

I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings

By Urban Animal Bird Man

Aside from feeding and care tips, the question I field the most as a bird enthusiast is how to choose a cage. Like a house, it's an investment and needs to be considered on a number of aspects, not just size and materials. Having started with a smaller ringneck and adding a large Eclectus, I've gone through a few fixed and travelling models and can offer experienced advice.

The cage needs to be safe, comfortable, suited for the size of bird and the right shape as well as appropriate materials used in its construction. Remember that your bird will be spending a large part of its life in its 'house' and needs to be secure but also have the space to move and furnishings to be comfortable.

Get the largest cage you can find and afford for your bird. They need the space to exercise and define their territory. Birds with longer tails (like my ringneck) need taller cages so they can manoeuvre around and not damage their tails. Birds need the appropriate width to flap their wings unimpeded. And a larger bird (like Jackson, our Eclectus) needs a large cage to exercise in by crawling around, hanging upside down and generally running amuck in throughout the day.

In terms of shape, for most birds, avoid cylindrical cages as they are often too small, not easy for birds to exercise or move around in and some birds feel insecure in round cages. Smaller birds tend to need lengthier rather than higher cages because they get most of their exercise flying side to side rather than up and down. Larger parrots need taller cages to climb in with room to play.

Bar spacing is crucial because small birds can be injured by larger spacing if they get their heads or wings caught in between bars and large birds can get toes or beaks caught in narrow spaced floors as examples. Also bar orientation—climbing birds or ones that use their beak to move around favour horizontal bars at least in one part of their cage walls. For birds like finches and canaries that don't use their beaks to climb, vertical is fine.

Materials are vital. Stainless steel is the best and most expensive. Powder coated wrought iron and steel cages are generally safer and non-toxic. They are also more durable, look better and often come in colours. Cheap wire cages, ones made from galvanised or zinc coated metal or plastic cages are not recommended. Forget about wood or bamboo cages as they are often hard to clean and fall apart.

Doors, latches and other cage parts need to be safe so as not to catch birds feet or wings. Intricate designs and scroll work may look good at first but may also be dangerous traps. Since the cage needs to be cleaned and maintained, it should be of solid construction with pull out trays and also have food and water cup facilities that can easily be removed or replaced without opening the cage's main door.

Perches should be the appropriate size for your bird's feet and a variety of perching materials and diameters should be provided to prevent foot problems. There need to be perches adjacent to food and water dishes and you can use twisted rope perches natural branches (but check they are not toxic, sprayed, infested or polluted).

Finally think of enrichment toys, shredding materials and things your parrot can destroy to occupy its mind and play. But make sure the cage has plenty of open area by avoiding over crowding of toys and rotate them regularly in addition to checking them for wear.

Remember also that the cage needs to be appropriate for the location and placement. Jacko needed a bigger cage as he grew older and more active so our choice was the "Playbird Mansion" as we jokingly call it, which fit neatly into a room corner that is protected from direct sunlight and drafts. He's got a playtop as well and Lisa believes there's parking under it for up to five cars!

Take your time choosing a cage, buy a new one if possible and take a measuring tape with your room specs to make sure it will be the right long term choice.



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