



# Ask Polly

by Carolyn Swicegood, Hollywood, FL

"Ask Polly" is a new feature of the Wing Tips column and it will be published in every other issue of Watchbird. The featured topic for this issue is "Safe Birdkeeping." Future issues will cover such topics as feeding, cage cleaning, bird bathing, travel with birds, and other topics of interest to bird owners. Please send your questions and suggestions for tips and topics to be addressed in future issues by Email to:

**WingTips@Landofvos.com**

or by U.S. Postal Service regular mail to AFA WATCHBIRD, Wing Tips, PO BOX 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079-6218. Thank you in advance for your questions and ideas and I hope that these and future helpful hints will make life easier for you and better for your birds.

## Safe Birdkeeping Tips

- Bird owners must be aware of the dangers of Teflon (PTFE) and other name brand non-stick coatings on cookware and other items. When it is heated to medium high temperatures, it releases a gas that is deadly to birds. PTFE is also in some new appliances, space heaters, ranges, ovens, heat lamps, irons, griddles, bread makers, woks, waffle makers, electric skillets, crock pots, popcorn poppers, coffee makers, roasters, curling irons, and hair dryers, and more. Check labels before purchase.

- PTFE-treated burner liners or bibs on your range are dangerous with normal usage. One such bib under a burner set on high can kill all the birds in your home.

- Walnut shell litter and corn cob litter can cause impaction if ingested by birds, and they harbor fungal spores when wet and soiled.

- Foods that are dangerous to birds

are avocado, guacamole, chocolate, cocoa, and the pits of apricots, peaches, plums, prunes, and Cheri Moya fruit. Alcohol, caffeine, and foods containing large amounts of salt, sugar, preservatives, and artificial coloring also can be toxic to birds.

- Do not allow your birds access to toxic metals such as lead, zinc, copper, and iron. Some sources are house keys, (especially gold colored ones), galvanized wire, lead-based paints, paints with zinc, linoleum, vinyl mini blinds, foil from champagne and wine bottles, lead weights, bells with lead clappers, stained glass, improperly-glazed ceramics, costume jewelry, mirror backing, copper pennies, zinc oxide, artist paints containing toxic cadmium, and cardboard or paper with high gloss inks.

- Cats and birds do not mix. The slightest cat scratch will infect birds with *Pasteurella* bacteria and vet treatment must be started within four hours to save the bird's life. Never allow birds and other pets to interact without close supervision.

- Wing clips should be checked on the first day of each new month to prevent flight-related accidents and escape into the outdoors.

- If your birds are flighted, be extra vigilant about ceiling fans, open windows and doors, hot pots and pans, hot stove burners, open containers of water (sinks, toilets, tubs, boiling water), poisonous or thorny houseplants like cactus, electrical wires, and any toxic substances that birds can reach.

- If you keep birds in your kitchen, remove them to a safe area when cooking. Smoke from burned foods and overheated oil has caused the death of birds.

- All new and used toys should be cleaned and examined for loose parts that could lodge in your bird's throat, as well as loose strings and threads that could trap and cut off circulation to necks, legs, and toes. Replace key rings, spring clips, and regular quick links with stainless steel quick links.

- Do not use cedar, redwood, or other toxic woods (nor pressure treated wood) for aviaries or shavings. The aromatic fumes of cedar can be dead-

ly. Aspen and pine are better choices.

- Keep all houseplants out of the reach of birds. Here are only a few of the poisonous houseplants to avoid: Azalea, Oleander, Castor bean, Sago palm, Yew plants, Dieffenbachia (Dumb cane), Asparagus fern, Daffodils, Flower bulbs, Impatiens, Mistletoe, Poinsettia, Philodendron, and potato sprouts or "eyes."

- Electronic nursery monitors sold for use in infant nurseries cost \$20-\$30 and can be used in bird nurseries and aviaries to alert the owner to unusual sounds. If the monitor is used around the clock, it can be as effective as a watchdog in the prevention of wild animal attacks, theft, and vandalism. No matter how soundproof your home might be, the monitor will alert you to disturbance in outside aviaries. The sounds of chicks hatching can be heard if the monitor is placed near nest boxes. Nursery monitors are the next best thing to closed-circuit TV monitors which are useful but which cost from \$200-\$400.

- You might save the life of your bird by preventing their access to the following miscellaneous items:

- Aluminum cooking bags
- Automatic dishwasher detergent
- Bleach
- Carpet freshener
- Cigarettes and cigarette smoke
- Cleaning solutions
- Coffee grounds
- Chocolate candies
- Epoxy glue
- Essential oils
- Ethylene glycol (antifreeze, film)
- Flea collars and sprays
- Furniture polish
- Homemade play dough (toxic levels of salt)
- Leather protectant sprays
- Linoleum (contains lead)
- Matches
- Mothballs
- Medicines (both prescription and over the counter)
- Oven cleaners
- Personal care products
- Pesticide strips, sprays, foggers
- Pine oil cleaners
- Plant spikes and all fertilizer
- Plug-in air fresheners
- Potpourri oils

- Poisonous plants (inside and outside)


- Spray starch
- Tea tree oil (Melaleuca)
- Thermometers (contain mercury)

- Keep veterinary and hotline numbers near your telephone and advise all family members and bird sitters what to do in the event of an accident or poisoning.

- Pet owners seeking immediate help for pets exposed to poisons or other toxins can call the National Animal Poison Control: 800 548-2423--\$30 per call. Or 900 680-0000; \$20 for the first 5 minutes, \$2.95 for each additional minute.

- For consultation services about animal poisoning call The ASPCA National Animal Poison Control Center at 888 426-4435.

For online information about the ASPCA/NAPCC visit the web site at <<http://www.napcc.aspc.org>>.

Please help to educate other bird owners on bird safety. 

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