

The Pyrrhura Conure

Personality? Straightforward and "on" much of the time.

Outgoing? Yes—These are big birds in little bird feathers.

Affectionate? They let you know they want to be with you for kissing and cuddling—they are usually "touchy-feely" birds

Quiet? Relatively speaking.

Colorful? Definitely! What's your favorite color?



Where do they come from?

Conures are birds of the Americas, and the Pyrrhura conures can be found all over South America as well as Costa Rica and Panama in Central America, depending on which of the 17 species they are. They are forest dwellers for the most part and seem most comfortable playing and feeding high in the forest canopy. They are strong, swift flyers, gregarious, and sometimes quite raucous. Their wild diet consists of seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, some insects and their larvae.



What is their life span?

A life span of 25 to 35 years is possible; however, in captivity, it is usually much less due primarily to the hazards in the environment.

What do they look like?

Pyrrhuras are small, colorful parrots that range in size from 8.5" to 12" from head to tip of tail, depending on which of the species they are. Common characteristics are a broad bill notched in the upper mandible, a long gradated tail, a naked cere, and a ring of bare skin around each eye. Their basic color is a shade of green, and they may have a multicolor of flashy splashes of red, white, blue, or yellow. There are a good many color mutations developing, particularly in the green cheek conure, with catchy color names such as "pineapple" and "turquoise pineapple."

What's their personality like? Are they good companions?

The Pyrrhura can be described having an "attitude." A big bird in a little bird body, they are typically outgoing and adventuresome, curious and playful, unmindful that they may be tackling a much larger creature than they are. They are territorial and will not hesitate to try to run a larger bird (or dog or cat) out of their territory, sometimes with disastrous results to themselves! They are usually very tactile, craving bodily contact from their favorite person, and often treat the human body as their own private playground, from burrowing in

hair, to ducking under a shirt. Pyrrhuras can be excellent companions, affectionate (and demanding), relatively quiet, and entertaining to watch, as they acrobat around a cage or home, dangle upside down, and “attack” a toy. As with other parrot species, a handfed bird that has been properly socialized can be a devoted and wonderful companion. They need have contact with their “flock,” be it one person or a family, on a daily basis, and even when put in a “flock” of other conures, when they are brought back into the home, will usually become tame and friendly again.



Do they talk? Are they noisy?

Pyrrhuras are very expressive of their emotions with their own body “language” and vocalizations. You can usually understand what they’re feeling by observation and interaction. Some do talk, but usually only a few words, and their voices are as petite as they are. They pick up certain sounds, like a kissing sound, and will repeat it for your attention—like most parrots. They are not, however, as noisy as most of the South American parrots or the larger Austral-Asian birds.

What are potential behavior problems?

Similar to ALL hookbills (parrots), Pyrrhuras can develop negative behaviors, such as excessive screaming, manic activities, biting, and (rarely) feather-picking. Biting, as a consequence of not having the interaction rules established (if they’re not in a hormonal time), is probably the most common problem encountered with a companion Pyrrhura. Because they often have an “attitude,” and since they are territorial, they may resent other humans or pets, and appropriate behavior modifications need to be made, such as wing clipping and learning to step-up and step-down. In contemplating the purchase of any parrot, you need to do your homework and learn about parrots in general, and the species you are considering in particular, so that you can interact in the best possible manner for the happiness and richest relationship for both of you. Since these guys bond strongly, you don’t want to have to be passing them on to another home if you can avoid it—they depend on you and they are your responsibility.



Is a handfed baby always friendly? Do they bite?

Generally, handfed Pyrrhuras are friendly if they are properly socialized. Even when they exchange one situation for another, they will usually adjust pretty quickly, if handled with sensitivity and respect for their



personal space for a time. You woo them over with positive interaction—a gentle “getting-to-know-you” period. All parrots bite at some time—whether they’re going through the “teething” period after weaning, the testing period at adolescence, or when they’re upset (frightened, angry, and hormonal). There are proven techniques for modifying unacceptable behavior.

Is it better to have one or more Pyrrhuras?

Birds are naturally “flock” creatures, so if you have a single bird, you should provide a rich environment to prevent boredom and undesirable behavior. Many parrots are in single-bird households, and adjust fine. Generally, Pyrrhuras are possessive of their person and may maintain a better relationship with you if they are not paired. However, since they

must have interaction and touching, if you can't give that daily, then keeping two birds (of the same sex if you are not breeding) may be best. You can keep similar size birds in the same cage so long as they are compatible.

What type of cage and environment do they need?

Pyrrhuras need as large a cage as your space and budget allows—suggested 24x24x24. Perches should be of various sizes and shapes to allow some variety for your bird's feet. Sufficient toys (even some that you can switch out from time to time) will provide amusement and exercise. Educate yourself on which toys are safe and which ones aren't. The handmade toys are inexpensive and great, but they can also be hazardous (like rope that will untwine, wind around a foot or a neck, and cut off circulation or breath).

They love bells, but be sure they're bird-safe bells (no jingle bells or lead clappers). Pyrrhuras are active, intelligent birds, and like inquisitive children, need stimuli in their environment to channel excess energy into fun, "lively" activities. These guys love a good bath or shower, and you can mist them with plain water, or provide a "bathing bowl" in their cage. Since they want to be "where the action is," their cage and play areas need to be where their human family is. They also need a good night's sleep, so if your home is active until all hours, give them a quiet space in a corner to sack out. Sometimes covering their cage at night will provide privacy for them, but just as often, as long as something is going on around them, they will stay alert and watchful.



What do they eat?

Depending on what they're fed from the time they are small, Pyrrhuras love most fruits and vegetables and should have them regularly. A good maintenance pellet, a limited amount of seeds, and if possible, sprouted seeds (sunflower, mung, lentils, oats, wheat berries, etc.), will provide the rest of the diet. Cooked multiple bean mixes and birdie cornbreads are other good foods. Healthy table food in moderation is fine, but no caffeine (coffee, chocolate), very salty or sweet foods, or avocados. A cuttlebone or mineral block is suggested for additional calcium. No grit is required, but fresh water is a must. Because Pyrrhuras are active and "mouthy," like a human

toddler, they will taste just about anything. Many household plants can be toxic, so you'll need to control their environment.

What about grooming and vet visits?

Pyrrhuras are exceptionally strong flyers—miniature stunt planes! For their safety, their wings should be somewhat clipped to prevent accidents or escapes, but have a pro do it or show you how, so that you don't clip too short (where they "fall like a rock" and can crack their sternum), or too long (so they can get going and fly into a plate-glass window). Because of their streamlined build, it's more common to have a pyrrhura fly better than you thought it could, rather than the opposite. Nails should be trimmed as necessary (a separate concrete perch helps). It is rare that a beak needs trimming, and this should only be done under a veterinarian's instruction, as it can mean that there is a causal health issue. A yearly check with your



avian vet is recommended. As prey animals, birds tend to “mask” illness, so observe normal behavior and learn to recognize signs of illness and know how to contact your vet quickly.

What’s my commitment going to be?

Most parrots are fairly long-lived, and therefore a strong commitment on the part of the person buying the bird is required. It’s not quite as easy caring for an exotic bird as it is a dog or cat. If you are new to birds, please do your homework before bringing home your new baby. Birds require attention every day. They have very special personalities and requirements. If they are ignored, they can develop undesirable behaviors, and can actually go crazy. Your extra effort for these little angels will not go unrewarded, however. You will have many years with a very special companion!



What are the species in the United States? How much do they cost?

A few of the Pyrrhuras have color mutations, such as cinnamon, turquoise-blue, etc., and prices will vary according to rarity of species and color, as well as the part of the U.S. Following is a listing of the 10 species being bred in the United States right now. Most readily available is the normal green cheek.



- ◆ *Green cheek*: normal, cinnamon, yellowsided, cinnamon-yellowsided (pineapple), turquoise, cinnamon-turquoise.
- ◆ *Maroon-bellied*: very similar to the normal green cheek in coloration, but not as readily available.
- ◆ *Black capped*: normal, “Voren’s” (similar to yellow-sided green cheek in coloration), not common.
- ◆ *Painted*: very colorful, fairly rare.
- ◆ *Pearly*: very colorful, rare.
- ◆ *White-eared*: colorful, not common.
- ◆ *Fiery-shouldered*: colorful, rare.
- ◆ *Roseifrons*: colorful, rare.
- ◆ *Crimson-bellied*: very colorful, rare.
- ◆ *Hoffman’s*: rare.

Are there differences in species temperament?

Basic temperaments are similar; however, some species tend to be more laid-back, and some, more hyper. Temperament also varies among individual birds and is influenced by the environment in which they live.

Where’s the best place to find a Pyrrhura?

There are several sources—large and small pet stores, bird marts, large and small breeders. Ideally, the bird will come from a small breeder or store, and you will be able to find out about the bird’s background and personality, as well as have ongoing support for questions.

Where can I find out more about Pyrrhuras?

The Pyrrhura Breeders Association has enthusiastic breeder members [<http://www.PyrrhuraBreedersAssociation.com>], and the Pyrrhura Conures list [PyrrhuraConures@Yahoogleroups.com] has active, experienced members—both breeders and pet owners—who love to share their experiences with and their passion for these exquisite little gems.

