

A Help Guide for At-Risk Amazon Parrots in Trinidad and Tobago



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Introduction

This guide is for anyone wanting to help Amazon parrots live healthier and happier lives in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Caribbean. It has been produced as a collaboration between the Nurture Nature Campaign (www.nurturenaturett.org), the Trinidad and Tobago Veterinary Association (TTVA), the Veterinary Students Association of Trinidad and Tobago (VSATT), and the Exotics Club at the University of the West Indies School of Veterinary Medicine.

We offer you this guide as many Trinbagonian parrot keepers often unknowingly participate in a harmful wildlife trade spanning the Southern Caribbean. Trade research done by local and international investigators reveals that there are more than 80,000 captive Amazon parrots in Trinidad and Tobago, almost all of which have been poached, trafficked, and illegally sold before ending up in everyday homes. Sadly, many parrots do not survive these experiences, so a far greater number of birds are affected. Also, local keepers often do not know about basic parrot care, such as appropriate diets, which can lead to captive Amazons' suffering and early death.

Though the situation facing our parrots is dire, we know that positive change for Amazon parrots and other wildlife is possible. Examples elsewhere show we can do better in the Caribbean. Since the 1970s, St. Lucians have made significant changes in how they protect their native and endemic St. Lucian parrot, and this has prevented its extinction. More recently, Belizeans have also developed a remarkable capacity to rehabilitate “pet” Amazon parrots to be returned to the wild. Their methods are so successful that even older parrots can return to their “flock life” in the forest.

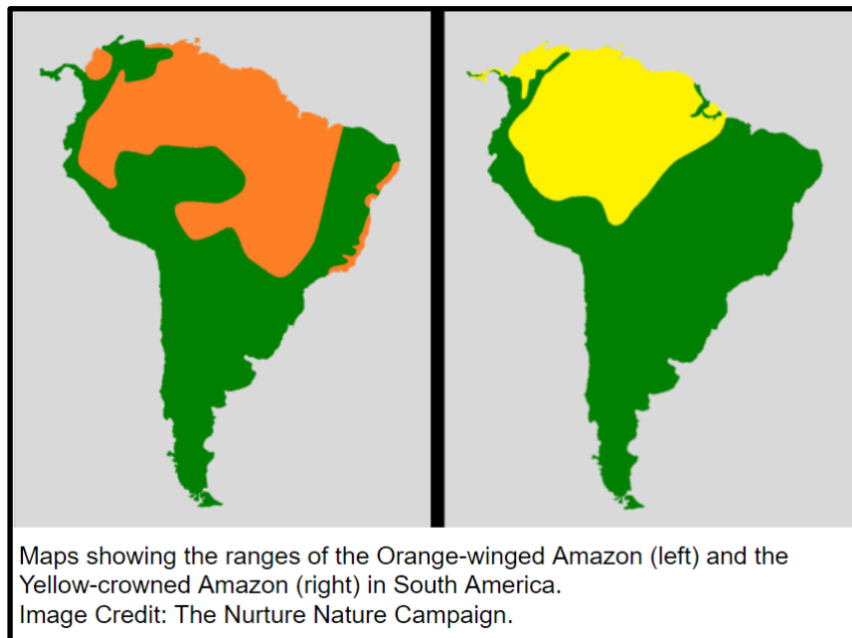
If you would like to stop participating in the harmful wildlife trade, and maybe help end the trade, then this guide is for you. As you will learn, any keeper who wants to make a change should first “Get to Know Your Parrot” and learn how to “Give Short-term Care”. Then, if you are ready, you can even “Be a Parrot Rescuer” to best support the welfare of your Amazon parrot.

Get to Know Your Amazon Parrot

The first step in helping any at-risk Amazon parrot in captivity is to get to know the animal. With knowledge comes power. You may be surprised to learn that many keepers do not know there are two types of Amazon parrots that are commonly traded in Trinidad and Tobago: the Orange-winged Amazon and the Yellow-crowned Amazon. You may also find it interesting to know about these animals' natural lives in the wild and how they are impacted by the pet wildlife trade.

Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons

The two most common “pet” parrots in Trinidad and Tobago are the Orange-winged Amazon (*Amazona amazonica*) and the Yellow-crowned Amazon (*Amazona ochrocephala*). Locally, these species are respectively called “green parrot” and “Venez parrot”. The trade in these parrots in the Southern Caribbean stretches back centuries, if not millennia. However, the modern-day trade is much greater in volume than in the past.



As their names imply, these parrots are from the genus *Amazona*, which means they are like other Amazons in having short tails, medium-sized bodies, and native ranges in the Americas. The Orange-winged Amazon is found in Trinidad and Tobago and in South America, from Bolivia and Brazil in the south to Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia in the west, to French Guiana, Guyana, Suriname, and Venezuela in the North. The Yellow-crowned Amazon shares much of this range but extends northward into Costa Rica and Panama.

The Orange-winged Amazon is native to Trinidad and Tobago. According to biologists, this local bird is a special “sub-species” with more remarkable orange feathers than mainland parrots. Yellow-crowned Amazons, on the other hand, are not originally from Trinidad and Tobago but have been introduced through the pet trade. The two species are sometimes found to interact in the wild.



Orange-winged Amazon (left) and Yellow-crowned Amazon (right).
Photo Credit: Getty Images.

Adult Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons are of medium size, the former measuring 31-33cm (12-13in) and the latter measuring 33-38cm (13-15in) long. Both birds reach adulthood at 4 to 5 years of age and can live up to 50 years in the wild. Like many other Amazon parrot species, both Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned parrots have mostly green colouring. However, each species has contrasting colours on their faces, the tops of their heads, and the flying feathers on their wings. Males and females show no difference in appearance.

The two species differ visibly in their colour patterns. Orange-winged Amazons have green heads with variable amounts of blue and yellow. There is a distinct yellow-orange colour on the front of their cheeks, the bend of the wing, and the speculum (part of their secondary wing feathers). Body feathers are primarily green from head to tail, with the underparts a bit lighter green. Juveniles are primarily green with fewer yellow-orange or blue feathers.

Yellow-crowned Amazons, as their name suggests, possess a distinct patch of yellow on the crown of their heads. They also have a distinctive white ring around their eyes.



Orange-winged Amazon (left) and Yellow-crowned Amazon (right).
Photo Credit: Getty Images.

The tips of their primary flying feathers are black, while the tips of their secondary flying feathers are blue. The bend of their wings and speculum are red. These birds are generally green with yellow-green underparts. Juveniles are a lighter green colour, with more black on the edges of the feathers behind the head and fewer yellows and reds in their plumage.

Like many parrot species, Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons can imitate human speech

and other sounds. Unfortunately, this has caused these wild animals to become popular as pets worldwide with detrimental effects on wild populations. From 1975 to 2016, Amazon parrots were among the ten most traded groups of parrots, and nearly 1/3 of all parrot species are now threatened with extinction (Chan et al., 2021). The pet trade is also often inhumane, and many parrots die before reaching a home.

Life in the Wild

Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons usually live happy, active, and healthy lives in the wild. This makes it all the worse when they end up in the pet trade where they often lack adequate nutrition, opportunities to fly, and a community of other parrots.

Ordinarily, these birds inhabit forested areas, including humid woodlands, gallery forests, mangroves, and even savannas with scattered trees (Bouglouan, n.d.). These species are very social and live in large communities, and they keep with larger flocks for foraging and sleeping at night. These parrots particularly enjoy “talking” with each other, emitting loud, harsh screeches, trills, screams, squawks, and whistles. Research on parrots suggests that these birds are named by their parents at birth and maintain this “signature call” throughout their lifetimes. As with most parrots, Amazons also keep a single life-long mate.



Flock of wild Yellow-crowned Amazons feeding on palm fruit.
Photo Credit: Angeli Parasramsingh.

A typical morning for an Amazon parrot starts around 30 minutes after sunrise when they emerge from their nests to fly across the sky to feed. Apart from this, they spend most of their time perching on tree branches, although parents return to the nest to check on their offspring during the day.

Amazon parrots are herbivores who eat various fruits, nuts, seeds, blooms, leaf buds, and berries, among other things. With the help of their flexible feet and muscular tongue, they can crack hard seeds and nuts with their beak. They can be spotted foraging in plantations, along woodland edges, and even in urban areas. Because of this, they are excellent natural seed dispersers. Despite their reputation for being raucous birds, they are silent while foraging, and often the only foraging sounds you will hear are from the leaves moving. When an Amazon is not feeding, they might be seen chewing on wood or bark to keep their beaks healthy, as it is their primary tool for climbing and feeding.

Amazons build their nests in the cavities of high trees and, at the time of breeding, will leave their roost and nest alone with their mate. A female parrot will lay two to four eggs, which hatch after incubating for 24-29 days (Pollock, 2012). Juvenile Amazons mature slowly, taking around two months before they develop wing feathers for flight. Both male and female parrots feed their offspring after they hatch.



Wild Orange-winged Amazon picking a mango.
Photo Credit: Chelsea Sampson.



Orange-winged Amazons nesting.
Photo Credit: Faraaz Abdool.

In the wild, Amazon parrots can face various natural and human threats. Their most common predators are larger birds of prey like hawks and falcons and snakes like boa constrictors. However, since they perch high up in trees, have a green camouflage, and roost in flocks, it is rare for Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons to be captured as prey. Other more severe threats include habitat destruction, capture for the pet trade, and being killed by farmers for foraging on crops. On islands like Trinidad and Tobago, these species are also threatened by bushfires, hurricanes, and other severe storms.

The Harmful Pet Wildlife Trade

The pet wildlife trade in Trinidad and Tobago and the wider Southern Caribbean causes many harms to Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons. These include long-term mistreatment, premature death, and the breaking of multiple local and international laws. Thankfully, neither of these species is threatened with global extinction (IUCN, 2022). However, their populations are declining quickly, particularly in areas where they are hunted for local food consumption and the local and international pet trade (IUCN, 2022).

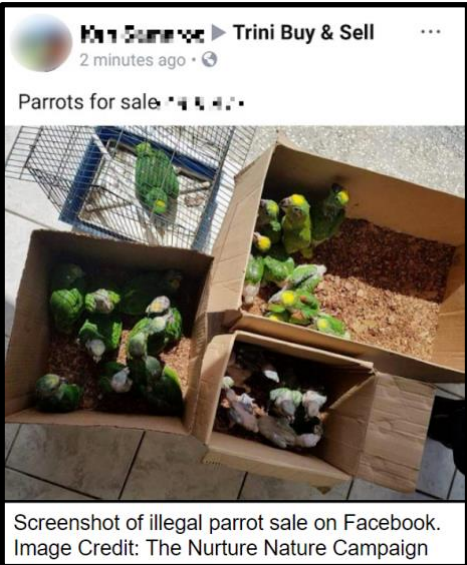


Amazon parrot nest broken open and vandalized by a poacher.
Photo Credit: Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

Trafficked parrots are transported in overcrowded and inhumane conditions that many do not survive.
Photo Credit: Forestry Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Land and Fisheries.

In Trinidad and Tobago, most Amazon parrots kept as pets are caught through the poaching of baby chicks from the safety of their nests. This can happen locally in Trinidad and Tobago or nearby Venezuela, where hunting such parrots is restricted by law. Worse still, poachers are typically heartless and act with the expectation that some birds will die in the process. They commonly cut down trees to get at baby chicks, and many chicks die from the resulting fall. Once collected, poachers keep chicks in boxes and crocus bags without water, food, cool temperatures, or a parent’s care, causing many more young parrots to die.

Amazon parrots poached in Venezuela are trafficked to Trinidad and Tobago under terrible conditions. Crowded and unsanitary cages or sacks are filled with birds to capitalise on volume. The experience leaves many animals sick, injured, or dead, and those that survive are often traumatised and develop long-term psychological disorders. This transportation practice is in clear violation of local laws for animal welfare and import regulations. Additionally, this importation is illegal under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).



Screenshot of illegal parrot sale on Facebook.
Image Credit: The Nurture Nature Campaign

The sellers of Amazon parrots are often as unscrupulous as poachers and traffickers. Many will market their animals illegally on

social media or sell them illegally out of the back of local pet shops. Many parrot keepers in Trinidad and Tobago report that they have purchased Amazons just to save them from the poor care of the seller. However, this is sometimes not enough, and weak Amazons can die soon after being brought to a new home, especially if they do not receive proper veterinary care. Worse still, this “rescue by purchase” incentivises more parrots to be poached and trafficked into Trinidad and Tobago since the sellers continue to profit.



Sadly, many buyers of Amazon parrots do not understand or perhaps are uninterested in the care requirements of their new “pets”. As a result, the birds experience malnutrition, disease, psychological issues, and early death. Few captive Amazon parrots ever live past 10 years old, let alone to the full 80 years they might live in captivity with appropriate long-term care. One of the most common dietary problems is that sunflower seeds and “bread and

milk” are given as staple foods. This causes serious nutritional deficiencies. Many parrots are also confined to tiny cages, some so small that the parrot cannot even fully extend its wings or clean itself.

Ultimately, this harmful pet wildlife trade in Trinidad and Tobago demands action, which can start with you! If you feel your Amazon parrot could be better off, continue reading about how you can give it appropriate short-term care and how you might even become a “parrot rescuer”!

Give Short-term Care

The next step in helping a captive, at-risk Amazon parrot is to ensure it gets the essential care necessary to be healthy and happy in the short term. Unfortunately, in Trinidad and Tobago, many parrots never receive such basic care and suffer serious traumas, diseases, and early death.

If an Amazon parrot keeper wants to do the right thing, we recommend that they pay attention to providing six things in the short-term:

- 1) appropriate enclosures/cages
- 2) healthy food and water
- 3) regular cleaning and bathing
- 4) mental health support
- 5) safety in the household, and
- 6) veterinary care.

Appropriate Enclosures/Cages

Orange-winged and Yellow-crowned Amazons require a safe and comfortable enclosure and ample space to move about. At a minimum, it is recommended that a solitary adult Amazon have *at least* a cage sized 2 ft x 3 ft x 4 ft. This space should be doubled for every additional bird in the enclosure. The cage door should be large enough for the parrot to enter and exit easily. Amazons should also be given an enclosed room where they can fly around for exercise. Such an arrangement can allow an Amazon adequate space only in the short-term, and in the long run, they should be placed into a full aviary to allow free flight.

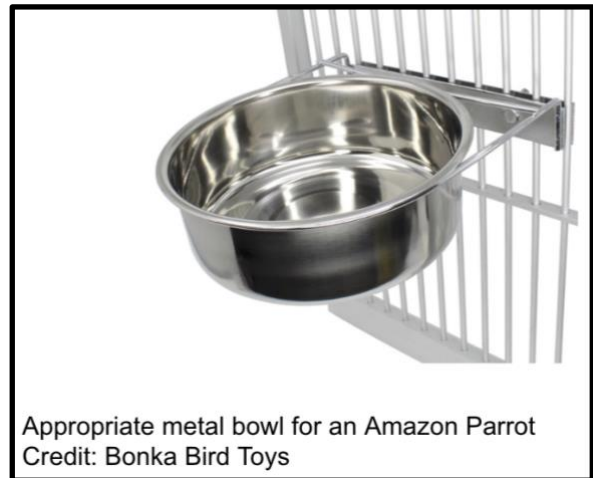
The placement, shape, and materials of the enclosure are important to consider. As a canopy species, Amazons prefer to have plenty of space to allow them to move upwards and view activity from above. Raising a caged enclosure on a stand can provide comforting height to Amazons and reduce their stress in captivity. Amazon parrots have powerful beaks, so wooden frames should not be used. Instead, enclosures are best made from metal and mesh wire. You should ensure that these do not contain any zinc or lead or be rusty or galvanised, which can cause heavy metal poisoning.



Cage that meets minimum size requirements for one parrot.
Photo Credit: mocassinlanding via Flickr.

What goes inside an enclosure is just as important as how it is constructed. Perches should be provided so parrots can move about and correctly grip with their feet. High perches will likely be favoured as they offer Amazons a natural sense of security and safety. However, multiple perching locations, both high and low, should be provided. Perching that is too large or too small for parrots' feet can cause issues. The ideal perch diameter is approximately 1 inch, and natural untreated wood is best (Pollock, 2012). Natural rope perches can also be great for Amazons as they allow for natural swinging and climbing behaviours that stationary perches cannot provide. Perches are also likely to be chewed and so should be regularly replaced.

Metal bowls should be placed in the cage for Amazon parrots to eat and drink naturally. Plastic bowls should never be used as they can be easily chewed and ingested. Placement of bowls should be considered. Bowls should be placed high, not on the ground, as this is where Amazons will naturally forage in the wild. They should be placed so they are not exposed to the elements. Heat can cause bacterial growth in bowls, and exposed bowls can attract wild animals and pests. Do not put bowls under perching locations as they will quickly become soiled with faecal matter.



Appropriate metal bowl for an Amazon Parrot
Credit: Bonka Bird Toys

Cages should be carefully designed for either indoor or outdoor placement. Indoor cages should have plenty of ventilation and air circulation to avoid the build-up of feather

danger and faecal dust in the air that can be harmful to both the animal and to you (Hartman, 1997). Indoor cages should not be kept directly in the sun, which can lead to overheating. Indoor lighting that reaches the cage should be used to emulate natural day and night cycles. Outdoor cages should ideally be half covered to allow the parrot the freedom to choose between being shaded or exposed to the sun or rain. These cages should also be regularly monitored to ensure wild animals and pests do not harm the caged bird.

Healthy Food and Water

Care must be given to ensure that captive Amazon parrots have a complete and balanced diet. Poor nutrition is a common reason for health issues in adult birds, including calcium, vitamin A deficiencies and obesity. Meanwhile, poor nutrition in baby parrots can quickly lead to death.

Parrot Food Groups	Examples of “Good Foods”	Preparation
Fruits	Apples, bananas, cantaloupes, cherries, coconuts, dates, grapes, guavas, kiwis, mangoes, papayas, passion fruits, pears, pineapples, plums, pomegranates, oranges, star fruits, watermelons	Fruit should be raw. Seeds should be removed from apples, pears and fruit with hard seeds, aka ‘stone fruit’ like North American cherries and plums.
Dark Green Vegetables	Beet greens, broccoli, bodi, cauliflower, lettuce, spinach, watercress	Raw.
Red/Orange/Yellow Vegetables	Beets, carrots, peppers, pumpkin, red cabbage, cooked sweet potatoes	Raw (except for sweet potatoes).
Grains	Buckwheat, barley, brown rice, boiled corn, millet, oats, quinoa, wheat	Use fresh grains, not ‘instant’ products. Do not add salt.
Nuts	Almonds, Brazil nuts, cashews, hazelnuts, pecans, peanuts, pine nuts, pistachios, walnuts	Should be unsalted.
Herbs	Basil, cilantro, coriander, dill, mint, oregano, parsley, rosemary, sage, thyme	Raw.
Protein	Channa, lentils, red beans, other peas, and beans	All must be cooked and without salt. Must not be canned.
Other	Chia seed, flax seed	Can sprinkle small amounts on other foods.

Unhealthy or Toxic Foods	
Alcohol	Fried, greasy or junk foods
Avocado	Fruit seeds or pits
Caffeine	Garlic
Cassava	Meat
Chocolate	Mushrooms
Cocoa	Nutmeg
Dairy products/Milk	Onion
Dry or canned peas and beans	Potatoes
Eggplant	Salty and sugary foods
Flour (Bread & Roti)	Stems from Nightshade plants (eggplant and tomato greens, pepper stems)

Adult parrots should have a diet composed of approximately 50% pellets and approximately 50% fresh fruits and vegetables. Pellets can be purchased at pet stores and are specially formulated with basic nutrients. Trinidad and Tobago pet shops that sell such pellets include Little Amazon Pet Store, Pantin's Pets, P&R Pet Store, and many other pet stores. Fresh produce should be cut into small, chewable pieces and can be fed to the bird either raw or cooked. It is important to note that some foods should never be fed to a parrot as they are toxic. Toxic foods include avocado, eggplant, and nutmeg. Seeds and nuts (such as the commonly used sunflower seeds) should never exceed more than 10% of the bird's daily diet, since they have a high fat content and become junk foods in large quantities. Additional sources of protein, such as grated hard-boiled eggs, can be given every 1-2 weeks.



Parrots need a varied diet of red, green and yellow vegetables, fruits, and proteins like nuts and legumes stay healthy.
Photo Credit: Mark Gibson.

Adult Amazons should be fed twice daily, and young adults should be fed even more frequently. Pellets should be given in the morning so the bird can snack on them anytime throughout the day. Fruits and vegetables can be given in the afternoon or evening after the parrot has eaten most of the pellets.

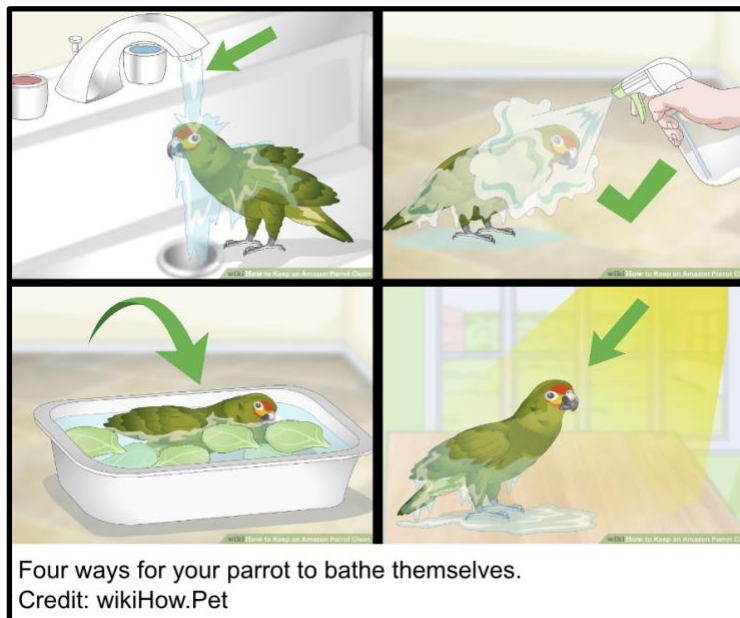
Baby parrots require very special attention to keep them well nourished. Without parents, baby parrots need to be hand-fed for 3-5 months. There are hand-rearing formulas that are available at pet shops. Local veterinarians also advise that Nestum formula can be used if it is made with water rather than milk. Baby birds should be fed with a syringe and will require feeding every 2-4 hours in their first month of life. Afterward, they must be fed twice daily until they are at least two months old. Avoid giving water orally to baby parrots as they can drown. The hand-rearing formula will provide them with adequate hydration.

Feeding Guidelines for Baby Parrots		
<i>Age</i>	<i>Formula</i>	<i>Other Foods</i>
1-2 weeks old	Feed every 2-3 hrs	
2-3 weeks old	Feed every 3-4 hrs	
3-5 weeks old	Feed every 4 hrs	Add a water bowl
5-6 weeks old	Feed twice daily	Add soft regular foods
7 weeks old	Feed twice daily	Add regular pellets
8 weeks old	Feed once daily	Provide all regular foods

Fresh, clean water should be easily accessible to the bird as it gets older in order to prevent dehydration. The water should be cleaned daily, and enough should be given to meet daily needs. An adult Amazon parrot drinks between 2-3% of its body weight each day. If your Amazon parrot weighs 200 grams, the ideal daily water consumption would be 4-6 millilitres.

Regular Cleaning and Bathing

Captive Amazons require regular cage cleaning and bathing to keep them healthy. Leftover fruits and vegetables should be removed no later than an hour after feeding to reduce the risk of attracting pests or letting bacteria grow on the food. Faecal waste should also be removed daily, and all bowls should be cleaned with warm water and detergent daily. You may consider having two sets of bowls to rotate daily. Surfaces such as perches should be wiped or scrubbed at least every few days.



The entire cage should be fully cleaned every 2 weeks. Cleaning products must be carefully considered as parrots have sensitive respiratory systems. Cleaning products like bleach can be harmful, particularly if ventilation is poor. It is best to use cleaning products that are veterinary approved to be safe for birds, but non-toxic household products can also be safe with proper use. For instance, you might use a mix of warm water and white vinegar as a safe cleaning agent. Use a freshwater rinse after all cleaning to rid the enclosure and any cleaned items of cleaning product residue. This is particularly important for their feeding bowls as residue can be transferred to their food.

Amazon parrots should be regularly bathed with a water hose, misting spray, or in a large sink. Unlike many other birds, Amazon parrots lack a preening gland that produces cleaning oils. Instead, they use rain and other water sources to clean themselves. Offering outdoor time in the rain or providing sprinklers or sprayers will help them to clean themselves as well as provide physical and mental stimulation.

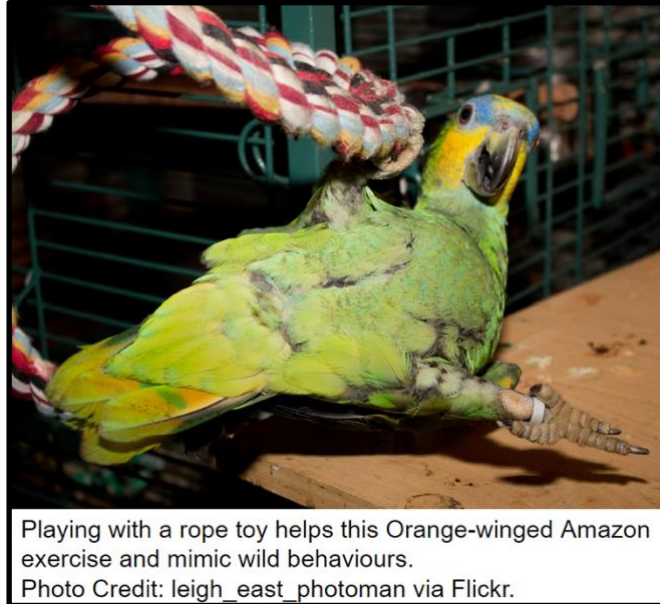
Mental Health Support

Amazon parrots are very dependent on socialisation and environmental stimulation for their well-being. In the wild, these parrots engage in various social activities throughout an ordinary day, from flocking, foraging, and grooming to nest building, interacting with a mate, and raising their young. The environment in which captive birds are placed in the short term must seek to replicate at least some of these activities. This will improve the mental health of the Amazon parrot, as well as possibly reduce any problematic behaviours, like aggression.



Perhaps the best way to enrich your parrot's life is to allow for bonding time each day. By setting aside time for one-on-one interaction, the parrot can get to know their keeper and build a greater sense of security. You can spend this time just sitting and "talking" with one another, listening to music, or you might offer them a shower. Just remember to keep your voice low and inviting and consider "grooming" the parrot with gentle pets.

Toys are excellent ways to enrich a captive parrot's life. Amazon parrots love to chew, so you can provide them with sticks, pieces of regular printing paper, empty toilet paper rolls, or even specialty toys from pet shops that they may enjoy shredding. One way to make a simple "toy" is to hide a treat inside a small paper cup and crumple it up so your parrot works to get to the treat. Parrots also enjoy climbing and chewing on ropes. Make sure these are made of natural fibres and thick enough to avoid harmful tangling.



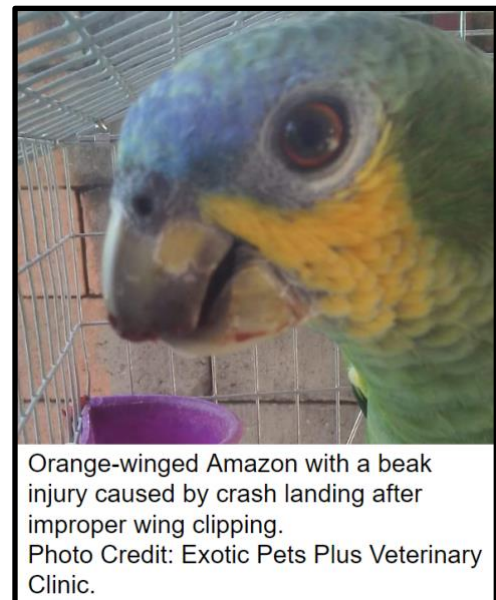
Playing with a rope toy helps this Orange-winged Amazon exercise and mimic wild behaviours.
Photo Credit: leigh_east_photoman via Flickr.

Finally, captive Amazon parrots should be allowed to exercise each day. Some veterinarians recommend a parrot to be outside of its cage for at least 3 to 4 hours each day. Active time helps your bird burn excess calories and stretch its muscles, but should be carefully supervised, ideally in a closed room environment.

Safety in the Household

Amazon parrots are not domesticated, meaning that they are not ideally suited to living with their human keepers. In fact, sometimes keeping captive Amazon parrots can be quite risky, both for the parrots and their owners. Special attention should be given to minimise these risks for appropriate short-term care.

Most of all, the household environment should be cleared of any potential hazards whenever a parrot is let out of its cage. Other household animals like cats and dogs can easily “play” too roughly and break a parrot’s wing, if not worse. If left to free roam, a parrot might fly into dangerous objects like ceiling fans, mirrors, or tubs of water, or they may find risky items to chew on, like electrical wires, sharp objects, or batteries. It is even possible that a captive Amazon might find a way out of the house and enter into a world for which it is not prepared. Sometimes escaped birds return home, but many times they are never seen again.



Orange-winged Amazon with a beak injury caused by crash landing after improper wing clipping.
Photo Credit: Exotic Pets Plus Veterinary Clinic.

Some keepers choose to keep their parrot safe by “clipping” their bird’s flight feathers. However, this practice is illegal in Trinidad and Tobago, perhaps because it can very often be done incorrectly and lead to serious injuries. Improper clipping can lead to blood loss and infection.

Unbalanced wing clipping can also be dangerous, leading to crash landings and serious breaks to the bird’s fragile bones. Birds can also lose confidence in their ability to fly, particularly if clipped from a young age, and this deprives them of an important way to protect themselves.

Special care should be given to ensuring that Amazon parrots are protected from toxic air pollution. Amazons have incredibly sensitive respiratory systems and so can be harmed or even killed by substances that do not have any effect on humans. Risks of toxic air pollution can be reduced by not using dangerous substances in your home and by ensuring good ventilation. As a rule, if you can smell it, it may be harmful to an Amazon parrot’s breathing.



Amazon parrot keepers should also take special precautions for the safety of themselves and their families. There are many diseases that parrots can possess, including a form of chlamydia called “Parrot Fever” or “Psittacosis” which can affect humans. To reduce the risk of catching any illness from the parrot, you should ensure that you wash your hands before and after handling a parrot or when cleaning their enclosure. You should also keep all care materials separate from those you and other humans may use. For instance, you should keep separate feeding bowls from those you have for kitchen use. You should also have separate cleaning tools and use them only for your bird’s cage.

In addition, indoor air pollution from bird excrement and wasted food may be a contributing factor to lung cancer in bird owners (Kim et al., 2018). There are several ongoing scientific investigations to determine if there is indeed a strong link. Until there is more conclusive evidence, you may wish to wear a facemask when cleaning to reduce the risk of inhaling faecal or feather dust.

Air Pollutants	Risky Objects
Aerosol sprays Air fresheners Cleaning products Insecticides Essential oils Glues Hairspray Kitchen smoke Scented candles Strong perfumes Teflon cookware	Air rifle pellets Bathtubs filled with water Batteries Ceiling fans Electrical cords Glazed ceramics Lead paints Lead pipes Mirrors Ornamental plants Toxic foods

Veterinary Care

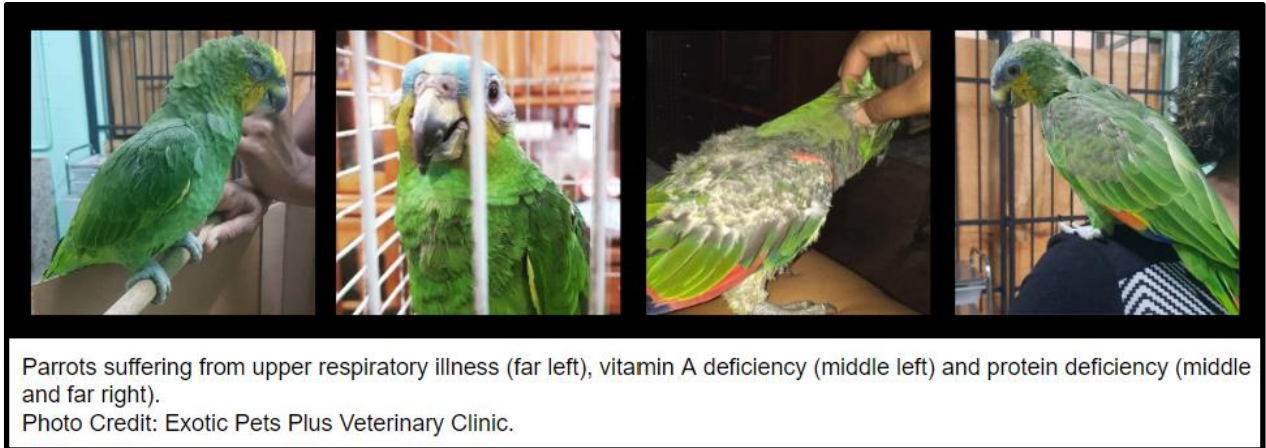
An essential element of short-term care is that a veterinary expert be consulted. It is very easy for first-time keepers to make mistakes that cause their birds to die, so you should make sure that you have a professional check your practices.

A first meeting with a veterinarian would include a physical examination, discussion on appropriate care practices, and additional laboratory testing if there are signs or risks of additional problems. Importantly, a veterinarian can detect specific diseases like chlamydiosis and parasites like roundworms and tapeworms. Also, by getting to know a veterinarian now, you will be ready to act if anything happens, like a physical injury or sudden illness.



Amazon parrot receiving vet care.
Photo Credit: Exotic Pets Plus Veterinary Clinic.

Meeting regularly with a veterinarian is also important because it is unlikely that you as an owner can identify all medical problems. In fact, Amazon parrots are experts in concealing signs of illness until the problem reaches a stage that it is very difficult to treat. After your initial meeting, it is advised that you see a veterinarian every 6 to 12 months to ensure that no health issues develop.



You should take your Amazon parrot to see a veterinarian if you notice any change in behaviour or physical appearance. Changes in the behaviour of Amazon parrots can be important signs indicating stress, boredom, lack of physical or mental stimulation, or sickness. Common problematic behaviours and physical changes include:

- **Aggressive or antisocial behaviour** - Displays of aggressive behaviour like biting, hissing, and lunging may occur when an Amazon parrot is exposed to regular environmental stressors or when it is feeling a drive to reproduce.
- **Changes in vocalisation** - Suddenly engaging in loud and seemingly endless screaming or becoming more quiet than usual is a good sign that a parrot is stressed or ill.
- **Feather “stress bars”** - The appearance of horizontal lines that run across the feather shafts is one of the most common indicators of stress.
- **Feather plucking** - The removal of feathers is a serious problem in captive parrots that continue long after any initial trigger has disappeared. Some emotionally traumatised parrots even engage in self-mutilation, chewing their skin and sometimes even digging till they reach bone. Other times, health issues like mites can lead to feather plucking.
- **Loss of appetite** - A sudden loss of interest in eating can be a red flag of stress or an underlying health problem.
- **Low Energy** - Unusual lethargy or tiredness is a general and common symptom that something may be wrong.

Beyond these short-term problems, captive Amazon parrots are also at risk of a wide range of diseases in the long run, including fungal infections, heart disease, the inability to pass an egg, lead toxicity, obesity, and vitamin A deficiency.

Be a Parrot Rescuer

A third and most important final step in helping a captive Amazon parrot is to start supporting the long-term well-being of this and other animals. Our advice at the Nurture Nature Campaign is that you consider becoming a “parrot rescuer” by taking three specific actions.

Action #1: Don't Release This Animal

Do not release this animal into the wild if you think you can no longer care for it. Captive Amazon parrots typically require special rehabilitation if they are to be returned to the wild and survive there. This rehabilitation includes teaching the bird to forage and interact with its own species and sometimes many months of training to rebuild their flight muscles.

Action #2: Relinquish, or Get a Permit and Give Long-term Care

If you are truly committed to giving this animal the best long-term quality of life, you have only two meaningful options to do so.

Option 1 is to relinquish your bird to a rehabilitation centre, of which there are several in Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, two NGO coalition members at the Nurture Nature Campaign are wildlife rehabilitation centres: the El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation in Trinidad (www.wildliferescuett.org) and Corbin Local Wildlife Park in Tobago (www.tobagowildlife.org). Contact them for more information on how and where you can relinquish wildlife.

Location	Rehabilitation Centre	Phone	Website
Trinidad	El Socorro Centre for Wildlife Conservation	1 868-366-4369	www.wildliferescuett.org
Tobago	Corbin Local Wildlife Park	1 868-327-4182	www.tobagowildlife.org

Option 2 is to commit to legal and high-quality care for the at-risk Amazon parrot now in your care. It is possible to apply and receive a government permit to have an Amazon parrot, but only if the bird is well cared for. You can visit your local government agency for information on how to apply. Meanwhile, appropriate long-term care would require

that you establish a care plan with a veterinarian and that you construct a large enclosure to let the bird fly short distances.

Location	Office	Phone	Website
Trinidad	The Wildlife Section of the Forestry Division at the Ministry of Agriculture, Land, and Fisheries	1 868-225-3837	https://agriculture.gov.tt/divisions-units/divisions/forestry-division/permits-keep-protected-animals/
Tobago	The Division of Food Security, Natural Resources, the Environment, and Sustainable Development	1 868-639-1966 1 868-639-2234	https://www.tha.gov.tt/divisions/food-security-natural-resources-the-environment-and-sustainable-development

Action #3: Stop Buying Wild Animals

The best way to do justice to your Amazon parrot is to make sure that other parrots like it are never again harmed by the wildlife trade. For every parrot that survives the brutal and uncaring trade, many more will have suffered terribly and have died unnaturally young. To stop the trade, you must commit yourself to stop buying wild-caught Amazon parrots. If you must have a pet bird, there are many alternative captive-bred options at local pet shops, including budgies, canaries, and cockatiels.



Captive bred Budgies make great pets for parrot-lovers.
Photo Credit: Faris Algosaihi.

Otherwise, there are also many incredible dogs and cats just waiting to be adopted at local shelters that make excellent alternative companion animals. You can contact your nearest shelter by consulting the table below.

Location	Organisation/Shelter	Contact
Trinidad	Animal Welfare Network (AWN)	Phone: 1 868-269-4296 Facebook Direct Message: @AnimalWelfareNetwork
	Animals 360 Foundation	Phone: 1 868-364-7729 Facebook Direct Message: @animals360foundation
	Animals Alive	Phone: 1 868-709-1151 Facebook Direct Message: @AnimalsAliveTT
	Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TTSPCA)	Phone: 1 868-622-1367 1 868-628-1615
Tobago	Trinidad and Tobago Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (TTSPCA)	Phone: 1 868-639-2567
	Venus Doggess of Love	Email: venusdoggessoflove@gmail.com Facebook Direct Message: @VenusDoggessOfLove

Conclusion

In closing, there are many ways that you can help at-risk Amazon parrots in Trinidad and Tobago.

You can get to know your parrot better and appreciate how it is an important part of our natural world or how so many Amazon parrots have been harmfully trafficked from the wild. Few people realise that many Amazon parrots do not survive the harrowing experience of capture, trafficking, and sale.

You can learn about appropriate short-term care practices to ensure that your own parrot is free from any immediate danger. As you may have learned, caring for Amazon parrots is complicated and involves many considerations, from providing enclosures and nutrition to cleaning and mental health support to special safety precautions and veterinary care.

You can also become a parrot rescuer by taking the best steps for your parrot's long-term welfare. This includes seeing that the bird receives proper care by establishing a long-term care plan with a veterinarian and by obtaining a government possession permit. You can also make sure you will never again support the harmful trade in Amazon parrots by following one simple rule: Don't Buy Wild!

Finally, if you have any remaining questions, we welcome you to contact the Nurture Nature Campaign on Facebook or Instagram, by email (nurturenaturett@gmail.com), or through our website (www.nurturenaturett.org).

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