Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee

ANIMAL CARE INFORMATION SHEET

The document provides comprehensive guidelines and information on the care, handling, and activities involving caged birds in schools.

Caged Birds

(e.g. Budgerigars, Zebra finches and Canaries)

Melopsittacus undulatus (Budgerigar)

Scientific Name:	Species dependant. Budgerigars (Melopsittacus undulatus), Zebra Finches (Taeniopygia guttata) and Canaries (Serinus canaria).
Activities requiring School Principal approval only:	a. The appropriate care of classroom pet birds b. Observation of a particular bird behaviour c. Measurement of respiration in caged birds (non-invasive) d. Capture, restraint and handling of caged birds e. Measurement of mild dietary effects in caged birds including palatability f. Taming/gentling of caged birds g. Training of caged birds h. Collection of feather samples from caged birds i. Administering topical or oral treatments to caged birds j. Administering subcutaneous or intramuscular injections to caged birds k. Beak trimming in caged birds
Approval Level:	Where an activity is not listed in this **Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS)**, advice must be sought from the Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee (NGSAEC) and confirmed before it can be undertaken.
Authority:	**Independent and Catholic Schools** – Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee
Disclaimer:	This document is reviewed annually. You should check the website 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 NGSAEC.
Licensing Requirement:	Not applicable. Check the Department for Environment and Water website for further details www.environment.sa.gov.au
Compliance Requirement:	The keeping of this species requires approval from the School Principal. It is recommended that this **Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS)** be followed as a minimum in the provision of appropriate care and housing for this species.
General Information:	Caged birds commonly used in schools for activities include Budgerigars, Zebra finches and Canaries. Schools should consider their resources and activities when deciding on what type of bird to use in their school. No birds should be taken from the wild and kept as a pet. Check the Department of Environment and Water website for permit requirements on species of birds other than the species discussed in this ACIS.

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, 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, white rump, and 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:** Species dependent • **Weight (adult)**: Species dependent • **Life span**: Species dependent
Behaviour:	**Normal:** Birds are normally alert with an erect carriage. They enjoy being able to explore on the ground and being up high in their cage/aviary. They also enjoy being able to fly freely. Birds can have their wings clipped to aid handling. Schools are advised to consult a bird expert or Veterinarian before undertaking this activity. It can be painful to the bird if not undertaken appropriately. Multiple feed sites assist new birds to acclimatise to their environment. **Socialisation:** Most birds are social enjoying the company of others, but schools should research the needs of the bird they are interested in to find out numbers that are best kept for a species. **Activity levels (hibernation, shedding etc.):** They will be active throughout the day, nesting at night. Birds may seem off-colour when they are shedding. This normal 'feather replacement' process takes a few weeks and is 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 insulating quality. Try not to disturb birds during this time. For enrichment, natural swings can be made from a branch with holes drilled at either end using fine chain to hang them. Talk to your local pet shops or Veterinarian for more enrichment ideas that are safe for birds.
Environment:	Housing / Space: You will need a large cage or aviary that provides for the physical characteristics and behaviours of the bird species you wish to use. Cages should be 34cm high at a minimum. Indoor birds can be kept in cages that allow for free movement. Outside birds can be kept in aviaries. Where leg rings are used these rings must be of the appropriate size and nature, so as not to cause injury. Caged birds must not be caged with any other species of bird, reptile, or animal, the keeping of which in the same cage will be detrimental to the birds' health or welfare. Use perches made from a variety of thicknesses of natural twigs and sticks. This avoids the birds' weight bearing on only one part of their feet. Do not use commercial plastic single sized perches or sandpaper- covered perches that can damage birds' feet. Birds must have a choice of more than one nesting and roosting sites with a variety of nesting materials available. Providing inadequate numbers of nesting boxes can lead to fighting.

Minimum Floor Space Allowances (cms) per species:**

- 1x Budgie, Canary, or Finch - 30 x 25 x 40
- 1x Cockatiel, Lorikeet or Red Rump Rosella - 60 x 40 x 40
- 1x Galah, Little Corella, king Parrot, Princess parrot, Indian Ring Neck, Long billed Corella - 60 x 60 x 60
- 1x Sulphur crested cockatoo, major Mitchell, Alexandrine, Eclectus parrot - 70 x70 x 90

**Minimum floor space allowances (from the South Australian Code of Practice for the Husbandry of Captive Birds)

For indoor-housed caged birds: use removable trays with absorbent paper can be laid on the cage floor for easy daily cleaning. Ensure the bar width on the cage is small enough to prevent entrapment of the bird's head. Hanging items like bells, mirrors and swings should not clutter the cage and restrict movement. Access doors for the bird and feed items should allow easy movement from the outside to inside without risk of harm to the bird.

For birds housed in outdoor aviaries: the aviary should have a solid construction. A minimum space of 4:1 length and width, with the width not being narrower than 900cm and a distance no shorter than twice the wingspan of the largest bird kept. The base should ensure that predators cannot dig through (e.g. sunken mesh sides, mesh floor or concrete floor with surface covering). Two access doors for entry and exit to the aviary that allows easy movement without risk of escape by the birds should be available.

Movement: Caged birds need to be able to move around freely from perch to perch, up and down and around the cage. They should be able to stretch to their full height, to flutter, spread and wave their wings within the cage. Schools are recommended to consider providing more than the minimum for birds' health and enjoyment. Outdoor aviary birds should also be able to move freely around and fly safely.

Water: Clean water must be always available. Feed and water stations should be positioned to allow easy access for each bird, not under perches as they become soiled. Shallow bathing bowls can be used to avoid birds drowning. In an aviary this can be a freestanding birdbath can be used.

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, draughts or placed next to windows or glass doors. Aviaries should always have protection from the weather.

Lighting: Normal indoor lighting is sufficient for caged birds. Adequate light and regular day and night periods must be observed.

Covering: All cages and aviaries must be fully enclosed and able to be secured (locked). Cages can be covered with a sheet or towel at night. Do not use plastic. Aviaries need part solid roofing and part wire roofing, with some solid sides against the prevailing weather. Protection from the entry of predators and pests is ideal (e.g. mice and snakes will enter through very small holes).

Shelter: In an aviary this can be created with nesting boxes, hollow logs, trees, and branches. Ideally aviaries have some solid sides and open sides to allow weather into the aviary, with the solid sides facing against the prevailing weather. In a cage a partially hung towel or if large enough a log or nesting box can be used. If cages are placed outside, ensure they are placed up high as birds will stress if placed close to the ground from the threat of predators. Also ensure

	cages are not left out in windy conditions that could blow them over or get knocked over by people or other animals. **Cleaning:** Cages must be cleaned regularly. Perches should be replaced regularly rather than scrubbed. Clean out water, seed containers, and remove a layer of soiled paper from cages daily. Clean out the bottom of the cage each week. Aviaries should be cleaned out regularly of any uneaten food. Flooring (sand, grit, natural materials, or dirt) that can be cleaned out completely at least twice a year should be used. Food and water containers should not be transferred to other cages without prior washing in a disinfectant solution and rinsing in clean water.
Feeding:	**Diet:** Adequate feed for the species kept and the number kept should be available daily. Budgies, zebra finches and canaries are all seedeaters. Most also like the addition of greens. Ready- made species blends can be obtained from supermarkets, fodder stores or pet stores. **Daily requirements**: Remember that birds remove the outer husk and eat the seed so check that the feeder is presenting new seed to the bird. Mixed grit and a calcium supplement (e.g. cuttlefish) should also be available to birds. **Supplementary feeding:** Birds should have access to some form of calcium. Cuttlefish bone and eggshells from chickens are reliable sources. Note: eggshells must be microwaved for a few minutes to kill bacteria and cooled before feeding to birds. Boiled chopped egg can be given to finches once a week to help with feather growth. Greens offered can include seed grasses, grass, lettuce, fruit, and green vegetables. Do not feed cabbage, cauliflower or avocado. **Equipment:** Water bottles and seed dispensers.
Breeding:	• **Gestation period:** Eggs have an 18-day incubation period. Young leave the nest after 30 days. • **Number of offspring:** Average 1-2 eggs but can be four or more. **Mating:** Birds may breed in aviary conditions where nesting opportunities occur. Females on their own lay unfertilised eggs. School should research the species they seek to keep and breed and consult with a Veterinarian or Avian expert before embarking on breeding of birds.
Handling:	**Humans:** All birds need to be handled calmly and with care. Cage birds can be conditioned from an early age to be regularly handled. Children are only to observe birds, not handle them unless supervised and the bird is accustomed to handling. Period of handling should be kept short. **Equipment:** Soft nets or towels can be used to catch birds and towels can be used to aid with handling. **Transport:** Birds can be transported in small boxes with air holes or small covered cages. Containers must be clean for example shoe boxes and cardboard wine casks. Milk cartons, jars, plastic ice cream boxes and paper bags are not suitable. All boxes used must have five of the six sides covered. The holes cannot be big enough that a bird's head can protrude through the holes. Cover the base of the box with newspaper or bedding materials. Open uncovered transport cages may cause injury as birds may hit the wires in panic. Transport quickly and do not leave for extended periods in hot or cold conditions. Incompatible individual birds or species should not travel together in the same cage if being transported. Food must be always provided when transporting birds. If the journey may exceed two hours, water must be provided and stabilised with cotton wool to minimise spillage.

Hygiene:	Thoroughly wash hands with soap and running water for at least 15 seconds after working with or handling any birds. Dry hands with clean paper towel or an air dryer. Turn off the tap with the paper towel if possible. Ornithosis (also known as Psittacosis) is a contagious disease transmitted to humans from birds as a form of pneumonia. Psittacine birds or potential carriers include budgerigars, parrots, parakeets, doves, and pigeons. Schools should contact their local Veterinarian or Avian industry expert to discuss zoonotic risks when considering using birds for activities at school. If schools take appropriate precautions, birds can be kept at schools. This is providing they are obtained from reputable sources, kept in clean cages, and handled as little as possible. 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 (e.g. 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; • weight loss; • breathing problems; • growths; • vomiting; • discharges from the nostrils, beak, eyes, or vent; • injuries including any bleeding; • failure to thrive; • excessive scratching or crusted areas on face and legs; • loss of feathers or feathers fluffed up; • sitting on the bottom of the cage or aviary.
Treatments:	Schools are encouraged to develop relationships with Veterinarians and your local bird suppliers. These contacts can be used for disease diagnoses, treatment options and dietary, husbandry and welfare advice. Veterinarians can also assist with advice for activities that may illicit pain where pain relief is required and for emergencies, particularly where euthanasia is needed. Staff should monitor birds in their care daily to become accustomed to normal bird behaviour. This will make it easier to detect abnormal behaviours and seek treatment when required. Treatments must be documented. Nail clipping may be required when housing caged birds. Seek Veterinary or expert advice from your local bird supplier if you are unsure of how to trim your birds nails and for restraint advice. Inappropriate handling, restraint and trimming can cause pain and stress to the bird and the nails can bleed excessively if trimmed too much. Nails should not be trimmed above the darker claw area or bleeding and infection can occur. Do not allow a bird's claws to curl. Newly acquired birds should be quarantined for seven days on advice from an industry expert or Veterinarian prior to adding them to a cage with other birds. When introducing new birds, school staff should introduce them early in the day to allow the bird to be observed for any issues throughout the day. Leg rings may be used on the legs of captive birds. These rings are used for identification and must be of a size that fits closely yet moves freely on the leg of an adult bird. Overly large rings get caught in obstacles such as vegetation or wire and the rings that are too tight restrict blood flow to the leg. These should only be applied and removed by experienced people.

	Pinioning is the act of surgically removing one pinion joint, the joint of a bird's wing furthest from the body, to prevent flight. Captive birds under the South Australian Code of Practice for the Husbandry of Captive Birds, except for quail, pheasants, plovers, and waterbirds must not be pinioned. Pinioning must ONLY be carried out by a Veterinary surgeon if required in approved species and must not be done on any bird under the age of two days old.
Euthanasia:	When an illness or injury is such that recovery is unlikely then the bird must be euthanised by a Veterinarian. Schools should contact their local Veterinarian to discuss emergency treatment options prior to an event occurring when keeping birds.
Disposal/fate planning:	When no longer required birds must be rehomed. 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:	Birds can be sent home for weekends or holiday care with students providing consent is received from the school Principal and the parents. Staff should provide carers with animal care and record-keeping instructions, emergency contacts and provide appropriate equipment and food. Birds must be checked daily, records kept, and any problems reported to the school immediately whether kept onsite or taken offsite. Birds can be sent home for weekends or holiday care with students providing consent is received from the school Principal and the parents. Staff should provide carers with animal care and record-keeping instructions, emergency contacts and provide appropriate equipment and food. Birds must be checked daily, records kept, and any problems reported to the school immediately whether kept onsite or taken offsite.
Approved activities:	Where an activity is not listed in this ACIS, advice must be sought from the NGSAEC and confirmed before it can be undertaken.
Activity:	**a. The appropriate care of classroom birds**
Objective:	To instruct students on the appropriate care of caged birds in the classroom. Staff must research the species of bird they are keeping and ensure students are provided with accurate information in relation to housing, nutrition, welfare, and health. Schools must also plan for rehoming at the end of the birds' use for activities in schools.
Activity:	**b. Observation of a particular bird behaviour**
Objective:	To instruct students on the observation of a particular behaviour in caged birds. Students are to remain quiet and a short distance away from a cage when observing bird behaviour so as not to startle the birds. Feeding or grooming behaviours are examples that could be observed.
Activity:	**c. Measurement of respiration in caged birds (non-invasive)**
Objective:	To instruct students on the measurement of respiration in caged birds. Respiration can be easily measured by observing the bird's chest movements. Record the rise and fall of the chest while keeping the noise to a minimum and standing far enough away from the cage not to distress the bird.
Activity:	**d. Capture, restraint and handling of caged birds**
Objective:	To instruct students on the capture, restraint, and handling of caged birds Staff must be familiar and experienced with the methods of capture, restraint, and handling before undertaking these activities. Handling is stressful to birds and needs to be kept to short sessions. Towels can be used to aid with handling.

	Gloves can also be used depending upon the species of bird being handled to avoid being bitten.
Activity:	**e. Measurement of mild dietary effects in caged birds including palatability**
Objective:	To demonstrate to students how to collect measurements of mild dietary effects in caged birds including palatability To test palatability caged birds can be offered a variety of food at the same time with students observing for food preferences or by comparing the volumes of food eaten. Only suitable feed types should be used, and birds should not be deprived of their regular diet when undertaking these activities. Students can be educated on suitable diets for caged birds including what should not be fed. Students could also observe feeding times when a new food is introduced including the birds investigation habits when the food is first introduced.
Activity:	**f. Taming/gentling of caged birds**
Objective:	Taming of birds should be started from an early age. Short length training session should be undertaken over an extended period (e.g. weeks to months). Treats can be used to aid with handling. Low stress handling techniques should be adopted and used. Schools may opt to use birds that have already been trained to do certain tasks for these activities to show students the principles of training. Punishment should not be used on caged birds.
Activity:	**g. Training of caged birds**
Objective:	To instruct students in the training of caged birds Training of caged birds should be started from an early age. Short length training session should be undertaken over an extended period (e.g. several weeks to months). Treats can be used to aid with handling. Schools may opt to use birds that have already been trained to do certain tasks for these activities to show students the principles of training. Low stress handling techniques should be adopted and used. Punishment should not be used on caged birds. Cage birds must not be pinioned to prevent flight as per the South Australian Code of Practice for the Husbandry of Captive Birds. The following birds are exempt from this with regards to pinioning; quail, pheasants, plovers, and waterbirds.
Activity:	**h. Collection of feather samples from caged birds**
Objective:	To demonstrate the collection of feather samples from birds to students. Feathers should never be plucked from any birds as this can be painful and stressful. Instead, feathers should be collected from the bottom of the cage.
Activity:	**i. Administering topical or oral treatment to caged birds**
Objective:	To demonstrate to students the techniques of administering topical and oral treatments to caged birds. Staff must be competent in the administration techniques themselves before demonstrating or teaching any students how to do so. Handling should be kept to a minimum and towels used to aid handling. When treating for parasites in a cage, all birds should be treated at the same time. Ensure the product you are using is safe for the type of birds you have, and the correct dose is given. Not all products are suitable for all types or all age groups of birds. Check with your industry expert (e.g. pet shop staff) or Veterinarian for advice if you need assistance.
Activity:	**j. Administering sub-cutaneous or intra-muscular injections to caged birds**
Objective:	To demonstrate the correct techniques for the administration of subcutaneous and intramuscular injections to caged birds.

	To demonstrate to students the correct methods of administering subcutaneous or intramuscular injections to caged birds. Only very experienced staff should be undertaking this activity. Schools should be consulting with their local Veterinarian or Industry expert before undertaking this activity to ensure that the welfare of the birds are not going to be compromised. It is preferable to use larger breeds of birds for this activity.
Activity:	**k. Beak trimming**
Objective:	To demonstrate the method of break trimming in caged birds. Beak trimming may be required if the beak grows too long and starts to grow in a fashion that inhibits the birds ability to feed properly. Staff must be competent in bird handling, capture and restraint if undertaking this activity and have the necessary experience and equipment for trimming. Schools are encouraged to talk to a Veterinarian or experienced Industry expert if they are concerned that a bird needs its beak trimmed. As the beak can bleed extensively after trimming and some birds may struggle warranting anaesthesia that needs to be provided by a Veterinarian, it is recommended that students are warned of the complications from trimming that can occur.
Resources:	**General husbandry of Caged Birds –Purdue University USA** www.purdue.edu/vet/vth/files/documents/general%20husbandry%20of%20caged%20bird s.pdf **Canaries (including breeding information) – Golden Cob** www.goldencob.com.au/breeders-nest/canary/ **Canary care (including canary types) - Melbourne Canary Improvement Society** www.melbournecanary.org/types-of-canaries/#description **Caring for your bird – RSPCA Victoria** www.rspcavic.org/health-and-behaviour/birds/bird-care **Basic Pet Bird Care - Association of Avian Veterinarians** www.aav.org/page/basiccare **Pet care – Bird Care, Nutrition and household and toy safety – Sydney Exotics and Rabbit Vets** www.exoticsvet.com.au/pet-care
Document Control	Document Inception date: 1 August 2010 (Standard Operating Procedure) Approved by: Non-Government Schools Animal Ethics Committee Approval date: October 2024
Revision Record	Review Date: August 2024 (amended to Animal Care Information Sheet (ACIS) Brief description of changes: Renaming of document Next Review due date: October 2025