

Timneh African Grey

Timneh African Grey *Psittacus erithacus timneh*

Timneh gray parrots occur in Western equatorial Africa – from the Ivory Coast to Western Kenya, Angola, Tanzania and South Zaire. They inhabit primary and secondary rainforest, forest edges and clearings, mostly in lowland areas. They are gregarious roosting in colonies of up to 10,000 individuals. The diet consists of a variety of seeds, nuts, palm nuts, fruits and berries gathered in the canopy of the forest. May be a crop pest in some areas.

African gray parrots are stocky, short tailed birds. The body coloration is varying shades of gray depending on the sex and where in their range they occur. Timneh Grey Parrots are smaller, darker and have maroon colored tail feathers and darker body coloration than Congos. Their upper beak is a dark horn color with a black tip. The tail of the Congo African gray is bright red and the beak is black. African Grey's have a powdery white facial patch extending from the beak to around the eye. The face of a timneh is darker than the Congo.

Length is 10-11 inches. Weight is 280-360 grams.

Life Span - possibly up to 40 -50 years, average probably 15-25 years

Age at maturity - 3-5 years.

Immature birds have dark brown eyes that change over time to gray and to yellowish gray in adults.

African Grays have a powder produced by feather on their flanks that helps to clean and protect their feathers. This powder may be allergenic for susceptible people.

Personality – African Grey Parrots are often considered to be the best talking of all parrots – rivaled only by some Amazons. They also have an incredible ability to mimic other sounds in the environment or home such as the telephone, microwave, car horns and the voices of individuals. Some highly trained individuals are also capable of reasoning and verbal communication.

Young African grays don't often speak well until they are approximately 1 year old and will typically mimic sounds first. Wild caught birds have an extraordinary repertoire of whistles, clicks and calls and often sing and whistle during the night, especially on nights with a full moon. While they often talk excessively, African grays seldom create noise problems.

Young African grays adapt readily to new surroundings and should be well adapted to many novel experiences at a young age. Adult birds are less adaptable to unfamiliar environments, dietary changes, etc and may feather pick in response to changes in their routine, such as the owner going away. African grays have a higher incidence of feather picking and feather chewing problems than most parrot species.

Activities - African grays are highly playful and easily become bored, so environmental enrichment is important. They should always be provided with toys, especially wooden blocks of other objects that can be chewed, and branches from non-toxic trees. In order to ensure safety companion birds should not be allowed unsupervised freedom in the home as they often encounter toxins or dangerous items. Young birds should be socialized to many people and exposed to a variety of situations such as new cages, toys, visits to the veterinarian, handling by friends, wing and nail clips, etc to avoid fear of novel situations.

Dietary needs - African grays appear to utilize calcium differently than other psittacine species. Birds kept as indoor pets especially tend to develop signs of calcium deficiency that can be a serious health threat. Natural or full spectrum seems to be important in helping them maintain calcium balance. African parrots should be fed approximately ¼ cup of a formulated (pelleted or extruded diet) as a basis for good nutrition. The diet should be supplemented with approximately ¼ cup of fresh fruits and vegetables daily to add variety and psychological enrichment. Seeds and other treats maybe given in small amounts especially as rewards for good behavior. Fresh clean water must be provided every day.

Vitamin supplements are not needed for birds that are eating a formulated diet. Kaytee exact is a complete and balanced diet for African parrots. African gray's love peanuts, but they should be watched carefully and ideally shelled prior to feeding as they are often contaminated with Aspergillus fungus which can lead to aspergillosis.

Timnehs are easy to hand-rear and do well on Kaytee Exact Macaw handrearing formula. When very small they are very prone to aspiration so they must be fed with extreme care. Weaning or fledging age is 9-11 weeks.

Grooming - Routine bathing or showering is vital to maintaining good plumage and skin condition. Routine bathing will also reduce feather dust. Birds can be misted and allowed to dry in a warm room or in the sun, or dried with a blow drier. Care should be taken not to clip the wing feathers excessively as African Grays often fall and injure themselves. This may result in open wounds on the often-requiring surgical repair. Clip only enough so the bird will glide to the floor.

Editor

Identification - All companion and breeding birds should be individually identified to assist in recovery if lost and in maintenance of medical and genealogical records. Many breeders apply closed legs bands when chicks are young. While they present a slight risk of entrapment closed bands are preferable to no identification, especially for breeding birds. Microchips that can be implanted into the muscle or under the skin are a reliable means of identification but require electronic readers to verify identification. Tattoos may be used but often fade or become illegible with time. Footprints may have some application in identification.

Sexing - African grays do not show definitive sexual dimorphism (visual difference between the species) therefore endoscopic examination or laboratory sexing techniques are needed for accurate sex determination. If you compare females to males which are from the same region the females tend to be a lighter or more silver color of gray. The females also tend to have a gray edge on the red undertail coverts, which is absent in the male.

Housing - African parrots are very active and should be provided with as large a cage as possible. The cage should have two perches so the birds can move between them. Toy and activities should be provided.

Breeding - African grays breed well in captivity. Some prolific birds will breed year round but most breed in the winter and early spring. Clutch size is usually 2-4 eggs. Some breeding grays are very shy and need privacy to breed well. Some pairs spend virtually all their time in the nest box if humans are near-by. Very shy birds may breed better in shady areas or in boxes with partitions to reduce light in the interior of the box.

Nest Box - African grays will use a vertical, horizontal box 18" x 18" x 24" or an L shaped box.

Cage size - Cage size should be at least 4' x 4' x 4' or 3' x 3' x 6'.

Common Diseases

- Feather picking
- Respiratory Diseases- Aspergillosis
- Sarcocystis
- Bacterial, viral, Fungal Diseases
- Calcium deficiency disorder
- Toxicities
- Chlamydiosis (Psittacosis)
- Tumors
- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease
- Tapeworms
- Cryptosporidiosis
- Chicks – aspiration, bony deformities

Many common health problems can be prevented by good diet, nutrition and routine health care. Routine veterinary examination (annually) can help you to keep your pet in excellent health and enhance your relationship with your bird.

Conservation status - Common, however drastic declines have occurred in some areas due to deforestation and capture for the pet trade. – African greys are listed on Appendix II of CITES (Convention on Trade in Endangered

Species of Faura and Flora) because of the listing of almost all parrot species.

African grays are very common in the marketplace and are one of the most frequently bred parrots in the United States.