

YOUR NEW BUDGIE

Please quarantine your new bird in an area away from other birds for at least 30 days. Wash your hands before servicing the cage or playing with the bird. If you are using a previously-used cage, be sure to wash it with a bleach and water solution, rinse, and thoroughly dry it before placing your bird inside. Perches and dishes should be treated likewise, making sure perches are dried completely. Anything not able to be sterilized this way should be replaced. A cage 18 to 24 inches long is a good choice, and I particularly like the medium Vision cages as they are a nice size for a budgie and also will help keep mess to a minimum. You can cut papers the right size for the bottom and then it's a relatively easy matter to pop the top section off and remove the grate and one layer of papers and then replace.

It's important to be very observant of your new bird the first few days especially. Be sure he has found his food and is eating. Provide lots of millet sprays to be sure he has quick energy available!

- You can offer little bits of veggies to your baby, but be aware that budgies don't seem as gung-ho over them as other hookbills, and since they are so small a little goes a long way. I offer small bits of the Beans/Rice/Veggies mix I make, and they will eat it as adults but it may take a while for them to warm up to it. I put a small amount on top of their seed. You can also try offering warm bits of veggies by hand and that may be more readily accepted at first.
- They have a dish of seed available at all times. Budgie seed doesn't vary a lot from one brand to another, so any good quality brand (not dusty!) is fine.
- A dish of regular pellets should also be available at all times. I often use a mixture of two types, such as Zupreem fruit flavored and some other type such as Roudybush.
- Millet sprays should be hung for the new bird – LOTS OF THEM! - and they also like the commercial treat sticks. When they first go to their new homes it's most important to have lots of food where they can't miss it. Once they are eating well you can focus more on trying to get them to eat veggies and less of the "treat" foods. But initially, they need food pretty much everywhere they look!
- A cuttlebone and/or mineral block should also be available, and two or three toys as well.

In short, offer lots of variety, and keep an eye on him to make sure he is eating. He will have been eating on his own for at least a week before going home with you, but being in a strange place could possibly throw him off a bit.

Hopefully you will heed the guarantee and be bringing him to a vet within 48 hours. This will give you a weight you can base his future weigh-ins on as well as knowing he is healthy.

Do let him out and get acquainted with him, but be sure he has enough time to eat sufficiently as well as having enough time to rest. Remember he is still a baby!

Please let me know how he's settling in, too, and anytime you want to give me updates on him I'd love to hear how he's doing.

People sometimes have some questions and concerns after bringing home their new budgie. The following questions/concerns in bold are things I've been asked, and my responses.

I have not seen my budgie drink!

Yeah, they are NOT huge water drinkers. I have not seen any of the kids taking a bath, either, but I know when I had the different adult pairs in the living room being quarantined I would see them bathe after a few days. I very rarely see the kids drink, and yet obviously they are drinking or they'd all shrivel up and die! So don't worry. I'm sure he knows where it is and will take a drink when he needs it.

Is it ok if all he's eating is the millet?

I'm sure the millet WAS a big hit. They love that stuff. The millet is to make sure your new bird finds something to eat quickly, and doesn't go hungry. It works great to "lead them" to their food dish, too. Hang some over or right next to the main seed dish and you can be sure he will see that food quickly as well. For the first couple of weeks, don't limit the millet sprays. They provide quick energy that your new bird really needs. These guys are small and will likely be stressed going to a new home. It's very important that they have lots of quick energy available and millet provides both complex carbohydrates as well as protein. When I'm weaning babies I have millet hanging EVERYWHERE in the cage!

You can offer him anything healthy. You probably already know the list of no-nos – the avocado, chocolate, onions, cheese (though a lot of people DO offer tiny amounts of cheese without any ill effects). I've never heard of tomatoes not being ok. But when in doubt, probably best NOT to offer it. There are tons of things he can have, though. Pasta is fine. Any kind of veggie is generally ok. You can definitely offer normal fruits, too. Just remember he's tiny so he's not going to wolf down too much even if he likes it! Any unsweetened cereal is ok, and cheerios are usually good. With cereal, just remember that often it has added vitamins and other nutrients geared toward humans, and remember he is just a tiny bird. Eating a couple pieces of Cheerios or other cereal is sufficient. Also it is sometimes more a matter of HOW something is offered that determines whether or not they will eat it. Sometimes offering foods in a separate crock will be completely ignored, but I discovered one night that if I put some broccoli florets right on top of their seed they tried it. Same thing with corn. So now I offer them veggies that way and they will at least check them out. If something isn't working one way, try something different. Don't just give up.

My bird is biting kind of hard.

The earthquake really does work well. Try to be very consistent with it, whenever he's in a position for you to do it. It's funny with the budgies, but they like to chew and it seems to us that most of their "biting" as kids is them simply chewing. As opposed to the greys who go through a stage at 70-some-odd days where they BITE BITE. Trying to see just how much they can get away with, is how it seems to me. But make sure you are consistent with the earthquake each and every time he bites, and try not to say anything when you do it. Make it as instantaneous and as drama-free (by not talking or going OUCH, LOL) as you can. It needs to register in their mind that "hey, if I chew on her something happens that I don't like." Quick little earthquake, no talking. You may have to do that two or three times in a row for him to get the message, and it may take a few days of that for him to really get it and stop doing it, but just keep at it. It WILL eventually sink in and work. Also having a small foot toy handy that you can use to distract him when he seems bitey is also a great approach.

My bird doesn't really seem to want to be with me now and seems lonely/unhappy.

I don't know if he's lonely as much as he is just learning how things are there. It's normal for him to feel a bit weird – everything is new to him. Different sounds, different smells, different people. It's all different. The more time you spend with him the more he'll come to think of YOU as his touchstone. His familiar thing.

If you can, try to give him little rubs or scratches on the back of the neck. They don't realize it yet, but once they figure out how good that feels they may LOVE it.

One thing that is very important, is that when you want him to step up, do NOT be slow or overly cautious about it. He will read that as your indecision. Firmly tell him STEP UP and then follow through on your end. Stick that finger out and firmly push it into his lower chest so he has no choice but to step up. If he flies off, go after him and do it again. If you've been overly cautious, it may take several times, but he will eventually step up and stay put. Once you have him staying put, "ladder" him from hand to hand, with a Step Up each time. That lets him know you are in charge. All hookbills need this, and any time they seem to be getting a bit cocky in the future, a bit of laddering often helps to make them remember who is in charge. Remember this is not being mean, it's simply giving him structure and boundaries, something all kids need.

When I try to get him to come out of the cage, he doesn't seem to want to.

You can either let him come out on his own, or reach in and get him to step up. If he's nervous about it to start with, he may just fly out. That's normal, too. It happens. You just have to hunt them down and get them to step up. Sometimes I have to chase down the cage of 4 or 5 kids several times, but eventually they settle down and will stay put.

What can I use for treat training?

This only applies to a bird that is well-acclimated in your new home and already eating REALLY well! Do not ever limit food for a bird that has only been in your home for a few weeks or a month! After that, however, if you want to elicit certain responses by offering treats, I think you could cut off small chunks of millet to use or perhaps single Cheerios. Perhaps little morsels of apple or grape would also work. It really depends on what your bird loves.

I'm nervous I'm going to hurt him or do something wrong.

I think you are more nervous than he is, but he will pick up on that and use it to his advantage. Also, birds are very empathetic. The smarter the bird, the more so. Don't ever work with him if you are wicked stressed or pissed off, because it will be felt and he will reflect it back at you. I sometimes stop and do a minute or two of deep breathing just to settle myself (true, believe it or not) before dealing with the kids, because a cage full of them is a bit stressful in itself.

Feel confident and he'll see it and be much easier to handle. It will work out. If there is a door on the room so you can confine his flying off, so much the better – at least until you guys are big buddies. If not, you may want to bring his cage to a smaller room to work with him – or maybe just bring HIM? If he can't get hurt on anything and you don't mind chasing him down then it's not necessary to move him. Just go after him repeatedly as needed. Once he settles you can reward him with a bit of millet. We talk to the kids a lot and take them on "walkabouts" to other areas of the room and show them things. Think of what you might do to amuse a small child.

Be deliberate in your reaching for him and making him step up. He needs to see that you are in charge and confident. That's really the main thing.

Several short sessions is better than one long one. With birds it's a lot like with small children – if you can avoid situations escalating to a showdown it's much better to do so. They are usually pretty well-behaved for short times, so you may not even encounter that chewy bit until he's out on you for 20 minutes. If that's the case, if you limit your time to 15 you can avoid that. Anything that happens once, now has a precedent, and if it

happens twice it's the beginning of a habit – whether it's good OR bad. Imagine taking a two year old to the store and because they are whiny you give in and buy them a toy. What happens next time you go? You can damn well bet they are going to whine again because it worked so well for them last time. Much better to try to think ahead just a bit and avoid confrontations when possible. By the same token, if he flies off and you go get him six times in a row and the seventh time you say “oh, forget it, I'm sick of bending down and crawling behind the chair” what do you think that tells him? If I keep flying off, eventually she will tire of it and I get my way. So it's lots of things like this, which if you stop and think about it and maybe try to picture him as a two year old human will make much more sense.

He keeps flying away from me like he's afraid of me.

Blocking off places where he tends to be a pain to retrieve him from is a good idea. Some places are impossible to do, but if there are places he goes like on the top of something, make sure you always have a dowel or something handy to make him get off of there. If he'd step up, that would be great, but even if you only use the dowel to let him know he can't stay up there on the top shelf that you can't reach (!) that's good enough. I've had to chase one around the dining room four or five laps, till they finally tired out and flew lower! But like I said, you can't ever give in or let him win, even if seems like it would be so much easier.

He may be less AFRAID of you than simply trying to see if he can get his way and be left alone if he retreats. We sometimes have one in the cage that won't hop right out. Usually I open the door and they pretty quickly all hop to the door to come out. Sometimes, there is one that always hangs back. I MAKE him come out. If he won't step up I keep going after him. He will either eventually step up or fly out, and then I go retrieve him. He's fine once he's out, but he continues to try to get away with not coming out. I don't let him do it. Eventually he will give in and realize it's much more pleasant to just come out when the door is opened, rather than have the big human force him!

I just brought him home. Should I leave him alone for a few days?

He is still settling in, but that doesn't mean you need to give him time or space. He's a baby still, and very malleable. Make sure he has time to eat and rest, but that doesn't mean you can't take him out for short spells. Now that you know the psychology behind the taming a little better you can put it into practice and he will end up being a nice little bird.