

Lovebirds – each day is Valentine’s Day

INSEPARABLES

In some places, registry offices stay open a few hours longer on Valentine’s Day, the 14th February, as many couples want to tie the knot on “Lover’s Day”. Man and wife don’t always live up to their promise: to love and obey “till death us do part”. A far better example is set by the “Inseparables”. No, these are not fictional heroes but a type of parrot – the genus *agapornis*. Shortly after puberty, the birds search out a partner with which they will then bond for life. “That’s why in English they are called “lovebirds”, explains Dr. Lioba Schaeztz, a vet with the specialist retail chain Maxi Zoo



with Maxi Zoo

COLOURFUL PLUMAGE

The plumage of these inseparable creatures is as colourful as the flowers which the kindly monk Valentine supposedly gave away from his garden in the 3rd century: mainly a green base colour with a contrasting colour in the head. Even the names of the different varieties bear witness to this multiplicity of colouring: red-faced, black-cheeked, peach-faced, grey-headed, orange-headed, green-headed, strawberry-headed, sooty masked or mountain parrot. The three first mentioned varieties are the most loved by parrot enthusiasts. They are also easy to look after and breed so far from their homelands in Africa and Madagascar.

LOOKING AFTER THE INSEPARABLES

Apart from a steady partner, the little parrots need a cage big enough for short flights. For two to four birds it should measure at least 120 x 100 x 60 cm (width, height, depth). There are special room variations available – it’s important here that the bars are not spaced too far apart (max. 16 mm). They need to be able to fly freely around the room once a day. Even if these creatures don’t need a human playmate, they still like to be occupied. See-saws, swings, ropes, rings and natural twigs or branches which they can play around on and nibble are all suitable for keeping them busy. And don’t forget a bowl of water for them to bathe in. So that the inseparable couple can see the true colour of their surroundings, a daylight lamp is recommended for birds – above all if they are to be kept in their cage the whole year round. This is because window glass filters UV radiation out of the natural daylight - that doesn’t alter the colour spectrum for us, but it does for the parrots. You can find more information on feeding *agapornis* at: www.maxizoo.ie

PAIRED FOR LIFE

In the wild, these eternal couples live together in groups. Anyone looking to acquire these little parrots must make the effort to find a mixed-sex pair. These lively birds become aggressive and loud when they have to live alone - something to be avoided at all costs. As a pair, they never stray from their partner’s side, canoodling all day long. They can also be very aggressive towards other bird species and for that reason shouldn’t be kept together with other birds. “Best thing is to find a pair of the same *agapornis* variety, something like a red-faced male and female”, advises Dr. Schaeztz. But be careful: with some varieties, like the red or peach faced ones, they can look like twins: the plumage of the male and female appears identical and one has to know exactly how to determine the sex. Several pairs of different varieties will get on just fine - provided they have enough room. The one exception: peach-faced birds can sometimes react aggressively towards their life-partners... and by the way: should one bird die, a replacement should be sought quickly – loneliness is just as undesirable!

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