**YVCipedia AVIAN**

Macaw Care Sheet

## **Species Overview**

Macaws are iconic parrots known for their striking colors, large size, and formidable intelligence. Native to Central and South America, these birds can range from the massive Hyacinth and Green-winged Macaws (up to 40 inches long) to the more moderately sized Hahn's and Severe Macaws.

At YVC, we often remind families considering a macaw that they are a **lifelong commitment**—with proper care, they can live **40–80 years**, depending on the species. These birds are emotionally complex, socially demanding, and need plenty of space, structure, and engagement to thrive in a home environment.

## **Housing & Environment**

Macaws are highly active and need room to stretch, flap, and climb. Their enclosure should be thought of as a **daytime base**, not a cage in the traditional sense—they will still require **hours of supervised time outside the cage daily.**

### **Enclosure Basics**

We recommend a minimum cage size of **48"x36"x60"** for large macaws, with **bar spacing of 1"–1.5"**. Smaller species can be comfortable in slightly reduced dimensions, but height and floor space are both important. Stainless steel or well-coated powder-finish cages stand up best to their powerful beaks.

Inside the enclosure, offer **multiple perches** of varying diameter and texture (including natural branches), and always allow open space for wing flapping and climbing. Cluttered cages can frustrate macaws and contribute to aggression or feather damage.

### **Location & Setup**

The enclosure should be placed in a well-lit, socially active part of the home but away from direct drafts, fumes, or unpredictable noises. Macaws appreciate being included in household routines—but they also need a **quiet, dimly lit area** to rest at night. At YVC, we recommend maintaining a **consistent 10–12 hour sleep cycle** to support their emotional regulation.

### **Temperature & Lighting**

Macaws adapt well to most indoor temperatures (65–80°F), though they should be protected from sudden drafts or extreme fluctuations. Birds without regular access to natural sunlight benefit from **full-spectrum or UVB lighting**, especially during darker seasons. Indoor air can become dry—**humidifiers** can help maintain a humidity range of **40–60%**, which supports respiratory and skin health.

## **Diet & Nutrition**

Proper nutrition is key to long-term health. Macaws, especially larger species, require **higher fat content** than many other parrots but still thrive on a balanced diet based around high-quality pellets and fresh foods.

### **At YVC, we recommend:**

* **Pelleted diets** (such as **Mazuri, Harrison’s, or Roudybush**) as the foundation of their nutrition
* A variety of **fresh vegetables**: dark leafy greens, carrots, bell peppers, squash, sweet potatoes
* **Fruits** in moderation: apples, berries, bananas, mango—ideal 2–3 times per week
* **Nuts and seeds** as controlled treats or training tools—especially important for large macaws who benefit from the healthy fats in walnuts, almonds, and macadamia nuts
* Occasional cooked legumes and whole grains for enrichment

Macaws often enjoy participating in **family meals**, but human foods must be carefully screened. Avoid salt, added fats, processed foods, and **toxic items** like chocolate, avocado, alcohol, and caffeine.

Fresh water should always be available and changed at least daily—macaws will often dunk food, so bowls should be monitored and cleaned regularly.

## **Behavior & Handling**

Macaws are emotionally intelligent, highly social, and capable of forming **deep, often intense bonds** with their caregivers. While they are frequently affectionate and expressive, they also demand boundaries, routine, and consistency.

They are not birds that tolerate neglect or confinement—without adequate stimulation and time with their people, macaws can develop severe behavioral issues, including **screaming, aggression, and feather-destructive behavior (FDB).**

At YVC, we advise clients to approach macaw care as a **daily relationship**—not just a feeding and cleaning task. They benefit from **structured interaction**, training sessions, and space to make choices. Beak strength and size require handlers to be confident and respectful of body language.

## **Enrichment**

Macaws require more than toys—they need a **lifestyle** that supports curiosity, learning, and problem-solving.

### **Effective enrichment strategies include:**

* **Foraging toys** that require manipulation or disassembly to access food
* **Destructible items** such as cardboard, untreated wood, palm leaves, or paper
* **Training sessions** using positive reinforcement to teach behaviors and tricks
* **Rotating perches and climbing opportunities** both in and out of the cage
* Structured **out-of-cage time**, ideally in a bird-safe room or with a play stand
* **Social interaction** through conversation, song, or dancing (yes, many do!)

Rotate toys and enrichment opportunities frequently—boredom leads to stress in birds this intelligent.

## **Health & Veterinary Care**

Macaws are prone to several health concerns—some preventable with good husbandry, others related to their size and long lifespan. Regular veterinary care is critical.

### **Common Health Issues**

* **Feather destructive behavior (FDB)**, often from stress, boredom, or dietary issues
* **Hypovitaminosis A** in birds fed seed-heavy or imbalanced diets
* **Obesity**, particularly in birds with low activity and access to fatty treats
* **Respiratory infections**, especially in homes with poor air quality
* **Beak malocclusion or overgrowth**, sometimes secondary to poor nutrition or lack of chew stimulation
* **Proventricular dilatation disease (PDD)** and **Aspergillosis** in susceptible individuals

Macaws are also **masters of disguise**—they often hide illness until it’s advanced. Signs to watch for include changes in droppings, reduced appetite, fluffed feathers, reduced vocalization, or new aggression.

At YVC, we recommend **annual avian wellness exams**, including physicals, fecal screening, and often routine bloodwork for birds over five years old.

## **Facts & FAQs**

* Macaws are among the **longest-lived parrots**, with many exceeding 50 years
* Not all macaws talk, but most are **loud and expressive**—not ideal for apartment living
* They **require a significant time investment**—these are not low-maintenance birds
* A well-socialized macaw can be gentle and affectionate but must be handled with **confidence and respect**
* They benefit from having **predictable routines**, especially around sleep, feeding, and play

## **Supplies Checklist**

* Oversized stainless steel or powder-coated cage (48"x36"x60" minimum)
* Natural wood and varied perches
* High-quality pellet food, fresh vegetables, and approved nuts
* Foraging and destructible toys (rotated weekly)
* Water and food bowls cleaned daily
* Play stand or designated out-of-cage area
* Travel carrier (large enough for comfort and ventilation)
* Nail and beak maintenance tools (if appropriate)
* UVB or full-spectrum lighting (if indoors)
* Air purifier and/or humidifier as needed

*Yarmouth Veterinary Center*