Imagine you have a flying two-year old whose fingers can get into an opening about 1/4 inch in diameter. Think of the many alterations in your house you would need to do to make it childproof. Basically, you will need to do that, and more, to make your house safe for your bird. Birds are even more sensitive to some chemicals than people, and remember birds use their mouths to explore, and they will want to taste everything at least once.

The following items may cause injury or be dangerous to some degree if ingested, inhaled, or placed in contact with your bird. Some can cause death almost instantly. Others may cause only a mild reaction, but it is best to remove them from any areas where they would be in contact with your bird. This is not a complete list, so if you are in any doubt about something that your bird has eaten or been in contact with, please contact your veterinarian or the National Animal Poison Control Center at (888) 426-4435. (They charge $50.00 per case.)

Windows, doors, and skylights

Just like wild birds, our pet birds do not understand glass, and will try to fly right through it.

- Clip his wings: One precaution you can take is to keep your bird's wings clipped. This will not necessarily prevent him from flying, but it will slow down his speed. Using a flight suit with a lanyard could also be helpful.
- Use drapes, blinds, or shades to cover your windows when your bird is loose. Some people have installed decals on their windows, similar to those used to deter wild birds.
- Make sure your screens are strong and installed securely. Check them regularly for any holes or loose wire that could injure your bird.
- Curtains and drapery can pose hazards if toenails become stuck in the fabric or the bird becomes entangled in the cord. Keep your bird's nails clipped to the appropriate length.

Fans and temperature extremes

Extreme heat and cold can be dangerous for your bird. Both ceiling and regular fans can pose a danger to your bird.

- Avoid placing your bird's cage or play station in any drafty area; keep him well away from fans, open windows, and heat registers. Also, do not place him in a cold room, or area that may be in full sun with no shade.
- Turn fans off when your bird is out of his cage, even if his wings are clipped.
Suffocation or crushing

Many birds like to hide under things, or find a small "hole" in which they can nest. With their small size, they can easily go unnoticed and be trapped or injured by moving parts.

- Always look where you walk. Many birds have been injured or even killed from being stepped on.
- When you close a door or cupboard, make sure your bird is not sitting on top of it or on his way through the opening.
- Do not allow your bird in rooms where computer printers, electrical tools, vacuum cleaners, or other mechanical devices with moving parts are being used.
- Use caution when using fold-out beds or recliners, since birds may get underneath them and into the mechanism.
- Before moving or laying anything on the bed covers, laundry basket, or other areas where there are multiple layers of fabric, be sure your bird has not gotten between the layers.
- Do not sleep with your bird. You could easily move and crush him.
- Cover all air ducts to prevent a bird from exploring and becoming lost in the maze.

Electrical and other cords

Electrical cords are a very serious threat to a bird. Chewing through a cord could cause severe burns, or even electrocution. There are other cords that can be chewed, including phone, computer, stereo, cable TV, and appliance cords.

To reduce the risk of injury, use one or more of the following:

- Spiral cable wrap. This is a flexible plastic sheath that can be wound around the cords. CAUTION: Some birds may still try to chew through this. Monitor your bird closely, and if he chews on this, try one of the other two alternatives.
- Cord concealers. These are hard plastic, come in various colors and sizes, and are usually applied to the area above the baseboards.
- PVC pipe or polyethylene hard tubing. A slit can be cut through the pipe or tubing, and the cords slipped inside. Tubing that is already split is also available.

Child – bird interactions

A bird could be hurt, or hurt a child if she is improperly handled.

- Take into account the age of children, their maturity, and experience with handling birds and other pets when deciding if they may be left alone with a bird. Also, take into account the temperament of the bird.
- Establish household rules regarding the handling of the bird, including who may feed her, and what supervision is necessary.
- Show children the correct way to play with a bird and praise them when they do it properly.
- Always have a safe area where your bird can retreat.

Interactions with other pets

Extreme care should be taken when introducing your bird to other pets, including other birds. It is natural instinct for wild canines and felines to prey on birds. Sometimes the reverse is true, and a large bird can actually be more aggressive. Animal bites can cause severe injuries and be fatal. If your bird is bitten, always seek veterinary attention.

- Never leave a loose bird unattended in a room with another pet, even if they appear to get along well together. It is always better to be safe than sorry.
- Place bird cages where they cannot be tipped over by inquisitive or predatory behaviors of other pets.
- Cover all aquariums to prevent your bird from accidental drowning, ingestion of lead weights used on some plants, and drinking the water that may contain infectious organisms or chemicals used to treat the water.
- Prevent birds from having access to corn cob or hay bedding used for small pets. These may contain molds or cause digestive problems.
- Keep cat litter boxes out of the reach of birds. The dust and scent may cause respiratory problems, and ingestion could result in obstructions of the digestive tract.
- Keep water dishes out of the reach of birds, since birds can drown in even a small amount of water.
- Prevent access to areas where heat lamps are used, such as housing for reptiles. These can cause burns and the covers may give off toxic fumes if coated with polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE).
- Keep all flea and tick sprays and pet medications and supplements – especially those that are flavored – out of the reach of birds.

### Kitchen hazards

The kitchen contains an almost endless number of hazards, including:

- Burns from hot burners, open ovens, toasters, coffee pots, tea kettles, boiling water, or hot cooking oil.
- Toxic fumes from teflon or other non-stick cookware and appliances including pots, waffle irons, slow-cookers, and drip pans. Fumes may contain PTFE and be very toxic. Fumes from self-cleaning ovens and oven cleaner are also toxic, as well as those from cleaning supplies.
- Drowning in a sink or even a glass or small bowl of water.
- Injuries or entrapment in open appliances, such as dishwashers, freezers, and refrigerators.
- Cuts from sharp, shiny objects, such as knives.
- Grease, butter, margarine, and oils that can get on the feathers.
- Toxic foods including chocolate (bakers, semi sweet, milk, dark), alcohol, avocado, garlic, onion, salt, yeast dough, and coffee (grounds, beans, chocolate espresso beans), tea, colas, and other caffeinated beverages.
- Smoke fumes from overheated foods or oils.

The kitchen should always be off limits to birds.

### Bathroom hazards

Bathrooms can be almost as hazardous as kitchens, and extreme care should be taken if a bird is allowed in this room of the house.

- Prevent access to water in sinks, bathtubs, toilet bowls, and jacuzzis, since drowning could easily occur.
- Place decals on large mirrors to prevent your bird from flying into them.
- Do not use a curling iron in the presence of a bird, since the iron may give off PTFE fumes.
- Keep all medications, including vitamins and supplements, out of the reach of children and pets.
- Keep other potentially poisonous items, such as shaving cream and lotion, aerosol hairsprays, hair dyes and permanent solutions, and cleaning supplies, including toilet bowl cleaner safely stored.

### Laundry room hazards

The laundry room is another area of the house that poses multiple threats to birds.

- Use care when placing or removing laundry from baskets – your bird may have found the basket to be a good sleeping place.
Keep the doors to the washer and dryer closed, and watch very closely as you load and unload the laundry. Birds have accidentally been trapped and killed in these appliances.

- Do not use hot irons in the presence of birds due to the danger of burns and PTFE fumes. Spray starch is also toxic.
- Keep detergents, fabric softener sheets, liquid softeners, fabric dyes, bleach, and other potentially toxic laundry supplies safely stored out of the reach of children and pets.

**Heat sources**

Burns are a common injury in pet birds and can occur from a number of sources other than kitchen appliances.

- Never allow your bird in a room where there is an open flame from candles, fondue pots, heated potpourri pots, or other sources.
- Keep your bird caged when using a space heater or fireplace. Even if glass fireplace doors would prevent access to the fire, the doors themselves can be very hot. Also, always keep the damper and doors to the fireplace closed when it is not in use.
- Radiators can also pose a risk of burns.
- Light bulbs, especially halogen ones, can become quite hot, and remain hot even after being turned off. Be sure they are cool before allowing your bird access.
- Keep matches out of the reach of birds – they can be toxic.

**Smoke and fumes**

A bird's respiratory tract is very different from that of a mammal's, and actually concentrates any smoke or fumes in the air, making them markedly more toxic. Basically, by the time an odor is strong enough for you to smell it (or even before that), the chemical could be damaging your bird's respiratory tract. The following should all be considered dangerous around birds:

- Smoke from any source is hazardous. Secondhand smoke from cigars and cigarettes can cause chronic eye, skin, and respiratory disease. Install smoke and carbon monoxide alarms. Tobacco is also toxic, so remove any whole or smoked cigars or cigarettes before allowing your bird access to a room.
- Marijuana, which can cause depression and regurgitation.
- Gasoline, kerosene, lighter fluid, and other petroleum products.
- Paint, wood stains and preservatives, mineral spirits, turpentine, paint remover, paint thinner, and other solvents.
- Cleaning supplies and disinfectants including bleach, phenols, ammonia, pine oil, spot remover, window cleaning solution, floor and furnisher polish.
- Scented candles, potpourri, tea tree oils, essential oils, air fresheners.
- Perfumes, hairsprays, room deodorizers, deodorant, nail polish remover, and anything with a propellant.
- Other items that can give off fumes such as glues, permanent markers, and mothballs.

Do not use the above items in the presence of birds. If they are being used in large areas of the house, it is best to remove the bird from the house temporarily.

**Heavy metals**

Poisonous heavy metals include zinc, lead, and arsenic, which are surprisingly common in a household and may actually be incorporated in items made for birds.

- Zinc is present in galvanized metal, such as nails and staples; solder (including that used in some bird cages); padlocks; zippers, snaps, and costume jewelry; the clasps and chains on some bird toys; pennies made since 1982; paint (especially anti-rust paint); zinc oxide skin preparations, such
as Desitin and sunblock containing zinc oxide; calamine lotion; suppositories; shampoos; zinc undecylenate (Desenex); and fertilizers.

- **Lead** is present in lead-containing paint, linoleum, tile, batteries, plumbing materials, putty, lead foil, solder, golf balls, some roof coverings, lubricants, the backing on mirrors, wine bottle cork foils, rug pads, acid (soft) drinking water from lead pipes or improperly glazed ceramic water bowls, lead weights, fishing sinkers, drapery weights, newsprint, dyes, insulation, lead-containing burnt lubricant oil, stained glass objects, and lead shot.

- **Arsenic** is a highly poisonous metal used in insecticides, pesticides, rodenticides, weed killers, wood preservatives, some insulation, and some alloys.

To protect your bird:

- Keep items containing these metals out of the reach of birds.
- Regularly check your bird cage and toys for any loose solder or pieces of metal that are loose.
- Choose non-heavy metal alternatives to the above items, if possible.

Other toxins or hazards

In addition to those mentioned, there are many other potential toxins that are found in and around many homes. Since birds can absorb chemicals through their feet, always wash your hands well after having contact with any possible poison. Protect your bird from: Jewelry, button batteries, coins, fishing tackle, pins, and other small metallic items, which are very attractive to birds, but can cause mouth injuries, damage or obstruction of the digestive tract, or toxicity.

- Guns and associated supplies such as cleaner, powder, and ammunition.
- **Toxic houseplants**.
- Polishes including those for brass, silver, copper, floors, and shoes.
- Other poisons, such as herbicides (weed killers), snail and slug bait, insecticides (flea and tick control products), pesticides (ant poison), and rodenticides (rat poison). Be careful with mouse traps, too.
- Holiday hazards, such as Christmas decorations including tinsel, angel hair, tree flocking, and glass ornaments; Easter basket grass; and ribbons and balloons.

Summary

It may seem like a daunting task to make your home bird safe, but it can be done. Remain on the lookout for potential hazards, regularly check each room of the house, and daily monitor your bird for any signs of illness. Being on the safe side will help your bird live a longer and healthier life with you.

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