

Airline Travel with Your Bird: Requirements and Recommendations

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

At times, pet owners find themselves forced to make travel decisions involving their pets. Sometimes finding accurate information about the "how-to's" and requirements is difficult, especially when that pet is a bird. By following this list of recommendations, your planning and trip should be simplified, and hopefully, stress free, and enjoyed by both you and your bird.

What to do before the flight...

- Contact the airlines first, making sure they 1) accept birds in the cabin and 2) to make an advanced reservation for your bird if they do. Most airlines will only allow two pets of any kind in the cabin per flight.
- Purchase an airline-approved cage that will fit under the seat in front of you. If you have a bird that is too large to stand upright in a cage of this size, you will have to either purchase a seat for your caged bird (if the airlines allow this) or look into having it shipped by a company familiar with specialized shipping requirements. Be sure the cage has a very secure latch.
- Firmly attach a rough-surfaced perch such as rope or natural wood, toward the front of the cage. A food dish can also be attached to the door.
- Familiarize your bird with this new cage before traveling.
- Clip your bird's wings and nails. This will make it easier for you as the handler and prevent an unfortunate loss if your bird somehow "escapes" in the airport.
- Fortify the diet with stress-formula vitamins and minerals for a week before, during, and a week after traveling.
- Obtain a health certificate for your bird within 10 days of your departure. The health certificate is valid for 10 days. If you will be staying at your destination more than 10 days after the date of issue of the certificate, you will need to obtain a second health certificate for your return trip. Check if the airlines have additional requirements. Understand that the requirements to return to your country may be different than those to leave it and travel to another. There may be more stringent quarantine restrictions upon your return. In the United States, if you wish to take your bird abroad, you must obtain all necessary documents from USDA and the Department of the Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before departing the United States. The telephone number is 301-734-3277.
- Clearly label the cage with a "live animal" sticker as well as your own personal identification, including where you can be reached at your destination.
- Do NOT line the bottom of the cage. Given today's security issues, you may be asked to remove your bird and all the contents from the cage if the bottom is not clearly visible.
- Do NOT ship on a connecting flight. If you must ship your bird separately, use a direct flight whenever possible and ship "counter to counter." This way, your bird will not be left in a drafty and cold, or hot cargo area waiting for your pick up. Rather, it will be taken inside the airline terminal to the ticket counter.



Just before leaving...

- Plan to arrive at the airport at least two hours early, but check with the airlines... it may be earlier.
- Confirm your flight (and all connections).
- Give your bird plenty of opportunity to drink water.
- Put fresh, watery fruits and vegetables in the food dish. Good choices include watermelon, cantaloupe, red or green grapes, red, green, or yellow peppers (not the hot kind), and cooked acorn or pumpkin squash. (If your bird is not used to these foods in its diet, start to slowly add them to the diet in the week before you leave.)

What to do at the airport...

- Inform the ticket counter at check-in that you have a pet, with a reservation. Present the health certificate, if requested, and keep both the health certificate and receipt for your bird's travel together and close at hand.
- Request that your bird be "hand" searched with a wand rather than x-rayed if this becomes necessary.
- Remain calm at all times and be as helpful as possible. Many airline and security personnel are under stress, as well as being unfamiliar with birds.
- Stay with your bird as long as possible if shipping separately. This will relieve stress for both you and the bird.

- Double-check all identification material and stickers on the cage.
- Confirm flight arrival for your bird if shipped separately and be prompt to pick her up at the arrival counter.

Once on board, airline personnel will instruct you as where to stow the cage. If small enough, it will generally go under the seat in front of you. Drape one of the light airline blankets loosely over the cage, except in front, to prevent drafts from reaching your bird while still allowing for circulation.

If you are traveling with a large bird and have purchased a separate seat, strap the cage into the seat securely with the seat belt by weaving the belt through two or three bars on both sides in the front of the cage before engaging the clasp. Drape the cage with the airline blanket (unless you have brought along your own cage cover).