

Birds Need Light - Natural or Full Spectrum UV Lighting

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

essential lighting for a healthier bird

After consulting with his local veterinarian, customer Jordan Pembank emailed us regarding light for his pet Green-cheeked Conure, Tiki. He was fortunate enough to be able to move Tiki into a small room of his own, but since it didn't have any windows, there was no natural light coming in. The condition of Tiki's feathers had declined, lacking the luster and health they once had, and Tiki seemed morose and less active.



Jordan's veterinarian informed him that Tiki's symptoms were due to light deficiencies. He recommended Jordan find ways to expose Tiki to natural light outdoors or full-spectrum lighting indoors. Jordan wanted to remedy the situation, but he was uncertain what the best course of action would be, so he sent us an email.

Light is a frequently overlooked, yet essential, aspect of bird care. Many bird owners have questions regarding proper light for their companion bird. The following is a compilation of frequently asked questions regarding light for birds, including those asked by Jordan.

How does light influence the mental and physical health of birds?

Birds are very sensitive to light and light conditions. Their health and behavior are affected on a daily basis, as well as on a larger seasonal scale.

On a **daily basis**, light determines the sleep cycle, signaling when to sleep and when to wake up – ultimately affecting the quality of sleep. Restful sleep contributes to a healthy immune system, reduces fatigue, and minimizes stress. For general, non-breeding purposes, your bird needs 12 hours of daylight and 12 hours of darkness for restful sleep.

On a **seasonal level**, the duration of light (photoperiod) affects physical and mental health, as well as the reproductive cycle of birds. Changes in the length of daylight dictate various metabolic processes and trigger various physical and behavioral changes including breeding, molting, migrating, sleeping patterns and other daily behavior.

What are the benefits of light?

The most basic benefit of light is sight. Birds have very keen vision and use vital visual information regarding their environment to navigate and to locate and identify food, other birds, and predators.

On a **physiological level**, UV light assists in the synthesis of Vitamin D and in turn the proper utilization of calcium for strong and healthy bones.

What kind of light is best for birds?

Light - Essential for Bird Health (If Natural Light Is Unavailable, Use UV Lighting)

- **Daily Basis** - 12 hours of daylight; 12 hours of darkness.
- **Seasonal Level** - Longer days affect physical and mental health, as well as the reproductive cycle of birds.
- **Physiological Level** - Light assists in the synthesis of Vitamin D and calcium for strong and healthy bones.

Natural sunlight is the best, and should be part of the lighting regimen when it's practical and safe. With proper supervision and an appropriate cage, many guardians bring their birds outside when the weather permits. However, it may not be practical to rely only on sunlight as a light source. You can create proper lighting conditions indoors with special avian lights. Select full spectrum bulbs designed specifically for birds and look for bulbs that emit light in the ultra violet wavelength. These bulbs replicate natural sunlight to provide all the beneficial properties of sunlight. Mount or suspend these lights approximately 12" to 18" above the cage to best simulate the manner in which light falls upon birds in nature. However, be sure to research your particular species regarding their specific lighting needs.