speak a few words. These birds also tend to have excellent mimicking abilities.

When properly cared for, lorries and lorikeets can live 15 to 20 years.

Diet

The lory possesses a long, slender bill and a specialized long, narrow, brush-like tongue designed to extract nectar and pollen from flowers. Lorikeets in the wild have also been observed to eat insect secretions such as ‘lerp’ (a sugary substance secreted onto leaves and twigs), honeydew (secreted by aphids), as well as plant exudates like manna and sap, fruits and berries, flowers, leaves, buds, and small seeds (*Note*: Nuts and seeds are only a RARE part of the diet in the vast majority of lorikeet species).

Not surprisingly, it is difficult to imitate the natural lory diet, however there are close compromises:

- The staple of the diet should be high-quality nectar. Powdered and liquid nectar mixes are available for purchase in many pet stores. Small amounts of dry commercial mix can be made available at all times with liquid nectar provided fresh daily.

It is important not to offer too much nectar to captive birds. Nectar is rich in calories and some commercial products also contain dangerously high levels of vitamin A. Excess vitamin A can interfere with normal feather color and condition, as well as beak pigmentation. High vitamin A levels have also been associated with health problems like pancreatitis, poor fertility, decreased survival of chicks, and perhaps iron storage disease (a common problem in lorikeets). Look for a nectar product that contains 6000 IU/kg or less of vitamin A and less than 80 mg/kg of dietary iron.

Consult your avian veterinarian for specific recommendations on brands and amounts to feed.

- Supplement the commercial diet daily with a large variety of fresh vegetables plus some fruit. Restrict access to fruits rich in vitamin C, like strawberries, cantaloupe, papaya, and citrus fruit, because high dietary levels of vitamin C increase the risk of iron storage disease.
- Birds can also be offered pesticide-free hibiscus flowers, rose petals, and bottlebrush flowers fresh from the garden.
- Small seeds make up a very small part of the diet in most wild birds and should never be provided as anything more than the occasional treat to pet birds. Compared to other parrots, the lory stomach is weakly muscled and is not equipped to easily break down this food item.

Housing

Purchase the largest cage possible. Lorries are active, high-energy birds that need an abundance of space for recreation and exercise. Minimum cage size should be "large parrot size" which is usually 36" (0.9 m) x 36" x 60" (1.5 m). Cages must be constructed of strong wire that can withstand chewing, and horizontal bar spacing should be no greater than 0.75 in (1.9 cm) to 1 in (2.5 cm). Select a cage that can be easily cleaned, and provide sturdy food bowls like heavy ceramic crocks to prevent your lory from tipping over its dishes.

Because of their special diet, lorries tend to produce large, wet droppings that they tend to squirt outside of the cage. To keep the area clean, surround the cage with plastic or set down vinyl carpet runners. Cages with seed catchers or cage skirts can also serve to catch and funnel droppings to the cage floor. Make sure dishes and toys are not placed beneath perches where they can become soiled by the bird's droppings. The entire cage, including all toys, perches, and dishes, should undergo a thorough scrubbing every 2 to 3 months.

Supply these curious, playful birds with an array of sturdy toys. Provide swings, chew toys, as well as puzzle toys that contain a treat that must be extracted. Lorries also enjoy playing with foot toys that they wrestle with on the cage floor. Hanging a toy from a perch will entertain these active birds as they play with the toy on their backs. In fact, a cage with a grate bottom is generally preferable because lorikeets tend to spend a fair amount of time playing on the cage bottom.

Finally insect control is important. Nectar tends to attract ants, bees, and wasps and lorries can be stung or bitten around the eyes.

Baths

Routine bathing or showering is vital for good feather and skin condition. Once your bird becomes used to bathing, she may delight in a true drenching. Some birds enjoy playing in the sink and even like to be held underneath warm running water. Take care not to get water into the eyes, nostrils, or ears.

Health

When fed appropriately, lories and lorikeets tend to be hardy, healthy birds.

- Nectar is high in sugar and calories. This food meets the needs of wild lorikeets, but can quickly lead to obesity in pet birds that are fed too much nectar or are not allowed sufficient exercise.
- Lories are also at risk for iron storage disease, also known as hemochromatosis.

Water consumption tends to be higher in lories compared to other parrots. For this reason, these birds are sensitive to many drugs and should only be medicated under the close supervision of an avian veterinarian.

References

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