

Veterinary Viewpoints

Edited by

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian
All Pets Medical Center, West Hills, CA

Question: I have a six-year-old daughter that wants a bird. We have in the past had a lot of birds, from Hyacinths to African Greys, both that we bred and kept as pets. We only have an African Grey now as a pet, but I don't let my daughter touch her as I think she would bite. We went to a local pet store, purchased a Cockatiel for our daughter, which once at home, bit our daughter.

The bird was then taken back to the pet store and they are going to work with it some more. I am thinking though, that this is not the bird for my daughter. What birds would you suggest for a young girl? She loves our friend's Amazon, but she says it is too heavy for her to hold. Thanks in advance for your help.

S. Tanaka, California

Answer #1: Sorry your daughter had a bad experience with the Cockatiel. I would still suggest a well-dispositioned, just weaned Cockatiel that was handfed and imprinted on people or a Budgie of similar background. A Ringneck Dove would also be a possible choice.

*James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, Ca.*

Answer #2: I am sure that most of the Cockatiel owners will be quick to say that this bad experience with the Cockatiel was really an isolated incident. Perhaps the bird was represented as handfed but was really not. Or possibly it was not well socialized after arriving at the store. Most Cockatiels are very gentle when properly handled. However, other more mellow birds might include species such as Senegals and Pionus. A hand-raised Peach-faced lovebird is also an excellent child's pet if it will be handled frequently.

*Louise Bauck, DVM
Montreal, Canada*

Answer #3: Birds bite, it's a fact. You cannot change the nature of the

bird but you can minimize damage by selecting the proper pet for the proper age owner. For younger children, pet doves are gentle and docile pets. The only damage they can generally do is scratch if the nails are too long. For an older child, nothing beats a young Budgie. Budgies may bite but it's rarely serious. Getting the child a young Budgie will teach her the responsibility of pet ownership and pet stewardship. Both Budgie and child can teach each other their own limits to handling and patience.

For a bit more money, a Pyrrhua conure such as a Green-cheeked or Maroon-bellied Conure makes a good first pet. The same is true of the Poicephalus such as Senegal parrots.

The important factor is to start with a young bird and preferably a handfed one since they are better socialized for pet purposes. Always buy from a reputable breeder or pet store. And, before any bird is introduced to the household, have the bird vet-checked and follow quarantine procedures if other pet birds already live in the home.

*Darrel K. Styles, DVM
Dripping Springs, Texas*

Answer #4: The proper type of bird and special "right" individual bird can make pet bird ownership in a child a wonderful and fulfilling experience. As all birds can bite, the goal in finding a pet bird for a young child is to select a bird that will have *less* of a tendency to bite. My first recommendation would be a Cockatiel and my second would be an Umbrella Cockatoo. As your daughter does not like the weight of a large bird like an Amazon, the Cockatiel in this situation would be my suggestion.

In selecting the right individual Cockatiel, spending some time in the pet store prior to purchase on one or multiple occasions may be advisable. Best wishes!

*Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian
West Hills, CA*

Louise Bauck, DVM

Dr. Bauck completed a postgraduate degree and residency in exotic pet medicine after completing her DVM at the University of Saskatchewan. She currently works as the Director of Veterinary Services for the Hagen Avicultural Research Institute. Dr. Bauck is on the review board for two international veterinary journals and has authored chapters in all three current major avian texts. She has also written the new AAHA manual on avian medicine, and has authored the avian chapter in the current Merck manual. She is a consultant for the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council in both the US and Canada. A frequent lecturer to both the pet industry and to the veterinary community, her current research interest is in diseases of the Lady Gouldian Finch.

James M. Harris, DVM

Dr. Harris, who is originally from England, started keeping birds at the early age of four. Dr. Harris is a graduate of the Michigan State University College of Veterinary Medicine. He started the Montclair Veterinary Clinic and Hospital in 1961, which is located in Oakland, California. He breeds macaws and finches, and is well known in the veterinary community for his interest and endeavors with the human-animal bond. Dr. Harris is the father of four children and the proud grandfather of four grandchildren.

Darrel K. Styles, DVM

Dr. Styles is a research veterinarian who has worked within the avicultural community for the past 10 years. He earned his DVM at North Carolina State University. His studies have taken him to work with noted research veterinarians and bird collection throughout the country. His work experience includes such facilities as Avicultural Institute and Pet Farm, Inc., as well as the Avian and Exotic Bird Medicine Department at NC State University. He is currently an owner of Hill Country Aviaries in Dripping Springs, Texas. Dr. Styles is also attending classes at the University of Texas where he is working on his Masters Degree in Medicinal Chemistry.

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian

Dr. Worell has a BS in Zoology from the University of Kentucky and a DVM from Auburn University. She is a diplomat of the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, where she was among the first group of veterinarians to be certified as an avian specialist. She is the owner of All Pets Medical Centre, in West Hills, California. Dr. Worell is an avid aviculturist, raising cockatoos, pionus, Greys and Eclectus Parrots. In the past, Dr. Worell was the AFA State Coordinator Chairman and chairman of the AFA veterinary program.

She served as the Association of Avian Veterinarians Chairperson for both the research and client education committees for several years, as well as being on the board of directors. She is on the editorial staff of several major avian and exotic veterinary publications as well as a contributor to major avian textbooks. She is known internationally for her research on hemochromatosis in toucans. 