

AEC STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

SOP No:	11
SOP	Budgerigars and caged birds
Scientific Name:	Varies
Category:	2 or 3
Approval Level:	Category 2: School Principal may delegate Category 3: School Principal may NOT delegate
Authority:	Government Schools – Department for Education and Childhood Development Animal Ethics Committee Independent and Catholic Schools – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC)
Authority Approval Date:	1 August 2010
Last Update:	18 December 2018
Disclaimer:	<i>This document may be updated at any time. You should check the web site regularly to ensure that you are meeting the most recent recommendations. If you note any concerns with the information provided (inadequate, incorrect) please contact the relevant AEC.</i>
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this Standard Operating Procedure be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.

General Information:

Caged birds may include Budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*), Zebra Finches (*Taeniopygia guttata*), Canaries (*Serinus canaria*). No bird should be taken from the wild and kept as a pet. Check with Department of Environment and Heritage for permit requirements on species of birds other than the species discussed in this Species Fact Sheet.

- **Budgerigars (budgie)** – small nomadic parrots native to Australia in inland areas of acacia scrub, tussock grassland, spinifex country, eucalypt woodland. Congregate in large numbers. In the wild the most common colour is green. Domestic colours include white, yellow, blue and mixtures. They are very adaptable birds and popular as pets all over the world. Both sexes appear the same apart from the cere around the nostrils. Adult males have a blue cere while females have a brown one. Average height 18 cms.
 - **Zebra Finches** – most common Australian finch found in a wide range of habitats including spinifex, mulga, grassland, grassy woodlands, saltbush, saltmarsh and farms, parks and gardens. They are always near water sources. They gather in large flocks. Often spotted hopping along the ground in search of seeds. Thick short beaks assist with seed gathering. They are robust and easy to keep in a cage or aviary. Males have coloured flanks and orange cheek patches. Both sexes have distinguishing facial streaks a white rump and a barred tail. Average height 10 cms.
 - **Canaries** - The canary is a type of finch that is native to the Canary Islands. In the wild the canary is brownish green and looks like a sparrow. Canaries have been popular pets since Spanish sailors brought them to America from the Canary Islands in 1478. Today there are many breeds of pet canary. The male birds of the German Roller and the American Singer breeds are famous for their singing. Average height is 10 cms.
- Physical Attributes:**
- **Size (adult):** Varies according to the species.
 - **Weight (adult):** Varies according to the species.
 - **Life span:** Varies according to the species.
 - **Gestation period:** Incubate the eggs for 18 days. Young leave after 30 days.
 - **Number of offspring:** Average 1-2 eggs, but can be 4 or more.

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Behaviour:

- **Normal:** Birds are normally alert with an erect carriage. They enjoy being able to explore on the ground and be up high in their cage/aviary, they enjoy being able to fly freely. It is not normal for them to have clipped wings and this should not be done unless under the direction of a veterinarian.
- **Socialisation:** They are normally flock birds and so enjoy having the company of at least one other bird.
- **Activity levels (hibernation etc):** They will be active throughout the day.

Environment:

- **Space:** You will need a large cage or aviary that provides for the physical characteristics and behaviours of the bird species. Indoor birds can be kept in cages that allow for free movement. Outside birds can be kept in aviaries.

Cages should have;

- Minimum sq cm of floor space of 1000cm for one finch or canary and 1600cm for one budgerigar.
- Provide an additional 500cm² for each extra finch or canary and 800cm² for each extra budgerigar
- Minimum height of 34cm
- Removable trays for easy cleaning
- Bars that prevent entrapment of the birds head.
- Perches made from a variety of thicknesses of natural twigs and sticks. Do not use commercial plastic single sized perches. Natural varied perches assist with keeping feet free from infections and sores and keeping nails shorter. Avoid sandpaper covered perches as these can damage the bird's feet.
- Protection from weather, draughts and predators.
- Feed and water stations to allow easy access for each bird.
- Hanging items – bells, mirrors, swings etc should not clutter the cage and restrict movement.
- Access doors for the bird and feed items that allow easy movement from the outside to inside without risk of harm to the bird.
- Absorbent paper on the base for easy daily cleaning.
- Security measures (locks).

Aviaries should have;

- A solid construction incorporating rectangular, square or circular shapes.
- A minimum space of 4:1 length and width, with the width not being narrower than 900cm.
- No shorter distance than twice the wingspan of the largest bird kept.
- A base that ensures predators cannot dig through ie sunken mesh sides, mesh floor or concrete floor with surface covering.
- Some solid sides and open sides, with the solid sides against the prevailing weather.
- Solid and open roofing depending on the location and normal weather conditions.
- Shade covering – saron, shade cloth sail, trees.
- Security measures (locks).
- A choice of nesting and roosting sites.
- Nesting materials available.
- Perches made from a variety of thicknesses of natural twigs and sticks. Do not use commercial plastic single sized perches. Natural varied perches assist with keeping feet free from infections and sores and keeping nails shorter.
- Protection from weather, draughts and predators.
- Feed and water stations to allow easy access for each bird, not under perches as the become soiled.

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- Shallow bathing bowls. (avoids drowning!)
- Hanging items – bells, mirrors, swings etc should not clutter the cage and restrict movement or impede flight. Natural swings can be made from a branch with holes drilled at either end and fine chain to hang it.
- Two access doors for entry and exit to the aviary that allow easy movement without risk of escape by the birds.
- Flooring (sand, grit, natural materials or dirt) that can be cleaned out fully at least twice a year.
- Protection from the entry of predators and pests (mice and snakes will enter through very small holes/gaps).
- **Movement:** Caged birds need to be able to move around freely – from perch to perch, up and down and around the cage. To stretch to their full height, to flutter, spread and wave its wings. Consider providing more than the minimum for their health and enjoyment. Aviary birds should also be able to move freely around and fly safely.
- **Water:** Clean water must be available at all times. Birds like drinking water and water to clean and bathe in. In an aviary this can be a freestanding birdbath located away from perches. Keep water containers away from perches to stop bird droppings fouling the water.
- **Temperature:** Birds in both cages and aviaries will become stressed in extreme hot and cold conditions. Cages should not be left standing in direct sunlight or placed next to windows or glass doors. Aviaries should have protection from weather. Ensure cages are not left in a draught, as birds will catch a cold.
- **Lighting:** Normal indoor lighting is sufficient for caged birds.
- **Covering:** All cages and aviaries must be fully enclosed and able to be secured (locked). Cages can be covered with a towel at night. Do not use plastic. Aviaries need part solid roofing and part wire roofing, with some solid sides against the prevailing weather.
- **Shelter:** In an aviary this can be created with nesting boxes, hollow logs, trees and branches. In a cage a partially hung towel provides an area of respite. If cages are placed outside at times ensure they are placed up high as birds will stress low down with the threat of predators, ensure they are not left out on windy conditions that could blow them over, ensure children cannot knock the cage over.
- **Cleaning:** Cages must be cleaned regularly. Perches should be cleaned or replaced regularly. Clean out water and seed containers daily. Remove a layer of soiled paper each day. Clean out the bottom of the cage each week. Aviaries should be cleaned out regularly of any uneaten greens. Also clean the water bowls and seed bowls daily.

Feeding:

- **Diet:** Adequate feed for the species kept and the number kept should be available daily. All birds on this fact sheet are seedeaters. Most also like the addition of greens. Ready made species blends can be obtained from supermarkets, fodder or pet stores.
- **Daily requirements:** Ensure the seed pot is emptied and refilled daily. Remember that birds remove the outer husk and eat the seed. Do not assume there is a still lot left!
- **Supplementary feeding:** Birds should have access to some form of calcium. Cuttlefish bone and eggshells from chickens are good sources. Note; egg shells must be microwaved for a few minutes to kill bacteria, cool before feeding to birds. Boiled chopped egg can be given to finches once a week to help with feather growth. Greens can include seed grasses, grass, lettuce, fruit, and green vegetables. Do not use cabbage. Commercial grit products are available and can be provided in small amounts as required.
- **Equipment:** Water bottles, bowls, seed dispensers, pots.

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- Breeding:**
- **Mating:** Birds may breed in aviary conditions where nesting opportunities occur. Females on their own can lay unfertilised eggs.
 - **Pregnancy:**
 - **Fate planning:** Breeding stock must be re homed. As an introduced or bred species they must NEVER be released into the environment.
- Handling:**
- **Human:** Birds should be handled as little as possible in aviaries. All birds need to be handled calmly and with care. Cage birds can be conditioned from a young age to be regularly handled.
 - **Equipment:** Soft nets can be used to catch birds.
 - **Transporting:** Birds can be transported in small boxes with air holes or small covered cages. Open uncovered cages may cause injury as the bird hits the wires in panic. Transport quickly and do not leave for long periods in heat or cold conditions.
 - **Children:** Should not handle birds. Observation only.
- Hygiene:**
- Thoroughly wash hands with soap and running water for at least 10-15 seconds after working or handling any animals. Dry hands with clean paper, cloth towel or air dryer. Turn off the tap with the paper towel if possible.
- Ornithosis (also known as Psittacosis) is a bird contagious disease transmitted to humans as a form of pneumonia. Psittacine birds or potential carriers include budgerigars, parrots, parakeets, doves and pigeons.
- Regardless these birds can be kept on sites providing they are obtained from reputable sources, kept in clean cages and handled as little as possible. Particular care is needed when handling birds to avoid facial contact and inhalation of faecal dust. Staff and students involved in cleaning should wear a mask and where possible rather than creating dust from sweeping use wet cleaning ie wet the cage or aviary floor lightly first before removing the droppings.
- Signs of illness:**
- **Indicators:** changes in droppings, loss of appetite, changes in behaviour, body posture, unable to perch, loss of body weight, respiration problems, growths, bleeding, vomiting, discharges, injuries, failure to thrive, excessive scratching or crusted areas on face and legs (lice or mites).
 - **Indicators of stress include:** biting their claws, pulling out feathers, frantic behaviour.
- From time to time birds may need their toes clipped. This can be done with nail clippers but must not be done above the darker claw area or bleeding and infection can occur. Do not allow a bird's claws to curl around.
- Birds may seem off-colour when they are moulting. This normal 'feather replacement' process takes a few weeks and is very obvious by the number of feathers lying on the bottom of the cage. The bird's new pinfeathers will begin to show, particularly around the head. Birds need to do this because their feathers become very worn and lose their insulative quality. Try not to disturb birds during this time.
- Treatments:**
- Assistance from a veterinarian should be sought for confirmation of conditions and treatment options.
- Euthanasia:**
- When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the animal must be euthanised by a veterinarian. Any death must be reported to the Animal Ethics Committee using the appropriate form (see section relating to ADVERSE EVENTS). Forms are available on the relevant websites.

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Disposal/fate planning:	When no longer required birds must be re homed. As an introduced or bred species they must NEVER be released into the environment. Bodies must be disposed of correctly in accordance with local council regulations.
Holiday and weekend care:	<p>Birds in cages generally cope with being rostered to responsible carers. They need to be checked daily and fed regularly over weekends and holiday periods if they remain on site or if they are housed in aviaries.</p> <p>Records must be kept of 'off site' care. Cages and feeding equipment and supplies must be provided to carers, with contact details for emergencies.</p>
Approved activities:	Observation
Resources:	www.budgerigarsociety.com