



BIRD SIZE-O-METER

HOW TO CHECK YOUR BIRDS SHAPE

- Getting hands on is key. Not all birds are used to being handled but it is difficult to judge if your bird is the right weight by sight. You will need to gently feel your bird, using restraint if necessary.
- Use bare hands and not gloves to handle birds as then you can judge the tightness of grip. If you need to protect yourself – use a cloth or towel.
- Small birds can be held in one hand with the neck between the first and second finger and the bird's back against the palm so that the wings and body are gently restrained in the closed hand.
- Larger parrots may take two people, one to hold the bird and the other to assess its body condition. A towel or cloth is used over the open hand to grasp the bird firmly behind its head and neck. The towel is then wrapped around the wings and body to prevent flapping. Gently stroking the top of the head and talking to the bird gently will help to calm it.
- Gently run your fingertips down the centre of the front of the bird in the midline over the breast area. You should be able to feel a bony ridge (known as the keel or breast bone). This should be easy to feel but not too prominent.
- Next, run your fingers at right angles to the keel across the breast muscles. If these feel shrunken so that the keel sticks out prominently your bird is too thin. If the breast muscles are just rounded but you can still feel the keel your bird is in good condition. If you cannot feel the keel and the muscles are very rounded or you can feel or see fat moving underneath the skin your bird is overweight.
- The breast muscle can also vary in size depending on how much exercise your bird gets – so if it flies a lot it will have larger firmer breast muscles than a bird who does not fly. However, the same criteria still apply in assessing body condition – prominence of the bony keel and presence of fat underneath the skin.

Size-O-Meter Score:	viewed from above	skyline view of breast bone and muscle	Characteristics:
1 VERY THIN			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast bone is very sharp to the touch • Loss of breast muscle and no fat cover
2 THIN			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast bone is easily felt and sharp • Loss of breast muscle and little or no fat cover
3 IDEAL			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breast bone easily felt but not sharp • Breast muscle rounded
4 OVERWEIGHT			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure is needed to feel the breast bone • Well rounded breast muscle and some fat cover • May see some fat below where breast bone ends
5 OBESE			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very hard or not possible to feel the breast bone • Very rounded muscle and possible to feel or see fat moving under the skin. • Fat also obvious below where the breast bone ends



BIRD SIZE-O-METER



CHECK OUT OUR TOP TIPS FOR FEEDING YOUR BIRD.

YOUR BIRD SCORE:

RESULTS:

VERY THIN

1

A score of one suggests that your bird is very likely to be underweight. Your bird may have a naturally lean physique but we would recommend you speak to your local vet to rule out any underlying medical reasons such as kidney disease. If your pet is healthy, but otherwise underweight, your vet is likely to advise some dietary and lifestyle changes.

THIN

2

A score of two means your bird is thin and potentially underweight. Your bird may have a naturally lean physique but we recommend you speak to your local vet for a health check up. If your bird is healthy but otherwise underweight, your vet may advise some dietary and lifestyle changes.

IDEAL

3

Congratulations your bird is in ideal body condition! This is great news, as being at ideal weight increases the chances of your bird living a long and healthy life. To keep your bird in tip top shape, monitor its weight and body condition on a regular basis (e.g. once a month) and be careful what you and everyone else in the family feeds it. Remember any changes in lifestyle (e.g. reduced exercise, extra treats or other factors such as stress) can result in weight-change. To help you keep on track – check out our feeding and exercise tips.

OVERWEIGHT

4

A score of four means your pet is potentially overweight. Being overweight is unhealthy for birds as it can lead to a shortened life-span, atherosclerosis, heart and liver disease and other health complications. Please speak to your local vet for advice and a thorough health check-up. The vet will look for any underlying medical reasons as to why your bird may be too heavy. If there are no underlying health issues, a change of diet and lifestyle is likely to be suggested. Many vet practices run free weight management consultations led by the veterinary nurse, ask about these services when you ring to book an appointment.

OBESE

5

A score of five means your bird is likely to be obese and this can have serious medical implications. Being overweight is unhealthy for pets as it can lead to a shortened life-span, atherosclerosis, heart and liver disease and other health complications. Please speak to your local vet for advice and a thorough health check up. The vet will look for any underlying medical reasons as to why your pet may be too heavy. If there are no underlying health issues, a weight loss programme will probably be individually developed for your bird and should include diet and lifestyle changes.

- 1 Pet birds can get obese (fat) quickly if they are fed an improper diet, and especially in combination with lack of exercise.
- 2 The most common cause of obesity in parrots is feeding a diet that is too high in seeds (e.g. sunflower seeds) – these are high in fat and cholesterol and low in many essential vitamins and minerals, and lead to many health problems.
- 3 Although some smaller birds such as finches, canaries and budgerigars, will do well on a largely seed-based diet, larger parrots do not. Complete pelleted diets that are nutritionally balanced are widely available for most species of pet parrots and can be supplemented with a variety of fruits, vegetables and nuts. Different species will have differing nutritional requirements.
- 4 Consult your vet for dietary advice for your bird. Increasing Exercise:

INCREASING EXERCISE

- It is ideal to let your bird out of the cage at least twice a day to fly freely. Pet parrots can easily be trained and should never need to have their wings clipped. Flying is a key part of a bird's normal behaviour. Always make sure the area is secure. i.e. close all windows and doors, away from other pets that may harm them (e.g. cats and dogs).
- Where appropriate free flight in a large aviary outdoors is ideal. Exposure to natural sunlight is also very important for birds, as long as they do not get too cold. Indoors special UV lights for birds can be used.
- Parrots enjoy playing with toys and these should be used to provide mental stimulation as well as physical exercise.

For more information and details of how to perform the assessment and check your bird's shape please visit www.ukpetfood.org. In addition to providing useful tips on how to keep your pet healthy and happy, a team of veterinary nutrition experts are on hand to answer your pet nutrition questions in the 'Ask the Expert' section.