

African Grey Parrot Species Profile: Diet, Intelligence, and Housing

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff



Described as the perfect combination of brains and beauty, the African Grey is one of the more popular parrots kept by the aviculturist. *Psittacus erithacus erithacus*, the Congo African Grey, is the most common, while *P. e. princeps* is the least. Their pale head and grey body is strikingly offset by their brilliant red tail feathers.

Typically, the African Grey is shy and reserved. With early and prudent handling, they will become trusting and affectionate, although not as demonstrative, per se, as some of the other small to medium parrots.

African Greys are probably best known for their amazing ability to mimic not only the human voice but also an impressive array of environmental sounds. A Who's Who of African Greys includes Prudle and Alex. Famous for mimicry or intellect, Prudle holds the Guinness Book of World Records for the biggest vocabulary, at 800 words, while Alex, incredibly, exhibited what can only be called cognitive abilities - he could talk, count, and...read a little.

With plenty of early stimulation, most African Greys will start speaking after one year of age. Even if your African Grey only maintains a handful of words in her vocabulary, it is certain you will share an entertaining and interactive life with one of these very special members of the parrot family. Average cost of an African Grey is \$1,000 - \$1,500.

Quick Stats: African Grey Parrot

Family: Psittacine

Origin: Lowland forests of central Africa; Guinea Is., Kenya, Tanzania

Size: Congo African Grey; 12" to 14"
Timneh African Grey; 9" to 11"

Coloration: Predominately grey; white around the eye; short red tail feathers.

Diet: 65-80% quality pelleted diet, 15-30% vegetables (e.g., greens, legumes, corn-on-the-cob), 5% fruits, and an occasional nut. Use many varieties of fruits and vegetables, washed thoroughly. No avocados or fruit pits. See [Basic Nutrition for Psittacines \(Parrot Family\)](#) for more information.

Cage Size: Minimum 30" H x 30" L x 30" W

Grooming: Trim flight feathers, beak and nails as needed.

Compatibility/Disposition: Shy and cautious, especially around strangers. Tend to bond to one person.

Vocalization: Considered the best mimic of all parrots.

Playfulness: Extremely intelligent. Require a great deal of attention to satisfy emotional needs and provide mental stimulation.

Life Span: 50-70+ years

Age at Maturity: 3-5 years

Nesting Sites in the Wild: Tree hollows and cavities.

Breeding Season: Depends on habitat location; summer months (July-September) or during dry season (Nov.-Feb.).

Sexing: Reliable only via endoscopy or DNA sexing.

Special: Quieter (scream less) than most other parrots. Sensitive to dietary calcium/phosphorus imbalance.

Increased susceptibility to [Psittacine Beak & Feather Disease \(Pbfd\)](#) and [Psittacine Proventricular Dilatation Syndrome \(PPDS\)](#).

(Sadly, Alex, the African Grey Parrot passed away in 2007.)