

## Flight Cages Soar in Popularity

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

### benefits of **flight**

**C**ommercial and custom-built flight cages - enclosures sufficient in size to allow side-to-side flight - are growing fast in popularity. The reasons are simple. A flight cage is a unique, beautiful and distinctive focal point in any home or office. Owners derive great enjoyment from watching their birds in flight. And, at the same time, their birds enjoy many health-related benefits.



### There are many good reasons for providing room to fly

- **Healthy exercise** - As it does for humans, regular exercise improves a bird's heart, muscle and skeletal structures, resistance to disease, and more.
- **Socialization** - Flight is an expressive indicator of a bird's status and a component of courtship. It is a must for breeding birds.
- **Mental health** - A bird's psyche and physical health correlates with its defining ability to fly. Flight also reduces tension and the stress of a response to the fight-or-flight reaction.
- **Learning** - A bird decides to move, where it wants to go, and then must figure out how high and fast it must fly to get there, and when to stall and hover prior to landing... a complex series of thoughts and actions.



- **Reduction of behavioral problems** - In

routine captivity, birds sit in cages for hours each day. As a result of this sedentary lifestyle the bird may become increasingly noisy and, in some cases, overly aggressive. These problems can be solved with increased exercise.



### **Flight cage characteristics**

**Commercial cages** - There is no reason a [flight cage](#) cannot be as convenient, if not more so, than a small cage. They don't get dirty as fast, and - if care is taken in the arrangement of perches, waterers, and feeders - can require less maintenance.

How big should your flight cage be? Long enough to allow side-to-side flight and wide enough for flapping clearance. Finches, for example, can fly spectacularly in cages just three feet long. Larger species, of course, require a much greater size cage.

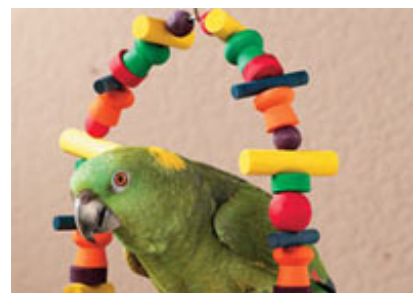
A number of excellent cages are available commercially to meet the needs of smaller species. In addition to flight space, make sure the cage you select has easy access to all areas for cleaning and for catching the inhabitants. Arrange your cage to allow your bird maximum use of the space. Position [perches](#), [swings](#) or [toys](#), and [food and water dishes](#) to avoid blocking the flying space.

**Custom-built cages** - Some bird enthusiasts choose to construct their own cages, especially those seeking to fit them into a special place in their home or office. Thoroughly investigate the needs of any bird you are hoping to keep...in advance of custom construction. You don't want to come up short on the space needed to allow for free flight.

A custom cage should be constructed of the sturdiest and highest quality wire available. Don't skimp on the quality of the wire because you are enclosing a large area.

To prevent entanglement, and possible injury, to your bird, the wire should resist bending, and feature 3/16 to 5/8 inch spacing depending on the size of your bird. The metal must also hold up to moisture without rust. If you plan to use galvanized wire, use only the type "galvanized before welded" to prevent zinc poisoning.

The seasonal changes in most U.S. climate zones normally require that your flight cage be located indoors. If you live in a southern locale, you might want to investigate an indoor-outdoor design. Opening your indoor cage to an outdoor aviary has unlimited possibilities. Of course, extra caution must be given to hygiene and disease control.



## Introducing birds to flight cages

- The jump from a small cage to a medium-to-large flight cage can be frightening to some birds, particularly if the bird is an adult. Careful, slow acclimation is always necessary.
- If you plan to introduce a bird to a large cage, especially one with established inhabitants, there are special considerations: First, all birds should undergo a period of quarantine of at least three to six weeks, and they should have a thorough health check before being allowed near an established flock. Second, never release a single bird directly into a flight cage which already has inhabitants. Without step-by-step acclimation you risk losing the bird to confusion, exhaustion, and stress. We recommend moving the bird gradually up the scale to ever larger cages. Lastly, hang the new bird high within the flight cage in a smaller cage so it can easily see most or all of the area in the flight cage. After a day or two, when the original occupants seem to have lost most of their curiosity, and the new bird seems relaxed and calm, open the door of the smaller cage and give the new bird access to the flight cage.
- Never keep a sick or ailing bird in a flight cage. It will use far too much of its energy just getting about, hindering its recovery. And recognize that some birds simply will not, or cannot, use a flight cage. If a bird refuses to acclimate quickly, do not force the issue.



## Free-flying birds

If you are able to afford your bird cage-free flight about your home or office, treat the entire area as you would an indoor cage. [Remove items that might lead to entanglement or collisions.](#) Provide out-of-cage perches and [playstands](#) to create a home-base. Take [precautions](#) to avoid soiling your furnishings. Never leave your bird unobserved. And remember, cage confinement is not an option for your bird, it's a necessity. At the end of a strenuous flying session, and always at end of day, your bird needs the protection and security of its cage. Be sure that it returns to its cage and



always close its door.

Are you thinking big? Perhaps there is a flight cage in your future.