



# Macaws

## AAV Companion Bird Care Series

### Vital Statistics

**Total length:** 12-39 inches (30-99 cm)

**Body weight:** 165-1700 g

**Age of sexual maturity:** 4-7 years

**Maximum life span:** 40-65 years

Macaws are some of the most intelligent and beautifully colored parrots. This group of birds is comprised of some of the largest companion species. Although they are native to Mexico and Central and South America, most free-ranging species are considered threatened or endangered, and efforts to protect these birds have resulted in a ban on importation for pet purposes in the United States. High quality companion birds are available from reputable breeders, rescue organizations, and avian sanctuaries. The most common large macaws include the blue and gold, scarlet, green-winged, and hyacinth. These birds are not suitable as pets for the average family because they require extensive care and space and are extremely noisy and destructive. More suited to captivity are those species known as the miniature macaws, including the severe, red-shouldered (Hahn's/noble), and yellow-collared. These smaller birds have more acceptable vocalization levels and are less destructive; however, fewer of these are bred in captivity. As a result, the current availability is low and the genetic pool is limited.

### Common Disorders of Macaws

- Malnutrition (obesity, poor feather quality)
- Objectionable behavior (aggression, screaming, feather destruction and self-mutilation syndrome)
- Feather disorders (cysts, ingrown facial feathers, discolored feathers)
- Allergies (especially to cockatoo or cockatiel dust, may be life threatening)
- Bacterial and viral infections
- Reproductive disease (chronic hormonal stimulation, ovarian or uterine disease)
- Trauma (collisions or aggression from other pets)
- Toxin exposure (especially heavy metal)
- Toe deformities of young macaws

Many diseases can be prevented with regular veterinary care, proper diet and housing. For these reasons, it is important to develop a relationship with a veterinarian who is experienced in avian preventive care, medicine and surgery.

For help in finding an avian veterinarian in your area, contact the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV) by visiting [www.AAV.org](http://www.AAV.org) and click on "Find-a-Vet."

### What to Expect from Your Macaw

Macaws require a great deal of attention, living space, and owner experience. These birds are not recommended for first time bird owners. Macaws are generally intelligent, inquisitive, and highly interactive parrots. While personalities and characteristics are highly variable among individual birds, many believe a few generalizations may be made. Blue and gold macaws are the most popular pet and may have the most suitable pet characteristics, while scarlet macaws tend to have less desirable pet qualities. The green-winged macaw may be the calmest. Macaws have limited ability to mimic words, and their extremely piercing vocalizations may be objectionable. Macaws become aggressive and protective of their nest box during the breeding season.

### Is Your Macaw a Male or a Female?

In most macaw species, it is difficult to reliably distinguish a male from a female based on physical characteristics; therefore, DNA sexing, followed by endoscopy may be used for sex determination.

### What Should You Feed Your Macaw?

For a long, healthy life, macaws should be fed a high quality, toxin-free, formulated diet, preferably certified organic. Supplementation may include chopped organic vegetables, fruit, and whole grains.

### What Do Macaws Do All Day?

Macaws are playful and love to chew, but they can be very destructive. They need a huge amount of space, especially if they spend much of their time in a cage. Toys must be sturdy and free of toxic metals, hooks, sharp objects, and easily consumed components. They should be rotated frequently to prevent boredom. Large diameter fresh-cut branches from non-toxic, pesticide-free trees should be available. Check with your veterinarian for recommendations on locally available safe trees.

## Are Macaws Tame?

Young, hand-raised macaws adapt readily to new surroundings and handling procedures. They should be exposed early in life to novel situations (car travel, hospital visits, being covered briefly with towels, multiple visitors in the household, other household pets) so that they are well-adjusted to these events. Macaws require frequent consistent training, especially reinforcement of “step up” and “step down” commands. They should not be allowed to perch on shoulders. Behavior problems are common and are usually linked to boredom, lack of socialization and training; they may become worse, especially in the spring or at maturity. Leadership, patience, and offering rewards for positive reinforcement are necessary to modify the behavior of macaws.

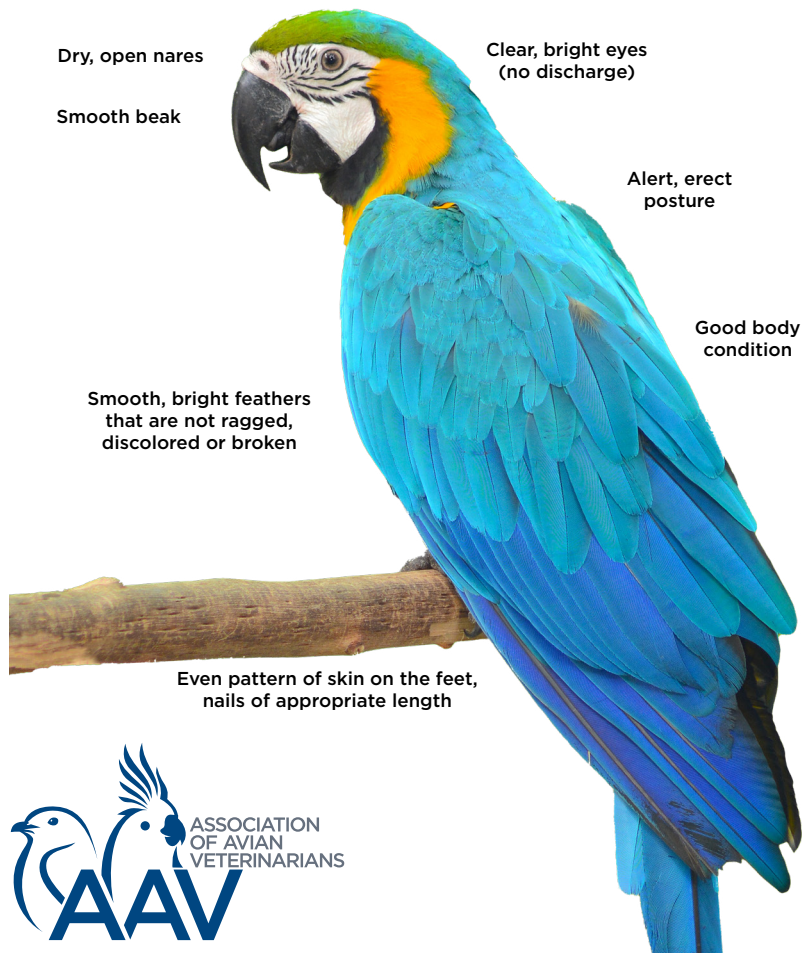
## How to Identify Your Bird

Macaws occasionally escape outdoors, and permanent identification may help to return birds to their owners. One method used to permanently identify your bird is implantation of a microchip, as is performed in other pets. Some birds already have leg bands for identification. Although closed leg bands seldom cause injury, some owners prefer to have them removed.

## Should the Wings Be Clipped?

The decision to clip wings or allow free flight should be made carefully. Birds allowed free flight benefit from exercise and mental stimulation; however, free flying birds may be injured by hitting windows or ceiling fans or hurt by encountering toxic materials. With careful planning and training, some birds may be allowed free flight in a safe area. The goal of clipping the wings is not to make the bird incapable of flight, but to prevent it from developing rapid and sustained flight and to prevent escape. Clipping must be done carefully and tailored to each individual to prevent flight and injuries from falling.

## What Your Veterinarian Looks for in a Healthy Macaw



## How to Keep Your Macaw Healthy, Happy and Safe!

- Take your macaw to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then at least once every 6-12 months for examinations.
- Provide stimulating environmental enrichment by offering toys, social interaction, and foraging opportunities.
- Feed a fresh, high quality, toxin-free, formulated diet with fresh chopped fruits, vegetables, and whole grains.
- Provide clean, fresh, uncontaminated drinking water and change frequently. Macaws can be trained to use a water bottle.
- Many birds enjoy bathing. Try providing a warm water bath, or gently spraying with clean warm water daily if possible.
- Avoid spraying house with insecticides.

## Housing for Your Macaw Should:

- Be as large as possible.
- Be clean, secure, and safe.
- Be constructed of nontoxic materials (some cages may contain toxic metals, such as zinc).
- Contain variably sized perches made of clean, nontoxic, pesticide-free wood or branches.
- Have easy-to-clean food and water containers.
- Have perches not placed directly over food or water bowls.
- Be offered opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to fresh air, direct sunlight, and exercise.

## Essential Safety Tips

Macaws are very curious and will investigate anything new in their environment. That is why it is important to prevent their access to:

- Ceiling fans
- Stove tops with hot burners, pans, or skillets
- Fumes from overheated non-stick cookware
- Sandpaper-covered perches
- Tobacco and cigarette smoke
- Chocolate, avocado, salt, alcohol
- Toxic houseplants
- Pesticides or chemical cleaners
- Easily dismantled toys
- Dogs, cats and unsupervised children
- Sources of heavy metals, such as lead or zinc (stained glass windows, pewter, some mini blinds, or linoleum)
- Plug-in air fresheners
- Scented candles



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[www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org)