

## Summer Safety

By Shauna Hill



Kids are out of school, and family vacations are coming. Time to get out and enjoy the outdoors - but let's take a moment to think about helping our feathered friends enjoy this time of the year safely.

Many want to give their birds more time outside to soak up that sunshine and fresh air. Simple safety measures will avoid the heartache of having your companion fly off or becoming injured or sickened by outdoor pests.

**Going outdoors with your bird.** There are different harnesses and some come with videos on how to get your bird used to wearing one. This takes time and patience and some birds will not take to wearing one. If your bird wears a harness, make

sure it is securely fastened to both your bird and you; there have been many instances where a bird has flown away with their harness when their human did not have it properly secured to their wrist.

Hawks can swoop down and yank birds off their human's shoulder so be mindful of your surroundings and pay attention if your bird starts alarm-calling. Your bird may see predators before you do. I didn't see a hawk in a tree until I was uncomfortably close!

There are many lightweight backpack-style carriers available to allow your bird to venture out with you in comfort. These carriers usually have water and food holders, and flaps to block the sun. Not all birds enjoy being in carriers so gauge their stress level and do not push it if they are getting stressed or overheated. This is especially true of birds with health issues or older birds.

Bring water and treats/food for a long outing so your bird can stay hydrated and energized.

A conversation with your avian vet before including your bird in any outing is a wise course of action.



Skittles the macaw shows bird watching with a bird is fun. (Photo courtesy of Tari & Mike Voydanoff.)



Gizmo the amazon makes a cool hiking buddy! (Photo courtesy Douglas Spurr.)



Squeejus the cockatoo ready for an adventure. (Photo courtesy Tari & Mike Voydanoff.)



Jazzie the cockatoo, with her bird collar, shows you can wear your accessories and still fit in your birdie back pack. (Photos courtesy of Michelle Yesney.)

Lovebirds Calliope and Pichi remind us the little birdies can enjoy time in their carrier too. (Photos courtesy of Sandy Rayn Wolf.)



**Indoor safety:** Not only do we need to ensure our air conditioning is in working order for those extremely hot days for our own well-being, but our feathered friends need it too so they do not get overheated. Yes, birds can get heatstroke! If a petsitter is caring for your birds in your home while you are away, ensure your pet sitter knows how to work the AC, who to call if it should go out, and reliable contact information for you and your avian vet. Fans help but remember they will only blow hot air around. So if the forecast calls for extreme heat have a plan for keeping your birds cool if you do not have AC (baths/misting, ice cubes in their water, visit a friend with air conditioning).

Check your bird's water more often than usual as it will evaporate faster and your birds will drink more. If you have a bird that makes soup of their water, supply fresh water more frequently.

Be cautious about leaving cages in front of windows as the sun can hit that window and heat up the bird in that cage very quickly.

**Outdoor cages:** Many want to bring their bird's cage outside to let them get fresh air. Outside dangers can take many forms. Predators like raccoons can break into cages and drag birds off or leave them seriously injured. Hawks can knock over cages, or open sliding doors that are improperly locked or not zip-tied. Rats and mice can crawl in to attack and kill birds.

Pests like mosquitos can spread diseases such as West Nile Virus and Virulent (aka Exotic) Newcastle disease. Make sure you do not have your birds outside from dusk to dawn when these pests are at their worst. Create a barrier against mosquitos such as with mosquito netting around the cage or aviary. Reduce mosquitos by getting rid of standing water sources like buckets or huge puddles. Be careful of using toxic sprays or chemicals to keep bugs away; these can be harmful to your birds. Bug zappers can help but make sure they are not in reach of your birds.

Avoid exposing your birds to outside coops or aviaries with birds that may carry West Nile Virus or Virulent Newcastle disease.

If you live in an area with fire ants be cautious about leaving your birds to be bitten by them.

Always monitor your birds for these and other dangers when they are outdoors. As you can see, a cage by itself is often insufficient protection for your feathered family member.

**Long car rides:** Packing up the bird to visit friends and family or staying in a pet-friendly hotel can be a fun way to include your feathered friend in your travels but monitor your bird's stress level. Try taking short car rides ahead of

time to see how your bird handles them. Make sure there are perches in their travel carrier they can grip to avoid falling; smoothed manzanita wood can be slippery so consider rope, natural wood, or perches with vet wrap. Pack plenty of their usual food in case there are no places to purchase more. Bring bird treats like fresh veggies and fruits so they can enjoy a nice snack. If your bird needs medications make sure you refill before your trip.

**Fourth of July:** The sound of fireworks can startle birds. Check on your birds to make sure no one has fallen off their perch or broken a blood feather while flapping around. A radio turned on low, or a white noise machine, might help. It's not recommended to have your bird outside of their normal enclosure during fireworks as they can fly into something and injure themselves.

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With some careful planning you and your feathered friends can enjoy a great summer. We hope you all have a fun and safe time!



Gizmo says to take time for rest stops on those long drives. (Photo courtesy of Douglas Sparr.)