



Care For Us

Blue-and-yellow Macaw (*Ara ararauna*)



Animal Welfare

Animal welfare refers to an animal's state or feelings. An animal's welfare state can be positive, neutral or negative.

An animal's welfare has the potential to differ on a daily basis. When an animal's needs - nutritional, behavioural, health and environmental - are met, they will have a good standard of welfare.

A good life in captivity might be one where animals can consistently experience good welfare throughout their entire life.

Understanding that animals have both sentient and cognitive abilities as well as pain perception, reinforces the need to provide appropriate husbandry provisions for all captive animals, to ensure positive welfare.

In captivity, the welfare of an animal is dependent on the environment provided for them and the daily care and veterinary treatment they receive.



There are approximately 390 different parrot species, found around the world in tropical and subtropical regions. The order is subdivided into three superfamilies: Psittacoidea (or 'true' parrots), Cacatuoidea (cockatoos), and Strigopoidea (New Zealand parrots).

Few parrots are wholly sedentary or fully migratory, most fall somewhere inbetween, making poorly understood regional movements, with some adopting an entirely nomadic lifestyle.

Parrots are commonly exploited, trapped for the pet trade and driven out of their habitats by hunting, invasive species and habitat loss — wild populations are increasingly being lost. Blue-and-yellow Macaws are listed as a species of Least Concern on IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species, but are in CITES Appendix II.



Blue-and-yellow Macaws are large parrots found in South America. They have beautiful blue and yellow (sometimes described as gold) colourings. Their forehead is green, the upper part of the body blue and the sides of the body and neck, yellow. Their wing feathers are blue with green tips; the underwing coverts and breast are yellow-orange.

These macaws have a very strong hooked beak and zygodactylous feet (two toes that point forward and two toes that point backwards). They use their feet and beak to manipulate their surroundings, helping them make nests, groom and eat food.

These birds are usually found near water, including edges of lowland humid forest, gallery forest in savanna, swamp forest and palm swamp.



Macaws Like to Fly

Parrots are no different to other birds in that they love to fly. Blue-and-yellow macaws will often fly in pairs, but can also be found in larger family groups and even bigger flocks, as they fly to and from feeding grounds. Each morning, they fly from roosting sites to feeding grounds and return just before sunset, flying high above the forest canopy. They are superb long distance flyers, using their long tails to aid balance.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Always allow for horizontal flying over a large space without interruption by vegetation. Where possible ensure the birds can fly in pairs or larger groups and encourage flying by feeding birds in different places around the enclosure, encouraging them to search for food.



Aviary Design & Care

Aviary space should mimic the natural habitat of a macaw. Enclosure essentials include plenty of vegetation, multiple perches and ropes, bathing opportunities and large spaces to fly.

The aviary floors must be well drained and must not provide a good environment for parasites. A concrete base covered in a layer of clean earth, sand or gravel is probably the most natural and successful substrate, as the covering materials can be completely replaced periodically and the concrete base washed and disinfected.

Floors are best raked or swept daily to remove faeces and litter. Most pathogenic micro-organisms thrive in dark, damp areas where sunlight is unable to penetrate so these conditions and areas must be eliminated. Where natural branches are used as perches, these can be replaced periodically.





Macaws Like to keep Clean

Macaws will spend time grooming themselves as it is an important for controlling external parasites and maintaining good feather condition. Without some humidity in their feathers, the feathers can dry out and become itchy. In well-watered areas where macaws mainly live, water bathing is most common, and in arid ones dusting is more often observed.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

It is important that bathing opportunities are provided, but remember each parrot is an individual, some love water, others don't! Provide separate bathing tubs at differing levels of the enclosure and offer depths that encourage different uses. Also make sure the water is cleaned regularly and if possible, provide fresh flowing water into the enclosure for the birds to dip into.

Macaws Like to Perch

When not flying, macaws will spend a lot of time perching or balancing on branches while finding food, grooming or socialising. In the wild, macaws have the option to use multiple different perches with different widths, at different heights and of different texture. Some will be fixed and non-moving, while others will be less stable.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Provide multiple perching options at various heights in an aviary. Avoid smooth materials as this can cause foot deformities, instead use tree branches of varying diameters and texture that help maintain healthy feet. A fresh supply of cut branches with leaves and buds will also provide a sensory stimulation. Ropes can also be used to mimic moving branches and encourage appropriate grip.



Macaws Like to Eat a Varied Diet

A macaw's diet consists of fruits, vegetable matter, seeds, nuts, leaves and bark. They are really well adapted to eating hard nuts due to their incredibly strong beak and ability to hold food in their feet. Their long flexible toes help them manipulate objects and food, while they use the lower part of the beak to file down a nut's shell before cracking it open. Their thick, fleshy tongue will move the food around as the macaw works on it. Macaws can also eat clay on exposed riverbanks, as a mineral supplement.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

In captivity you must try and prevent obesity and encourage foraging and manipulation for food. This helps with sensory stimulation and prevents boredom. Provide different choices of food, and scatter and hide food around the aviary. A variety of seeds, fresh budding branches, fruits, insect larvae, commercial mixes, mineral blocks, homemade mixtures, cooked eggs and honey, are all good choices of food and provide an interesting diet.



Macaws like to be busy

Macaws are incredibly intelligent and have a complex emotional capacity, so can get bored and frustrated easily. In the wild they spend many hours a day finding food, socialising, communicating, preening and caring for chicks.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Prevent boredom or frustration with a suitably complex environment. Use labour-intensive foods, such as in-shell nuts (whole Brazil nuts), dates and whole fresh corn cobs, that need work to access, and scatter and hide foods (hanging baskets full of wood chips with seed scattered inside for example).

Provide plenty of different materials for birds to manipulate and explore. Ensure birds are kept in suitable social groups, have multiple perch options, enough space to fly suitable distances and build nests.



Macaws like to Socialise

The background of the page features two blue and yellow macaws perched on a red horizontal bar. The macaw on the right is in the foreground, looking towards the left. The macaw on the left is slightly behind and to the side, looking towards the camera. The image is dimmed to allow text to be overlaid.

Macaws are social birds and will spend a lot of time in the company of other macaws. They are often monogamous (remaining paired for life). They can often be seen flying in large flocks and the bonded pairs fly close together, their wings nearly touching. Macaws can make very loud screeching noises, especially when interacting with other birds!

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

Always ensure you keep macaws with other macaws so they can enjoy interacting and socialising like they would in the wild.

Observe how different individuals interact and allow them to form different relationships with each other. Always make sure the aviary is large enough for all the birds to have their own space or choose to interact and fly in pairs or groups.

Macaws Like to Build Nests and Raise Chicks

Sexual maturity for macaws occurs around three to four years of age. Once they have found a suitable mate, they are generally monogamous. In the wild they will nest in the hollow trunks of dead trees or cavities to avoid predation. Youngsters are usually born naked and blind and are fed entirely by the parents for several weeks. Both parents are very protective of their young and will aggressively defend them against intruders.

Positive Behaviours to Encourage

If you intend to encourage breeding – if you have suitable space and resources to care for additional birds throughout their life - ensure there are plenty of nesting choices, by providing multiple barrels or horizontal nest boxes. Allow both parents to raise the chicks and allow the chicks to stay with their parents for as long as they want. During chick-raising, increase the food and provide appropriate supplements, and offer a variety of special foods which can be easily converted to baby food by the adults.





Blue-and-yellow Macaws Enjoy...

Having lots of space to fly, different choices of food, appropriate social interactions and environments that are suitably challenging, to avoid them becoming bored and frustrated.

In captivity we should always try and replicate their natural and normal behaviours, so they are happy and healthy throughout their lives.

