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### AFRICAN GREYS

Two species of African Grey Parrots, obviously native to Africa, are commonly found in captivity: the Congo with a bright red tail and the Timneh with duller coloration. Most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. High quality companion birds are available from breeders. Research has shown that African Greys are capable of actual reasoning and verbal communication (beyond just mimicking). Some researchers even believe African Greys have show intelligence levels equal to a 13-year-old human. There is some speculation that males imprinted on humans may have difficulty in relating to a female bird; exposure to parent birds during rearing may reduce this tendency. Once initiated, African Greys are prolific breeders and the offspring are easy to hand-raise.

### What to Expect from Your African Grey

African Grey Parrots are extremely intelligent, alert and can be high-strung. It is best to acquire these birds at a young age, because older poorly integrated individuals can have objectionable personalities and vocalizations that are very difficult to eliminate. Some aviculturists are initiating selective breeding for calmness. There is a tendency for African Greys to form a bond with an individual family member and become aggressive toward others, especially during the breeding season. This is mostly true in birds on a seed, nut, sweet vegetable and fruit diet. African Grey Parrots are considered to be one of the five top companion bird species for potential mimicking. This mimicking ability can include sounds like dripping water, flushing toilets, squeaky doors, coughs or sneezes of family members, and answering machines. They can carry on short meaningful communication.

### Is Your African Grey a Male or a Female?

In most African Greys, it is difficult to distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, endoscopy or laboratory methods must be used for sex determination in breeding facilities. There

may be some size or color variation between genders if the birds are from the same subspecies.

### **What Do Greys Do All Day?**

Because of their high intelligence, African Greys are easily bored and require training. They are relatively playful and can be amused with some toys. Because they love to chew, any toys must be free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects or small, easily consumed components. Providing chew toys or fresh-cut branches from nontoxic, pesticide-free trees is encouraged for African Greys. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations on locally available safe trees.

### **Are African Greys Tame?**

Young, hand-raised African Greys adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well adjusted to these events. Adult birds are less inclined to accept environmental changes and may feather pick. Patience, discipline, leadership, hooding (covering the head), a sense of ritual and the offering of rewards may be necessary to modify the behavior of adult African Greys. Even then, they are not completely trustworthy and may bite for no apparent reason.

### **What Your Veterinarian Looks For in a Healthy Grey**

Dry, Open Nares

Smooth Beak

Clear, Bright Eyes (No Discharge)

Alert, Erect Posture

Smooth, Bright Feathers Without Color Breaks, Transparency or Ragged Edges

Body Free of Lumps and Bumps

Even, Reptilian Pattern on the Feet and Nails of Appropriate Length

### **How to Identify Your Bird**

Two methods used to permanently mark companion birds for identification purposes are tattoos and microchips (both are injected under the skin). Individually numbered leg bands are not reliable for identification. Every bird has a unique scale pattern on the feet. Photographs of the feet (updated periodically as the bird ages) can be maintained in the bird's record to confirm its identity and to prevent fraud that can occur with other techniques.

### **Why The Wings Should Be Clipped**

African Greys that are allowed unrestricted freedom in the home often become dominant in their relationship with their owners. They can encounter numerous physical dangers or toxins; therefore, wing clipping is recommended. The goal of clipping the wings is NOT to make the bird incapable of flight, but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Because African Greys are particularly heavy-bodied birds, falls from over-trimmed wings may result in severe damage to the chest.

### **How to Keep Your Grey Healthy, Happy and Safe!**

Give lots of structured leadership training while young. Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free formulated diet, such as Harrison's High Potency Course Grind formula with daily supplementation of chopped vegetables and fruit according to the instructions on the back of the bag. Grit is probably not

necessary with modern captive diets. Provide clean, fresh, uncontaminated water (try using water bottles). Remove and replace food and water containers twice daily. Provide occasional opportunity for bath, shower, or misting (at least weekly). Weekly exposure to sun that has not passed through glass and is not too intense is ideal. A minimum of fifteen minutes is recommended. Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

**African Greys are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:**

ceiling fans hot cooking oil Teflon-coated items (overheated) leg chains sandpaper-covered perchestobacco and cigarette smoke chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol toxic houseplants pesticides toxic fumes easily dismantled toys dogs, cats and young children cedar, redwood and pressure-treated wood shavings sources of lead or zinc.

**Most Common Problems in African Greys**

Behavior problems. Biting, screaming and

Feather picking

Respiratory diseases

Bacterial, viral and fungal infections

Calcium deficiency syndrome

Neuropathic gastric dilatation

Vitamin A (beta carotene) deficiency

Toxicities

Chlamydia

Tumors

Psittacine beak and feather disease virus

Many common disease conditions in African Grey Parrots are the result of malnutrition. Visiting your avian veterinarian for routine health checks will help prevent many of the above diseases and support you in having a long, satisfying relationship with your African Grey Parrot.