



A stable perch is essential to safe bird travel. Crystal Flight's Crystal Shuttle features a removable perch that sits near the carpeted floor of the carrier to prevent birds from slipping.

Innovative Bird Carriers

A proper avian taxi is essential for safe, comfortable bird travel. Here's a look at some carriers that fill the bill. By Julia Ann Charpentier

Most canine ears perk up at the phrase, "Let's go for a walk," but birds run more hot or cold on outdoor adventures. "Some birds love to travel, while some are scared of anything new," said Angie Yeung, president of Celltei, based in Brooklyn, N.Y. But even the most housebound birds need to see the vet or go out every so often, and since they can't just flap their wings to get there, a proper bird carrier is essential.

"The worst error a pet owner can make is assuming they don't need a carrier because they think they can safely hold onto the bird and restrain it," said Lisa Zierfuss, marketing manager for Prevue Pet Products Inc. in Chicago. "Retailers should stress the importance of a secure carrier by pointing out that anything—a sudden stop, a loud noise like a motorcycle revving its engine—could startle the bird and cause it to fly away."

Bird owners also should avoid makeshift carriers. A cardboard box is no match for a sharp beak, and a wire carrier with improperly spaced bars could lead to broken bones if a bird tries to escape.

A proper avian taxi is essential for safe and secure bird travel, and features like

visibility and ventilation can make trips more enjoyable for even the most nervous birds. Here's a look at some important travel considerations and some innovative products that address those issues.

Protection and Comfort

The greatest concern during travel is the safety of the bird—and that includes



Celltei's versatile Pak-o-Bird carrier can be worn as a backpack or carried like a tote.

safety inside the carrier. Watch out for sharp protrusions, breakable features, parts that could be destroyed and ways a bird might escape from a carrier, said David Veschio, owner of Crystal Flight (Flagstaff, Ariz.). And a stable perch is a must.

Crystal Flight's Crystal Shuttle, a clear acrylic carrier available in four sizes, has a removable perch. Fastened low and near the non-skid, carpeted floor of the carrier, it enables the bird to step down without getting hurt. "When you're moving, when you're traveling with a bird, he's going to get jostled. If he has to step off the perch, he loses his balance," Veschio said. "When he does step off [this], he's not going to slip."

The shuttle, which closes using a fabric fastener, is not suitable for air travel.

Prevue's Zierfuss agreed that stable perches and secure doors are the most important safety features, which is why Prevue's Small Bird Carrying Cage uses a durable plastic base and top-door access.

Bird carriers are usually marketed for large birds, such as cockatoos, Zierfuss said, but Prevue's Small Bird Carrying Cage is designed for canaries, finches and parakeets. "Some small bird owners think they can just hold onto their parakeet and keep it in their lap," she said. Remind customers that birds can be spooked by anything, and birds of all sizes need to be in a proper carrier to ensure safer travel.

Ventilation and Visibility

Making sure a bird can't escape during a trip is the first priority, but keeping



The Perch and Go from GaiTec Corp. provides visibility to help even nervous birds relax during travel.

CRYSTAL FLIGHT: CRYSTAL FLIGHT CORP. PREVUE PET PRODUCTS INC.; MICHIGNEY PHOTOGRAPHY

traveling birds comfortable and calm also is important.

For example, ventilation and visibility are key features in bird carriers that help birds feel less intimidated during outside excursions, said Bill McGrath, senior vice president for Catec Corp. (Baltimore). "Certainly one of the most important things in traveling with a parrot is maintaining a consistent routine and having the ability of 360 degrees visibility," McGrath said. "It's a big asset to the bird. It's similar to being in his cage where he can see all the way around him, so he tends to feel secure."

Catec's clear Perch and Go Travel Cage, made of polycarbonate rather than acrylic, lets the bird look out on the world but keeps it fully enclosed. "Way too often we see birds being transported in some kind of a wire carrier. The bird's in a strange environment, in strange circumstances. He's probably going to go nuts at some point," McGrath said. "It's way too easy to get a wing or a leg stuck through that wire and not be able to get it out and get injured."

The Perch and Go, which requires minor assembly, has an additional top perch and was designed for easy transport. "It's pointless to make something that doesn't fit in a Volkswagen or a Toyota," McGrath said. "It's pointless to make something that a woman can't pick up and carry."

Portable and Adaptable

The attachment and understanding between birds and their owners is



A proper bird carrier is important for all sizes of birds. The Small Bird Carrying Cage from Prevue Pet Products Inc. is designed for canaries, finches and parakeets.



The Poquito Avian Hotel serves as a temporary home for birds and fits in a travel bag that's sold separately.



special, perhaps more intense than the bond between cats and dogs and their human companions, said Yeung of Celltec. "Educated bird owners who love to do more with their birds are the type of consumers who constantly look for more products," she said.

She designed the Pak-o-Bird carrier to meet the growing demand for bird travel items. The outside features either nylon or stainless steel mesh and the carriers can be worn like a backpack, carried like a tote bag or worn around a person's stomach.

It's more than a backpack with a perch, Yeung said. It can function as a mobile home for short trips, with privacy curtains that can be rolled up or down. The carrier, available in various sizes and species-specific models, can also be placed in a stroller to accommodate elderly pet owners or birds with long tails.

"We designed Pak-o-Bird for all birds and multiple birds and various ways of carrying based on the owners' needs and required travel conditions," Yeung said. "We recognize that our product price is higher because of the complexity and skilled labor cost in making them and [we are] constantly improving the design. We love to see more bird owners enjoy life with their birds."

Temporary Lodging

Birds staying away from home will need something more than just a carrier. Some important rules apply here, too. For example, a temporary cage's bar spacing should mimic the bird's

home cage, according to Jim Wingate, vice president of product development for Midwest Homes for Pets (Muncie, Ind.).

The company's Poquito Avian Hotel, not intended for the travel portion of the trip, can be used as Polly's home away from home. Secure latches prevent curious pets from escaping, and no bolts or screws are needed for assembly. It folds down to fit in an accessory bag, sold separately, that also houses bowls, toys and food. The hotels accommodate birds from finches to large Amazons.

The Poquito's bottom tray slides out and fits on top of the hotel to create a makeshift recreation area. "So once you get to your destination and you want your bird to have a playground, you can put it on top," Wingate said. "It prevents seeds from getting into the cage and gives them a little bit more room to move around, which simulates the cage that they have at home."

Sales have been high, said Wingate. "It's for the people that really have a strong connection with their bird, where they treat them like family," he said.

Bird owners—especially the ones who don't take their feathered friends out much—need to understand the importance of security and comfort for traveling birds. Once they realize a quality avian taxi will offer a safer, more enjoyable ride, the temptation to grab a laundry basket, milk crate or cardboard box will diminish. ■

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