

Birds – Safety and Bird Proofing

Why Safety-Proof?

Home hazards are one of the leading causes of death of pet birds. Lack of awareness or momentary lapses can lead to severe or fatal injuries in a matter of moments. Because birds use their beaks to explore, they will often come into contact with dangerous and toxic items in a non-bird-proofed home. To prevent serious injury or premature death, it is essential to prevent your bird from coming into contact with any home hazards.



Birds are one of the leading species of animals reported lost each year.

Clipping a bird's wings does not eliminate this threat, as they can be carried off by air currents once outside, and it is common for birds with clipped wings to be lost because of the false sense of security of this procedure. Furthermore, clipping severely restricts one of the most essential aspects of birds' natural behaviours – flight.

What You Can Do

Supervise

The most important thing you can do to ensure your bird's safety is to supervise all flight time outside of the cage. Dedicating this time to observing and interacting with your bird will also strengthen your relationship and lead to new insights and discoveries about your bird's vibrant, individual personality.

Restrict Space

Larger homes often contain far too many hazards to adequately safety proof. Allowing flight time in a single room or smaller area will allow you to ensure all areas to which the bird has access are safe and secure.

Safety Proof

Safety proofing your home begins with an awareness of the common home hazards that face pet birds. To ensure that your home is ready for your bird, carefully read the common hazards listed below and take steps to avoid or eliminate them.

Use Common Sense

If something seems wrong or is not listed below or on another bird home hazard list, use common sense and do not allow your bird access to anything that you suspect may be harmful.

Finding an avian veterinarian in your area is essential. Ask questions and ensure that your bird is examined if you suspect any illness or injury. Regular (yearly or twice yearly) exams are also important for healthy birds to detect illnesses before more severe symptoms arise.



Common Home Hazards

Kitchens

Keep them out! Kitchens are the number one room for hazards to birds. Birds should never be housed in a kitchen or have access to one when flying free. If you are unable to block off your kitchen when your bird is flying free, ensure that the following hazards are avoided:

Cooking

Smoke or steam from cooking can kill birds because of their delicate respiratory systems. They can also suffer serious injury from contact with hot stoves or pans, toasters, kettles, or any heated device. Birds have drowned in sinks, gotten caught in fridges, dishwashers, ovens, or other appliances, cut themselves on knives or sharp objects, and otherwise injured themselves. When a bird is out, all appliances should be off and closed. No one should cook or clean while the bird is out and the bird should be discouraged from entering the kitchen if at all possible.

Eating

Many human foods are toxic to birds and can easily kill them if ingested. Common toxic foods include, but are not limited to chocolate, alcohol, avocado, garlic, onion, salt, yeast dough, and coffee (including grounds and beans), tea, colas, and other caffeinated beverages. Food should be securely out of reach of birds when flying free.

Some foods, such as butter, margarine or oils, can get onto the bird's feathers and cause damage as well. Ensure that all such food is out of reach and that you closely supervise your birds at all time.

Bathrooms

Toilets, sinks and tubs pose a potential drowning hazard for birds. Toilets should be shut at all times, and birds should be kept out of bathrooms entirely if possible.

Mirrors

Birds cannot distinguish mirrors and often fly into them thinking they can fly through them. This can cause serious injuries to the beak, wings or keel. Any mirrors in bathrooms or throughout the house should be covered or have decals placed on them to show the birds they are solid objects.

Medications and Cleaning Products

Many parrots are adept at opening jars and bottles. All medicines should be securely out of reach of birds at all times. Soaps, hair dyes, perfumes, shaving creams, shampoo and other products are also toxic to birds and should always be kept out of reach.

Cleaning products contain harsh chemicals which will kill a bird if ingested. Never allow your bird access to these products and rinse all surfaces well after using them before allowing a bird contact with these areas.

Heated Products

Blow-dryers, hair straighteners and curling irons should never be accessible to birds or used around them. Birds coming into contact with these appliances will suffer severe burns. Many of these items are also coated with Teflon, a product which releases toxic fumes when heated which can kill a bird.



Cords and Wires

One of the most common activities of birds is chewing. Most species could quickly bite through an exposed cord or wire resulting in electrocution or an electrical fire. Because of the high risk of fatality, all cords and wires should be always out of reach of birds. Cord protectors, sold in hardware stores, can be used to cover, and protect any cords that cannot be fully out of reach.

People and Other Pets

Most people unfamiliar with birds do not realize how delicate they are. Trying to grab them from the air or handling a bird when unfamiliar with it can result in serious injuries. Children should never be left unattended or unsupervised with a bird, should be restricted from handling until older and taught to do so safely, and should never be the primary caregiver for a bird. Adults unfamiliar with an individual bird should first be shown how to interact with it. Most birds will bite when afraid and even smaller birds can easily break the skin. Anyone in contact with the bird should be prepared for this and should refrain from shaking, dropping or flinging the bird if bitten, despite this being a natural response. These actions can severely injure the bird and physical discipline is never an appropriate training method for birds.



Careful supervision at all times to avoid stepping or sitting on a bird is also essential to avoiding death or injuries when your bird is out of its cage.

Animals

Even the most calm, sedate pet is essentially still an animal with the natural instincts of its species. Cats, dogs and ferrets are all-natural predators and their methods of play can inflict serious harm on birds. Even pets who are not interested in playing with or chasing a bird will react to a bird startling, biting or otherwise bothering them with a natural bite or swat which can prove fatal to delicate birds. Even in securely shut cages, birds will often have heart attacks because of the fright of being trapped in the cage with a predator on the other side. For this reason, birds should never be kept in a room to which your other animals have access and other animals should be put out of the area when your bird is given flight time.

Many people do not realize that birds can also be a threat to one another. Unfamiliar birds will often fight and can fatally wound one another. Larger species will also not see smaller birds as companions and will often attack them. Unless properly introduced for bonding purposes and carefully supervised until fully bonded, birds should not be put together or allowed access to one another, even through the cage.

Windows and Doors

One of the most common ways people lose their birds is by accidentally leaving a window or door open when the bird is flying around the house. Even the most affectionate birds will rarely return home, often getting confused or frightened once outside. Domesticated birds are not adapted to wild living. Most domesticated breeds are native to much warmer climates and do not survive our winters. Domestic birds, and other animals, are also not used to finding their own food – much of their natural food sources are also not available in this area – and are not adept at avoiding predators or hiding. Birds who are not found do not often survive for long outside. For this reason, it is essential that you check (and double check) that all windows and doors are closed and latched when the bird is flying free in the home.



Many birds with clipped wings are lost this way, as owners mistakenly think they cannot get far without full flight. A bird who jumps through a window can easily be carried off by air currents and the clipped wings will only make fending for themselves outside much more difficult, and the chance of death higher.

Birds should also be discouraged from perching on top of open doors. A strong draft or accidentally bumping into a door will cause it to slam shut and potentially crush or injure the bird. Keeping doors shut at all times when the bird is flying free will avoid this situation.

Cover your Windows

Birds cannot visually discern windows or mirrors, and often fly into them as a result, expecting to be able to fly through them. Broken beaks, necks, wings or damaged keels are often the result, and unfortunately regularly result in fatalities. Covering windows and mirrors when allowing birds free flight is the best way to avoid such incidents.

Teflon

Teflon is the brand name for the coating in non-stick kitchen ware. It is also used as a coating in heating devices such as space heaters, curling irons and other appliances. When heated, Teflon releases fumes that are fatal to birds. Birds should never be kept in or near an area where such items are being used and none of these items or devices should be used when a bird is flying free.

Smoke and Fumes

Birds have extremely sensitive respiratory systems, and any kind of smoke or fumes can be fatal to them. These include fireplace and cooking smoke, chemical-based cleaning products, air and fabric fresheners, machinery, and any other product that releases fumes into the air.

Scented Products of all kinds are included in this list. Scented candles, perfumes, incense, or other products should never be used near a bird or when a bird is flying free. Only natural, chemical-free cleaning products should be used in the same room as a bird. Check with your vet before using any products to ensure their safety.

Plants

Many common household plants are toxic to birds if ingested. As birds commonly test things with their beaks, ingestion of items is common. You should never allow your bird access to any toxic plant, either in their cage or when flying free.

Common Toxic Plants include, but are not limited to:

Amaryllis	Bean Plants	Hydrangea
Marigold	Holly, Buttercups	Oleander
Mistletoe	Shamrocks	Oak Tree
Ficus	Snowdrops	Peach Tree
Morning Glory	Mushrooms	Iris
Rhododendron	Red Maple	Calla Lily
Rubber Plant	Hyacinth	Clover
Nectarine Tree	Honeysuckle	Bleeding Hearts

Dried plants and potpourris are often overlooked when bird-proofing, but are equally toxic and should not be in an area to which the bird has access.



Lead Paint, Polishes and Veneers

Birds naturally chew and this activity should be encouraged with appropriate chew toys. However, birds will often also chew on inappropriate items to which they have access, such as furniture, baseboards, window and door frames and other items. If these items are coated with lead paint, toxic polishes or veneers, this can be a fatal activity. Ensure that all such items are kept out of reach of birds and provide plenty of appropriate chew toys to divert your bird's attention.

Heavy Metal Poisoning

The most common metal poisoning in birds is from lead, zinc and copper. None of these materials should be used in bird caging or accessories or any items to which birds have access, as birds will often chew on items containing these materials, resulting in toxicity.

Drafts and Fans

Ceiling fans and other fans are extremely harmful to birds flying free and often result in broken bones or beaks or even death. All fans should be turned off before allowing free flight. If using a fan when a bird is in the cage, make sure it is not pointed at the cage. Drafts from fans, windows or vents can cause respiratory illnesses and chills in birds. Cages should always be kept out of drafts.

Sunlight and Heat Sources

While direct sunlight is beneficial to birds, birds should always be able to get out of the sun when desired to avoid over-heating. Cages should always be kept away from heat sources such as fireplaces, space heaters, heating vents or radiators and the temperature should be kept regulated in areas in which birds are kept.

Hiding Spots

Birds will often seek places to hide when flying outside of the cage and will sometimes burrow under blankets, towels or in couch cushions. Ensure that you know at all times where your bird is before moving around or sitting down to avoid crushing your bird. Ensure that your bird is able to get out from under blankets and towels, as this can also lead to suffocation.

