

CAGES 101

A GUIDE TO CAGE SET-UP

CAGE SIZE

The first step in cage set-up is to ensure that your cage meets minimum size requirements appropriate for the species of bird that it is intended for. The cage should match the personality, activity, and needs of that specific bird. A minimum cage size for a budgie is 18 x 24" but anyone who has ever had a budgie, or a pair of budgies, knows how much they love to play and explore, so they absolutely would utilize a larger cage. As annoying as it is to answer the cage size question with "bigger is better," for the most part, it's true.

The cage should be well maintained, stocked with essentials (perches and toys), and cleaned on a regular basis. The cage is the bird's foundation, their "home base", and it is crucial that you create a safe space for your birds. Having a comforting environment in which to thrive and grow is essential.

STAR's minimum cage sizes can be referenced at www.staravian.org under the adopt tab, along with appropriate bar spacing and helpful tips for cage arrangements listed for each individual species. Please note, these are MINIMUM requirements. If your budget and space allow for larger, as long as bar-spacing remains appropriate, bigger is better!



CAGE STYLE

Smaller species need a large **horizontal** cage where they may fly from one side to another. This is especially true for birds that do not spend a lot of time out of their cages.

Larger species (like the Macaws and Cockatoos) need a large **vertical** cage so they may climb up the bars but should also be (at least) wide enough to allow for wing flapping.

Dome top, playtop, elegant? All are great and can be chosen based on personal preference.

Round cages are not recommended as they do not allow the bird to have a corner to hide or feel safe in. Antique cages are also not recommended as they could be made with unsafe materials that are toxic to birds.

PLACEMENT

A cage should be placed in accordance to the bird's overall demeanor, age, and health. For instance, placing a plucked bird near a drafty window or vent is never a good idea, nor is placing a terrified bird in the center of a busy room. Parrots are flock animals, and tend to enjoy spending the majority of their time with their flock (including their human flock). Get to know your bird a little bit and then determine where they would be most comfortable.

Be conscious about general safety rules and knowledgeable about any potential hazards that may be present in your home (wires, cookware, plants, other pets, etc.). A second "sleep cage" can be used if your bird's main cage is kept in a busier more active part of the home.



Quick Tips for Cage Placement

- At least one side against a wall (not a window) for a sense of security
- Near a window to watch outside. Pay attention to your bird and ensure they enjoy looking out of the window. Some birds may find the outside world frightening.
 - When placing near a window, ensure they are always able to move away from direct sunlight.
 - In the winter, ensure there are not cold drafts from the window. Move the cage away from the window if this is the case.
- Pay attention to your bird: if they enjoy being in the center of things, consider placing the cage in the living room. If they are easily startled, consider a quieter area of the home.
- Watch for any safety concerns. Examples include areas where the cat can easily reach, where the bird can easily reach wires or plants to chew on ...etc



Sleep Cages are a great way to allow your bird their needed 12 hours of uninterrupted, dark, quiet time, while still keeping their main (daytime) cage in a more active area of your home.

Questions about sleep cages? Don't hesitate to reach out!

PERCHES!

A bird spends 24/7 on their feet so it is extremely important that their cage offers support for their joints and comfort for their feet. A great way to ensure this is to have a combination of different diameters, textures, and shapes for your bird to choose from.



Perches should vary in diameter, texture, and type.

As a rescue, we often see birds that have been kept on only dowel rods in their previous cages due to a lack of education, and this can contribute to arthritis, open sores, and mobility issues.

STAR uses the 4-3-2-1 guide for perch styles:



4 – Different Diameters

Cages should always have at least 4 different diameter perches, to promote foot health. This will allow for movement of the toes, different grips and change in pressure points on the foot

3 – Different Textures

Perches should be made up of at least 3 different textures. Examples include rope, natural wood (with bark) & smooth wood (without bark).

2 – Action Perches

Cages should feature at least 2 action perches. Action perches include things like swings, boings and suspended ladders. Action perches encourage light exercise & improved balance.

1 – Flat Perch

Cages should include at least one flat perch or platform, allowing them to put their foot completely flat.

A note about dowel rods: while dowel rods are not inherently bad, having only dowel rods can cause serious and painful long-term issues for your bird. When you only offer dowel rods to your bird, they are forced to keep their feet in the same position at all times. In addition to this, the slickness of the smooth wood requires them to grip harder to keep their balance. STAR does not recommend the use of dowel rods as primary perches.

ADDITIONAL TIPS & TRICKS TO PERCHES



- To encourage use of perches throughout the cage- ensure your bird has a reason to visit each perch. This means that there should be food/water or enrichment/toys near each.
- Include a perch that stretches the entire length of the cage. Rope perches are a great option!
- Use the entire cage! While most parrots prefer to spend the majority of their time in the top 1/3 of their cage, it is important to encourage them to move around their cage.
- Don't just attach perches to the inside of the cage! Expand your bird's world and use the outer sides and top of the cage as well!
- Sand/Concrete perches (i.e. Grooming Perches) - If used to often, these can cause extremely painful abrasions to your bird's foot. If your bird is using their grooming perch as a regular hang out, consider only offering it occasionally, or moving it to a less "popular" part of the cage.

Things that should NOT be offered

- Heated perches - these malfunction frequently and can cause burns
- Happy huts - the fibers on these huts can be harmful when ingested, can get wrapped around a bird's toes, and the huts themselves can encourage hormonal behavior

SPECIAL NEEDS

- Can't Fly? - ensure your perch placement allows for your bird to climb throughout the cage. Extra ladders/bridges may be appropriate
- Arthritis? - less smooth wood and more rope perches are encouraged
- Seizures? - A normally frowned upon hut may be necessary for sleeping, in addition to a shorter cage.

When in doubt, always reach out to your avian veterinarian for guidance.



TOYS/ENRICHMENT



Parrots of all kinds instinctually need to chew, shred, forage and preen. It is important to provide a variety of toys. Regularly switch out toys to keep them interested. An abundance of toys can be very important to help your bird burn off energy and keep their minds engaged throughout the day while you are at work.

While there is no set rule for how many toys should be provided for each bird, a good rule of thumb is to place a toy at every perch in their cage for easy access. It is also recommended to regularly rotate the placement of perches and toys to cultivate interest for birds that may not have been offered toys in their previous homes.

Pro-tip - if a bird is not showing interest in a toy, try moving it to another location in their cage. Sometimes just this simple adjustment is enough to encourage interest. Rearranging the setup of a cage is also a fast and easy way to provide a bit of enrichment without spending a ton on brand new toys. However, if a toy has been destroyed or is falling apart, it should be removed and replaced (this also applies to perches).

Parrots should be offered a variety of toys. Types of toys include toys they can chew/shred, foraging toys, noise making toys (bells) and puzzle toys.

Fun tip: Make it a rule to place a toy at each perch so that the bird has an activity available at every opportunity. A fun twist to this rule is rotating these toys out every so often, replacing it with a new toy or even just switching spots from one side of the cage to the other. Rearranging a cage layout is a great way to provide enrichment for your bird and can also be a fun date night idea for you and your significant other (just kidding...kind of).



Toy that should NOT be offered:

- If your bird is hormonal or has a history of breeding - avoid providing toys that provide nest building materials
- For a variety of reasons, STAR does NOT recommend providing mirrors to parrots.

ADDITIONAL CAGE INFO

CAGE LINERS

There are many different options when it comes to lining the base of your bird's cage. The safest and recommended choice is simply PAPER. You can use newspaper, paper bags, or specialized cage liner paper.

Why do we recommend flat paper? It is important to be able to SEE your bird's droppings. Monitoring your bird's droppings (for quality & quantity) will allow you to monitor your bird's health. *(As prey animals, birds will hide signs of illness, often only displaying once it's too late. By being able to SEE their droppings, you will have an early warning sign to many medical issues)*

What NOT to use:

- Wood chips: generally toxic, can't see the droppings to monitor health
- Crushed shells or corncob: haven for bacteria/fungus, dangerous if ingested
- Kitty litter: dusty (causing health problems), often scented (toxic) and dangerous if ingested
- Sand: dangerous if ingested, messy
- Paper pellet/pulp bedding: messy, can't see the droppings to monitor health
- Puppy Pads: chemicals used in the pads are toxic to birds

Don't forget - it is best to change the liner EVERY DAY. By changing the liner daily, you will have a daily blank canvas, making it easy to monitor your bird's droppings, and ensuring they are eating enough. It is also important to change the liner regularly because, as the droppings, discarded food...etc. decompose, they are releasing harmful gases that your bird would otherwise breathe in.

BOWLS – FOOD & WATER

There are TONS of different options when it comes to food and water bowls. The MOST important aspect is ensuring you are able to keep these clean. Metal bowls are recommended, but if you prefer plastic- that's ok! Simply ensure you are cleaning daily to prevent the growth of harmful bacteria. Special attention should be paid to the corners of bowls that are not round when cleaning.

Most parrots feel extremely vulnerable when on the ground. Due to this, the majority of parrots prefer their bowls to be located higher in their cages (and not set on the grate).

Silo Feeders/Waterer are not recommended

- Large birds are not able to get ENOUGH water from a silo feeder
- They are difficult to clean, and can be a haven for bacteria.

It is not practical to clean these daily, so simply skip them and stick with a bowl



EXAMPLES OF SOME GREAT CAGE SETUPS

BUDGIES



EXAMPLES OF SOME GREAT CAGE SETUPS

CONURE



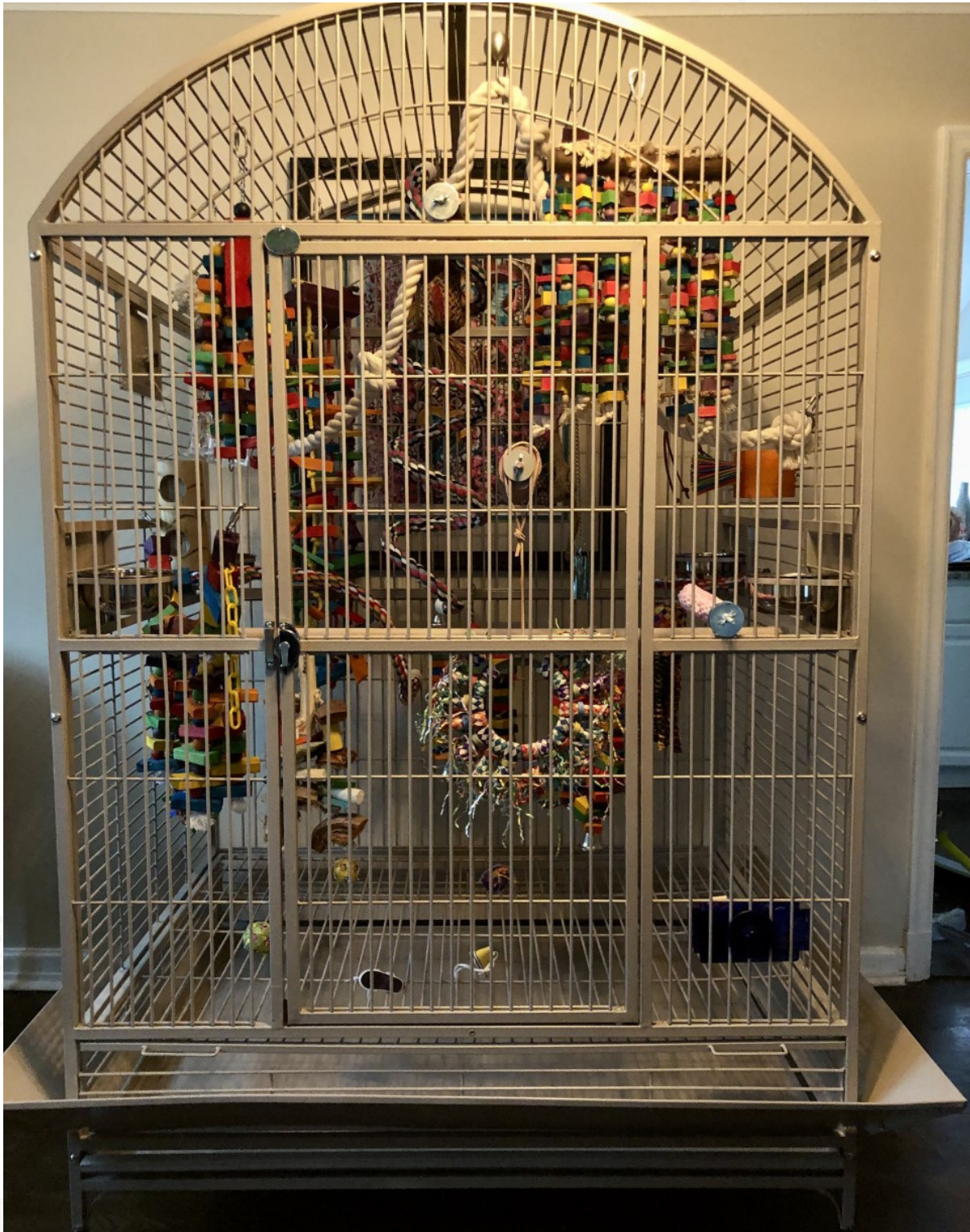
EXAMPLES OF SOME GREAT CAGE SETUPS

MOUSTACHED PARAKEET



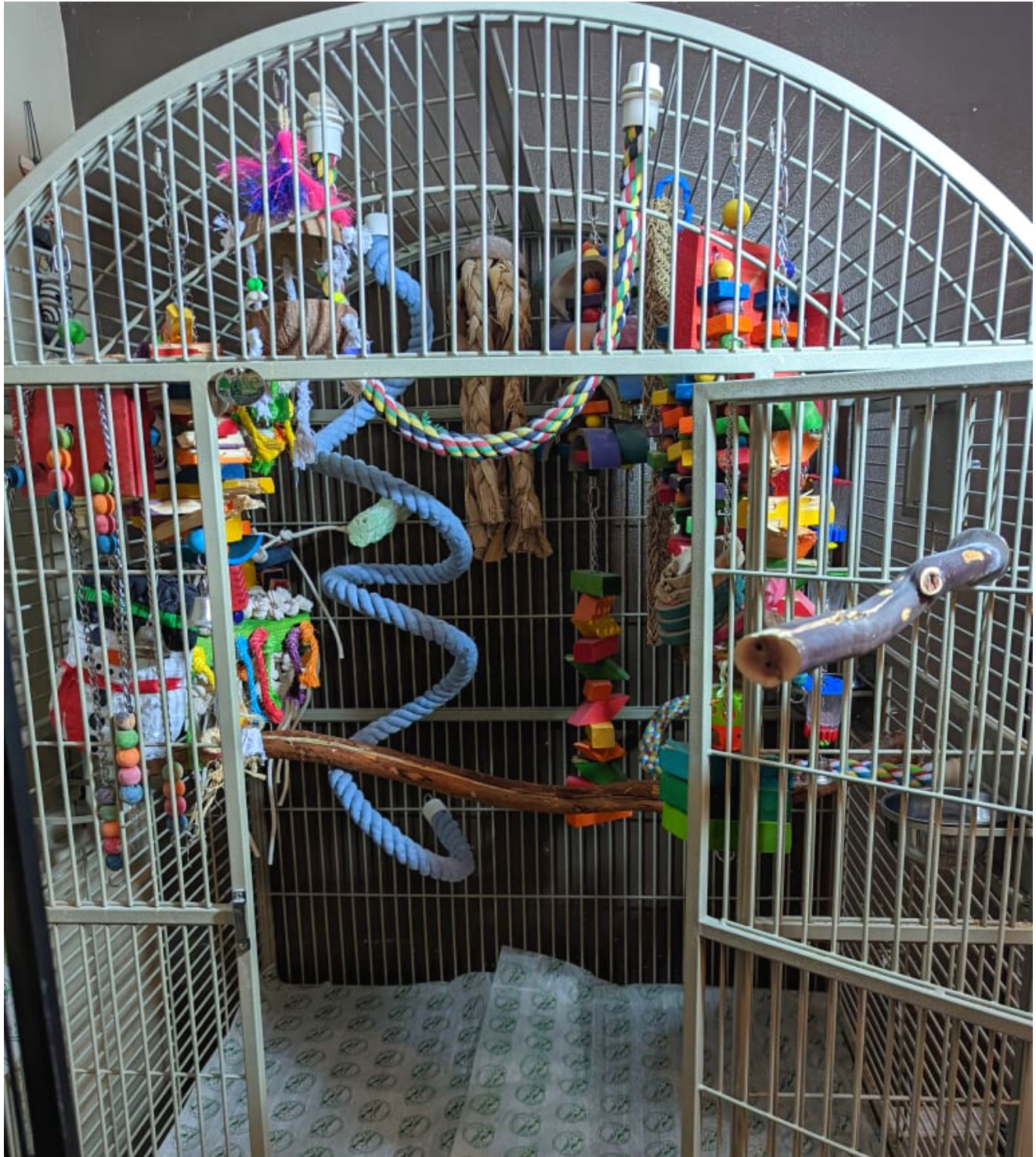
EXAMPLES OF SOME GREAT CAGE SETUPS

UMBRELLA COCKATOO



EXAMPLES OF SOME GREAT CAGE SETUPS

MACAW

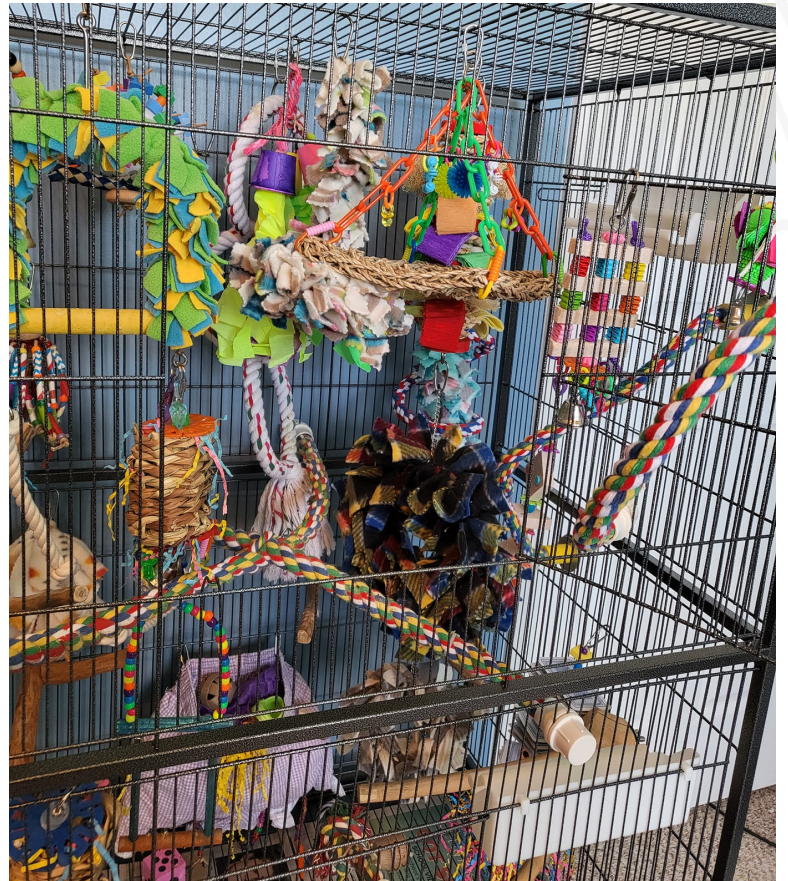




THANK YOU

- Have questions?
- Want feedback on your cage set-up?
- Wish to enter your set-up to be used in a future *Habitat Highlight*?

email adopt@staravian.org



ADDITIONAL SMALL-MEDIUM SIZED BIRD SET-UPS