



Owner's Manual for Your Bird

Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital & Exotic Care, Inc.



About Us

Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital & Exotic Care, Inc.

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Drs. Bloss & Follett opened Brook-Falls Veterinary Hospital & Exotic Care Inc. in March, 2007. The owners take pride in selecting excellent staff and equipping the hospital with the latest technology to enhance patient diagnostics, comfort and care.

Our mission: To improve the health of our patients through a full understanding of their needs and education of their owners.

Table of Contents

About Us	1
Emergency Care.....	3
Avian First Aid and Emergency Preparedness.....	4
Veterinary Visit.....	5
Avian Bloodwork.....	8
Feeding Birds.....	9
Leg Bands and Identification	15
Wing Clipping	17
Beak and Nail Care	20
Bathing.....	23
Housing.....	24
Cage Hygiene	26
Toys.....	27
Household Dangers	28
Safe Plants for Birds to Eat	31
Toxic Plants	37
Recognizing a Sick Bird	40
Abnormal Droppings	42
Anorexia and Lethargy	44
Respiratory Disease.....	46
Excessive Egg Laying.....	48
Behavioral Problems	50
Behavioral Homework for Your Bird.....	54
Recommended Resources	59

Emergency Care

If you have an emergency on a weekend, holiday, or week night after 5 p.m. We recommend that you use the services of one of our local emergency clinics:



VCA Milwaukee Emergency Center for Animals (MECA)

3670 South 108th Street

Greenfield, WI 53228

(414) 543-7387 | www.vcamilwaukee.com



Blue Pearl Specialty and Emergency Pet Hospital

2100 W. Silver Spring Drive

Glendale, WI 53209

(414) 540-6710 | info.glendale@bluepearlvet.com

Avian veterinarians are staffed on limited basis, please call to see if one is available



**School of
Veterinary Medicine**
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

UW Veterinary Care

2015 Linden Drive

Madison, WI 53706

(608) 263-7600 | www.uwveterinarycare.wisc.edu



Avian First Aid and Emergency Preparedness

1. Be prepared

- a. Teaching your bird to accept a towel and be handled
- b. Teach step up and step down, being able to get out of the cage, into the carrier
- c. Accept a drink from a syringe
- d. Have needed supplies readily available
- e. Know your bird's normal!

2. Equipment and supplies to keep on hand

- a. Carrier or travel cage NEARBY! Can be just a plastic tub with cover, should have a perch.
- b. Towels
- c. First aid kit – bottle of saline solution, gauze pads, roll of gauze, vet-wrap, roll of paper tape, Q-tips, hydrogen peroxide, hemostat, small nail scissors, quick stop powder (not silver nitrate sticks!) or bleed-X powder.
- d. (Bleed-X hemostatic powder can be put on soft tissue, quick stop should not)
- e. Heating pad, blanket to cover carrier
- f. Gram scale (postage or food scales work great!)
- g. A week's supply of food and water – rotate this out so it does not expire

3. Important phone numbers kept in kit

- a. Local avian veterinarian - Brook-Falls (262) 781-5277 @ 148th / Lisbon in Menomonee Falls
- b. Local avian emergency hospital – VCA MECA (414) 543-7387 @ 108th / Beloit in Greenfield
- c. Have someone that can assist you!
- d. National Animal Poison Control Center – (888) 426-4435
- e. Avian boarding facility - Brook-Falls

4. Have a relationship with a vet with annual exams

5. Perform regular grooming/bathing

6. Assess the situation and triage- stable, acute, or critical?

7. Transport to the vet- call ahead! Make sure bird is secure in carrier and warm.

Emergencies:

1. Bleeding- from where? (Feather, nail, beak, skin) How much? How long?
2. Not eating- How long? Weight loss? Lethargy? Abnormal stools? Increased drinking?
1. Prolapse- cloacal/oviduct
2. Egg binding
3. Respiratory distress
4. Poisoning
5. Chemical/Heat Burns
6. Fractures

Veterinary Visit

Does my bird really need a check-up?

The most important visit is the very first one, right after you acquire your pet bird. A routine veterinary examination is recommended at least once a year. Your veterinarian may have very important reasons to see your bird on a different schedule so discuss it. The most important job a veterinarian has is to help ensure your pet stays as healthy as possible and hopefully never gets sick. This is called preventive medicine.

In the wild, birds endeavor to display a strong appearance even when sick. This is because predators will go after the weakest appearing bird in the group. By the time a bird actually shows an owner that it is unwell, it has likely or often been sick for some time. During the examination the veterinarian may pick up subtle signs of disease. By the same token, an experienced, observant owner will be able to detect symptoms early. Early detection of an illness is very important for a favorable outcome.

Make sure your bird's veterinarian is qualified to treat pet birds. Avian medicine has become a specialized part of veterinary medicine, and most general practitioners are not comfortable or knowledgeable in avian (pet bird) medicine. Ask the doctor about his/her qualifications. At a minimum, he/she should be a member of the AAV (Association of Avian Veterinarians). Some avian veterinarians are also board-certified which means that they have undergone extra training and passed an extensive review and examination process by their peers. Being board-certified in avian medicine and surgery indicates an advanced level of experience and commitment to the profession. They have taken extra measures to ensure that they are on the leading edge of avian medicine.

You can locate avian veterinarians through the website of the Association of Avian Veterinarians at www.aav.org.



What will the veterinarian do?

If possible, bring the bird in its cage so the veterinarian may assess the bird's environment, food, feeding arrangement and some of the droppings on the bottom of the cage. If this is the bird's first visit to the veterinarian then a lot of information will be gathered initially pertaining to you and more importantly, your bird. The age, sex, species, previous background the bird may have had, diet and length of current ownership will be recorded in the bird's permanent medical record.

Your veterinarian may discuss or give you information regarding *proper* diet and care of your particular species of bird.

Visiting the veterinarian can be a stressful event for a bird but it is necessary to ensure good health. We recognize how traumatic the experience can be and so we do everything possible to minimize stress to our bird patients. We appreciate your cooperation with us to make visits as stress-free as possible. If at any time during your visit you feel that your bird is becoming too stressed or not doing well, please alert the veterinarian or a staff member. We have a variety of techniques to secure your bird in a towel for examination and we will work slowly and cautiously with your bird to find the method that is the least stressful. For the safety of staff and your bird, we will almost always have a trained staff member restrain your bird for the veterinarian rather than have you hold them. Please let us know, up front, if your bird has any severe anxiety issues with toweling or restraint, or if there are special "tricks" for securing your bird for examination that will make it work as smoothly as possible. In some cases of severe anxiety, we may also recommend the use of midazolam, a mild sedative.

From the time you walk into the exam room, your veterinarian will observe the bird, first in its carrier and then while it is out of the cage interacting with you or the veterinarian. Attitude, posture, feathering, vocalizing, droppings, and physical condition are all noted. The bird's weight is recorded. The bird will then be gently restrained and a complete physical exam performed. Any abnormalities of the eyes, ears, nares, mouth, skin, feathers, beak, wings, legs, nails, vent, chest, and abdomen will be noted.

The beak and nails may be trimmed with a nail trimmer, small scissors or Dremel rotary tool, depending on the size of the bird. Wings are clipped at this time if requested by the owner. An AVID microchip can also be placed in the bird's breast muscles if requested. If present, the leg band will be checked and can be removed if requested or necessary.

Will any lab tests be done?

Your veterinarian will discuss the need for diagnostic testing with you depending on your bird's age, species, medical history, and what has been found on the examination. Wellness testing will provide further information important in assessing your pet's condition. Some tests are performed routinely on apparently healthy birds to monitor the current state of health of the bird and keep abreast of gradual changes to their health.

Blood Testing - Blood testing can include hematology and serum biochemical. Hematology checks the health of blood cells and can help detect certain types of infections. The serum biochemistry checks for function and damage of some key vital organs (liver, kidneys, pancreas).

Specific Pathogen Testing - Additional tests can be used to detect infection with Chlamydia (causes Psittacosis), polyomavirus, circovirus (Psittacine beak and feather disease), and many other pathogens.

of concern. Not all of these tests may be necessary and your veterinarian can help you select those most pertinent to your situation.

Fecal Analysis - Microscopic examination of the feces allows detection of internal parasites. This is only necessary in certain species under specific circumstances or when there are gastrointestinal symptoms present. As a general rule, most pet birds kept exclusively indoors, do not need this test performed.

Microbiological Testing - Stains of feces or oral/cloacal swabs can be used to determine the presence of abnormal bacteria and yeasts. Depending upon the findings additional tests such as a culture and sensitivity may be needed to determine the species of bacteria or yeasts and the proper treatment.



Medical Imaging - Using X-rays or ultrasound, the doctor can examine your pet's body for abnormalities in the size, shape, and position of organs, screen for masses, and check bones and joints. Foreign bodies in the gastrointestinal tract may also be visible. We can also use ultrasound imaging to check texture of organs and detect cysts and tumors. It can also be used to detect heart dysfunction. In some cases, more advance imaging such as CT (computed tomography) or MRI (magnetic resonance imaging) can be performed in cooperation with a local imaging facility. CT is a rapid process that can produce detailed 3D images in just a few minutes.

Anesthesia and Sedation - Many avian veterinarians recommend performing some or all of these tests under short-acting gas anesthesia, using an anesthetic like isoflurane. Your bird may also be given a short acting sedative injection. Most birds can be safely anesthetized for the short period of time needed to perform the diagnostic testing. It is usually much easier and safer to perform certain procedures, such as x-rays, on birds under anesthesia, as they are not stressed out when anesthetized and stress is a major factor in sick birds dying when handled. A bird that is relaxed is easier to position during imaging which allows us to produce more useful diagnostic images.

Avian Bloodwork

We recommend performing routine blood work on all avian patients, both sick and healthy. This should be done annually for older birds, and every other year for younger birds to detect early disease. Bloodwork provides a complete picture of your bird's health that may otherwise not be found on a physical exam. Routine bloodwork consists of two components – checking a hematology complete blood count and evaluating chemistry levels within the body.

Hematology Blood Tests

The Complete Blood Count (CBC) is a test that provides measurements of red blood cells, white blood cells and platelets. The CBC is an important tool that can detect conditions such as anemia, leukemia and other blood disorders as well as assess stress levels, inflammation, infection and blood clotting capabilities.

- **Red Blood Cells (RBCs)** carry oxygen to the tissues of the body and transport carbon dioxide to be exhaled by the lungs. Anemia results when RBCs are not present in sufficient numbers. Determination of the cause of anemia is vital.
- **White Blood Cells (WBCs)** play a major role in your pet's immune system function. Normal baseline levels are very important to determine the importance of changes seen with infection or inflammation. Elevations noted without signs or symptoms can help us treat your pet more effectively.
- **Platelets** are a crucial component of the blood clotting system. Adequate numbers must be present to prevent or stop bleeding. Therefore, it is very important that platelet numbers are known prior to any surgical procedure being performed and to identify clotting issues before they become critical in non-surgical patients.

Chemistry Blood Tests

We use a VetScan® state-of-the-art, in-clinic laboratory system to evaluate your pet's overall health allowing us to provide you with immediate results. In some cases, we also submit blood to reference laboratories for additional chemistry tests. Chemistry and hematology blood tests are an important addition to a physical examination as they provide more details about how organ systems are functioning.

- **Phosphorus (P)** - Elevations, in conjunction with UA and Ca, can help prognosticate about kidney dysfunction and the threat of gout.
- **Amylase (AMY)** - Amylase can help in diagnosis of certain pancreas ailments.
- **Gamma glutamyl transferase (GGT)** - Elevations can be supportive of certain pancreas and bile duct diseases.
- **Creatinine kinase (CK)** - Elevations indicate damage to soft tissues such as liver or muscle
- **Bile acids (BA)** - Elevations indicate compromised liver function.
- **Uric acid (UA)** - Elevations indicate kidney dysfunction and the threat of gout.
- **Calcium (Ca)** - Depletions can lead to egg-binding and seizures. Elevations can help confirm reproductive activity.
- **Aspartate transaminase (AST)** - Elevations can indicate liver or soft tissue destruction (used in concert with CK to determine which)

Feeding Birds

Our knowledge of bird nutrition is constantly improving. As with all other animals, birds need a proper balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fat, vitamins, minerals and water. Different species of birds often require different foods.

Should I be concerned about what my bird eats?

Improper nutrition is a common cause of health problems in pet birds. Be sure that you are feeding your bird a diet that is appropriate for their species and health status. Dietary information given casually over the internet or from pet store personnel may not be optimal for your bird. Your bird's health depends upon how well it is fed. Please ask us for the best, most current information on proper diet for your bird

What does my bird naturally eat?

Depending on the species, birds will eat an assortment of seeds, fruits, nuts, berries, blossoms, roots, and vegetation such as leaf buds. Some birds even eat insects and their larva. They are known to raid farmer's crops, destroy sprouts, mature crops and bagged grain. The staple food items of a bird's diet often change with seasonal availability. Keep in mind wild, free-living birds are under higher energy requirements than those in captivity. This is because they have to fly, forage, and resist weather and temperature extremes. In captivity the same caloric intake may lead to obesity or other health problems.

What should I NOT feed my bird?

Seeds: Commercial seed diets tend to be high in calories for a captive bird and deficient in key nutrients such as calcium and vitamin A. This is compounded when a bird picks through the diet and selectively eat 1 Or 2 "favorite" types of seeds. Seeds are highly palatable and sought preferentially but, nutritionally, they are like giving candy to a child. Overconsumption leads to malnutrition.

With most pet parrots, seed is an optional part of the diet and must be limited. Individual seeds can be offered as training or foraging rewards. These rewards should be small enough that they are consumed in 10 seconds or less. This prevents disrupting the flow of training and limits the amount of seed that can be consumed. For many birds, a safflower seed, small (fingernail-sized) millet bunch, tiny peanut fragment, or grey-stripe sunflower seed is a perfect reward.

Other items to avoid include iceberg lettuce as it is mostly water and has little nutritional value. Avocados should be avoided because of the high fat content and because some of its parts are known to be toxic. Many houseplants can be toxic also. For a list of toxic foods and plants to avoid, check toxic plants section later in this booklet.

Take your bird's FAVORITE food, usually sunflower seeds, pine nuts, or other nuts, and ONLY give that to them when you are training your bird. Think of the power of that treat and how much easier it will be to train your bird!

What Should I Feed My Bird?

The following covers most pet parrots, but does NOT include lorries or lorikeets or other non-parrot species. For any other types of birds, please consult us directly for current recommendations.

Most pet parrots should ideally have 2 dishes for food in their cage. One should contain a formulated (aka pelleted) diet. In the other bowl, a simple selection of one or two vegetables (not grains) are supplied daily. Appropriate vegetables include broccoli, green beans, carrots, squash, or greens. Water should also be supplied, either in a bowl or other watering device (e.g., sipper bottle). Sipper bottles or watering nipples must be cleaned and checked daily for proper function. For your bird, I recommend offering a formulated pellet free-choice, and providing one or two vegetable (not grain) selections daily. Vegetables should be fresh or thawed-from-frozen. If your bird does not currently eat a formulated pellet, be sure to consult with a veterinarian before converting. Birds should be reasonably fit before radical changes in diet are committed. Conversion also requires training your bird that pellets are good food. The goal for most parrots is to receive approximately 80% of their diets as a formulated diet and 20% as vegetables. Exceptions to this rule of thumb are eclectus parrots, which should probably receive at least 50% of their diet in vegetables. Also, some color-mutation cockatiels (esp. lutinos or albinos) often require more seed in their diet but your veterinarian can help determine if this is appropriate for your bird.

Formulated (aka Pelleted) Diets

“Pellets” refers to a variety of commercially-made formulated diets available for pet birds. They are considered ideal because they have all the ingredients of a balanced diet in a form that does not allow favoritism and selective ingestion of ingredients. There are a variety of formulated diets and they come in many shapes and colors. Some pelleted diets do not resemble pellets at all and instead look like crumbles, cubes, or fruit-colored cat food. Another type of formulated diet is made from hulled seeds that are clustered together with a molasses and vitamin mixture (e.g., Lafeber’s Nutriberries). These do provide complete nutrition and can be attractive options for birds that resist transition to other formulated diets.

Examples of formulated (pelleted) diets that we recommend for a maintenance diet:

- Harrison’s Adult Lifetime (coarse or fine)
- Zupreem Fruitblend or Naturals
- Lafeber Nutri-Berries or Pellet-Berries
- Lafeber Pellets
- Roudybush Daily Maintenance
- TOP Organics, TOP Organic Pellets (not seed mixes)

Fortified Diets to Avoid

There are also “fortified” seed diets but these do not provide a balanced diet since the birds select out their favorite seeds and any fortified coatings are removed when with the seed hull during consumption. Many of these seed diets also contain pellets but they are poorly made and few birds actually eat them, particularly with the presence of tastier items—meaning much of the diet is wasted. For these reasons, we recommend avoiding these types of whole-seed diets.

How do I convert my bird to a pelleted diet?

For successful conversion, it is important to realize that we are CHANGING BEHAVIOR, not just offering food. To some birds, a formulated pellet will not look like food. Furthermore, if they are older birds, they have very firmly set routines in their life and may be reluctant to try new things. However, parrots

are flock birds and will try new foods that their flock members show an interest in. So, to get your bird to try new foods, you have to make a ROUTINE of sharing those foods with your bird and CONVINCING them that you are interested in them. Set aside time every day to work your bird, play with or eat the new food items, and don't give up, even when your bird does not show interest for several days.

Cockatiels or budgies: It may be important to have your bird's wings clipped unless they are very tame in order to maintain the bird's focus on you. Spread a variety of choices of pellets out on a table surface covered by a towel and set your bird amongst them. Use your hand to simulate a scratching and pecking flock member. Pick at the pellets, crunch them in your fingernails, and flick them about. Do this daily as it must be seen as a regular flock behavior. During the introduction period, offer pellets in a separate bowl from the old diet. Once your bird begins to eat the pellets consistently, you can replace its old diet. You may also find that using smaller pieces or varieties of pellets will be more readily accepted and you can later increase the size you feed. You may want to simulate foraging, using your fingers, in the food bowl in the cage as a final conversion training method as well. Since these species are ground-feeders, it may help to offer the pellets on the floor of the cage or in a flat dish instead of in a bowl. Even then, be sure to monitor your bird's droppings to ensure that they are eating well. Once the birds are regularly consuming a pellet diet you will notice changes in their droppings. The droppings will generally be larger and lighter in color than when on seed. If you only see scant, dark green feces or black feces, your bird may not be eating and will need to be offered its old diet again.

Lovebirds and small conures: It may be important to have your bird's wings clipped unless they are very tame, in order to maintain the bird's focus on you and your fingers. Have the bird stand on your fingers with your hand flat, palm up. Spread pellets out on your palm. Use the fingers of your opposite hand to simulate a scratching and pecking flock member. Pick at the pellets, crunch them in your fingernails, and flick them about. I recommend doing this exercise in the morning before the bird has a chance to eat other foods-- the time when they are most hungry. Do this daily as it must be seen as it becomes ROUTINE. During the introductory period, offer pellets in a separate bowl from the old diet. Once your bird begins to eat the pellets consistently, you can replace its old diet. You may also find that using smaller pellets will be more readily accepted and you can later increase the size you feed. You may want to do a similar exercise in the food bowl in the cage to direct their attention to the pellets there. Since these species are tree-top feeders, it helps to keep the dish of pellets up in the cage near their favorite perch. Even then, be sure to monitor your bird's droppings to ensure that they are eating well. Once the birds are regularly consuming a pellet diet you will notice changes in their droppings. The droppings will generally be larger and lighter in color than when on seed. If you only see scant, dark green feces or black feces, your bird may not be eating and will need to be offered its old diet again.

Larger parrots (Caiques, pionus parrots, senegals, cockatoos, grey parrots, macaws, Amazons, etc.): Place a dish of pellets and a dish of the old diet in the cage at all times. Once a day at a time when the bird is most hungry (typically first thing in the morning), bring the bird out and set them on a training stand or table. Play with the food in your fingers and eat some (or at least act like you are eating it). Do this for about 10 minutes and try to entice the bird to eat the new food. Do this at least once daily and don't give up. Some birds try the food quickly. Others require seeing it as a regular part of their routine before they eventually try it. Once your bird is picking up pieces and eating them, you can usually safely remove the dish of seed. Watch the droppings closely and if you stop seeing formed feces in the droppings then the bird may not be eating the new diet sufficiently yet and you will want to continue offering the seed and try removing it again later.

Other bird species: There are formulated diets made for almost any species of pet bird. If your bird is

not covered here, please call us and discuss the options available and how to convert your bird's diet.

Can I feed fruits and vegetables to my bird?

It is suggested that a selection of various fruits and vegetables be fed to your bird every day. They are a good source of carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. It is recommended that 20–30% of the diet should be fruits and vegetables. Dark, leafy greens plus yellow and red fruits and vegetables have the best nutritional value. Frozen-thawed or fresh vegetables are the most nutritious. Cooking can rob a food of some of its nutritive value but some birds do prefer the soft texture. Presentation is extremely important—the food needs to be presented in an appetizing form and be readily prehended (manipulated) with their beak. Small species such as cockatiels and budgerigars frequently show more interest in slivered or thinly-sliced raw vegetables. It can also help to clip slivers of vegetable (e.g., carrot) to the inside of the cage at perch-height. Larger species, that prefer to hold food in their feet, will respond better to cut pieces provided in a bowl or flat surface. There are individual preferences to how vegetables are cut, whether the skin is still intact, and whether it is cooked or raw. **DO NOT GIVE UP** in experimenting to find vegetables or presentations that suit your bird's tastes.

Will my bird get diarrhea from eating fruits and vegetables?

Because of the high water content of fruits and vegetables, owners are frequently concerned about "diarrhea". What you are witnessing is increased urine output, which is normal with high moisture consumption. You can also see odd colors (e.g., red colors from berries or tomatoes) and this is perfectly harmless. However, if you are ever concerned, simply stop offering vegetables for a day and see if the droppings resume normal colors and become less wet. Remember to feed your pet bird with the same common sense as you would for you and your family. Wash all produce well as birds are very sensitive to pesticides and other sprays.

What are the recommended fruits and vegetables to give my bird?

Some suggested food items include:

alfalfa	carrot tops	parsley (in moderation)
apple	cherries (not the pit)	parsnip
apricots	coconut	peaches
asparagus	coriander	pear
banana	corn	peas
beans (cooked) such as:	cucumber	persimmons
chick peas	dates	pineapple
kidney	dandelion leaves/flower	plum
lentils	dates	pomegranate
lima	endive	potato
mung	fig	pumpkin
navy	grapes	rappini
soy	grapefruit	raspberry
beet	hot peppers	rice (brown)
bell peppers	kale	romaine lettuce
blackberries	kiwi	spinach
blueberry	lemon	sprouted seeds
bok choy	melons	squash
broccoli	mango	strawberry
brussel sprouts	mustard greens	sweet potato
cabbage	nectarines	tomato
cantaloupe	orange	turnip
carrot	papaya	zucchini

Water

Fresh clean water must be available at all times. Depending on the quality of your tap water, consider the use of bottled water. Dishes must be cleaned thoroughly every day with soap and water.

What about people food?

As a general rule any wholesome, nutritious food that you and your family eat, your bird can eat. Follow the general guidelines discussed above and use your *common sense*. Some birds even enjoy a small amount of lean cooked meat, fish, egg or cheese occasionally. Birds love pasta, tacos, pizza, etc. Dairy products should be consumed in moderation. It is common sense that *junk food*, chocolate, products containing caffeine and alcoholic beverages be avoided. Your bird will like to eat when your family sits down to dinner, especially if he can see the dinner table. Birds are flock creatures and like to eat together. Remember, you are your bird's flock!

Will my bird have any different needs throughout its life?

Birds that are extremely young, stressed, injured, laying eggs or raising young may have certain special requirements. There are specially formulated pelleted foods available for birds with specific nutritional requirements. Consult your veterinarian regarding these situations.

Do I need to use a vitamin-mineral mixture?

Does your bird need extra vitamins, minerals or amino-acids? Powdered supplement should be applied directly onto moist food. Placing these powders on seeds or dried foods is of little value since it will

ultimately end up on the bottom of the food dish and not in the bird. Liquid vitamins can be placed in the drinking water if it is changed daily. If a bird is eating at least 50% of its diet in the form of pelleted food it does not need supplements. Specific vitamins or minerals may be more important at various times during a bird's life (e.g. egg-laying requires calcium supplementation). Calcium supplements are available if your bird is determined to be deficient. Your veterinarian can help you assess your bird's diet and its particular needs.

Does my bird need gravel or grit?

Controversy exists over the need for gravel. It was once believed that grit was necessary for the mechanical breakdown of food in the gizzard as an aid to digestion. Birds do fine without grit. Some birds will in fact have problems if grit is over eaten.

RECAP OF FEEDING RECOMMENDATIONS

- For most parrot species, only pellets and vegetables should be presented in food dishes.
- Seeds and people food should be treated as special rewards for good behavior or for foraging. Such rewards should be small and quickly eaten.
- Always monitor the amount of food eaten every day by each bird.
- Offer fresh water every day.
- Offer fresh fruits and vegetables every day.
- Wash thoroughly all fruits and vegetables as if eating them yourself
- Clean all food and water dishes daily.
- NEVER place food on the bottom of the cage
- Refusal of a food item one day does not mean you should give up - KEEP TRYING!

Leg Bands and Identification

Why does my bird have a leg band?

Leg bands are often applied by the breeder to help identify and keep track of their birds. Breeders usually apply closed (solid) rings or bands at an early age when the small feet will fit through the hole. As the bird grows the bands cannot be removed unless cut off. This helps the breeder monitor the birds that are to be sold as well as managing the genetics of those birds to be bred together. Quarantine bands are placed on imported birds for regulatory reasons, these bands are often open (incomplete rings).

. Open bands may be put on the bird after determining the sex of the bird. Sexing bands are put on the right leg to indicate males and left leg to indicate females.

Tattoos

Some birds have tattoos under one of their wings. The tattoo indicates that the bird was surgically sexed using an endoscope. There will be a black patch or spot under the left wing if the bird is a female or under the right wing if it is a male. This practice has been phased out in recent years, particularly since the advent of genetic blood-based sexing in the mid-1990s and is rarely seen today.

Can a leg band be a problem for my bird?

For the most part, leg bands do not cause any problem. Leg injuries can be caused by leg bands when they get caught in the cage or toy hardware. Leg bands sometimes are too small and may cause constriction of the leg as it grows or if the bird has a foot condition that causes swelling. Some smaller birds may develop a buildup of dead skin between the skin and the band, which will lead to constriction. Injuries can include fracture of the leg, deep wounds, swelling, and even death and loss of the foot. A good rule of thumb for proper band fit is that it spins freely and slides up and down the tarsus (on parrots, this is the bare portion of the leg just above the toes). If the band cannot slide or if it can slide up over the ankle (the joint just above the tarsus) then it should probably be removed. Removal is painless and generally very easily done with a special band cutter. All leg bands should be checked regularly for problems.

Should I have my bird's leg band removed?

After sale of the bird, most leg bands have limited value and can be removed. Most are not registered in a centralized database so they DO NOT help with recovery of lost birds (exception: Aviculture Federation of America bands, identified by a special symbol on the band, can be registered but are not always). They can be important to keep on a bird if international travel or trips to Hawaii are a possibility. However, even in those cases, other permanent forms of identification, such as an implanted microchip, are perfectly acceptable. Microchips ARE registered centrally and do help in recovery of lost or stolen birds.

Ask your veterinarian for advice and never try to remove a leg band at home as it is easy to injure your bird. Have your veterinarian assist you safely to prevent injury to your bird.

How else can I identify my bird?

Passive Radiofrequency-Identification (RF-ID) microchip technology has been available since the 1990s in the veterinary marketplace. It has become ubiquitous to the point that almost every clinic and animal control shelter possesses scanners that can quickly confirm the identity of a pet. By working with the microchip company, they can contact the registered owner and reunite a lost or stolen pet all while maintaining the privacy of the owner. Microchips are about the size of a large grain of rice. They can safely be implanted into birds of about 80 grams or larger (e.g., cockatiels and up). The procedure is quick and can be performed right in the examination room. Smaller birds can also be implanted but require anesthesia or sedation. Microchips have a very limited transmission range and require the use of a scanner. The technology is not yet available for satellite or radiotracking small birds with microchips. However, since many lost or stolen birds do eventually end up in the hands of veterinarians or shelters, the likelihood of recovery is still promising.

There are currently two major manufacturers of identification microchips: AVID and Home Again. It is important to realize that microchips only provide a unique identification number. The number is registered to the purchasing clinic and to you. It is critical that you provide accurate information to the company. It is YOUR responsibility to update the information if you relocate. Visit the website of the manufacturer for information on how to update the information or give them a call:

AVID
<http://www.avidid.com/>
1-800-336-2843

Home Again
<http://public.homeagain.com/>
1-888-HOMEAGAIN (1-888-466-3242)

Genetic “fingerprinting” involves a small sample of blood your veterinarian can have tested to record the unique and specifically individual genetic code of your bird. No other bird will ever have this “fingerprint” and no one can remove it. This particular method is most important when evaluating a breeding bird to establish family bloodlines. Ask your veterinarian if this service is of interest to you.

Wing Clipping

Should I have my bird's wings clipped?

The purpose for clipping a bird's wings is to prevent sustained upward flight. When birds have their wings clipped, it should be done just to the amount required to prevent them from flying upwards out of reach and yet still allow controlled, soft landings. A good rule of thumb is that they are able to flutter down to the floor from shoulder height over a distance of less than 10-15 feet.

Reasons for clipping bird's wings include prevention of loss (e.g., flying away outdoors) or to prevent them from accessing areas of the house that are unsafe. Trimming the wings can also be beneficial for focusing the bird's attentions on the owner during the training or diet conversion exercises.

There are also good reasons for NOT trimming wings. These include birds that have disabilities that already make flight, climbing, or perching difficult (e.g., permanent disfigurement of the beak, legs, or feet). Also, birds that are obese should be trimmed conservatively, if at all, since they will be at higher risk for hard falls and because flight can be of benefit for exercising and reducing weight. Also, young birds, particularly those of species that naturally have small wings and heavy bodies (e.g., grey parrots and psittacids), should have their wings trimmed very conservatively, if at all. There can be serious behavioral and health repercussions in such birds if trimmed too aggressively at the age when they are learning to fly, climb, and developing their coordination.

What if I don't trim my birds wings?

If you choose not to trim your bird's wings then you must be prepared to spend time training your bird to return to you on command. This is called "Recall Training" and is vital for recovering your bird if it flies away outdoors and for controlling your bird when it is flying loose in the house. Recall training is a series of "baby steps" to teach your bird to come when called. The first step is to convert your bird's diet to a basis of formulated pellets and vegetables. With highly desired items, such as seeds, removed from the freely available diet, the bird will be more interested in coming to you for a treat. The rewards should be very small and easily consumed in less than 10 seconds. Next you present the reward with your outstretched hand—preferably with your hand flat and the palm up. The food can be held next to your hand or left in the palm or fingers. The first goal is for the bird to take the food from your hand while standing on a perch. As the bird takes the food, give your recall command. It can be words, a whistle, or a clicker. The sound should be clear and easy to reproduce loudly since you may someday be using it outdoors to get your bird's attention when it is far away from you. The command or signal must be given every time the bird does what you want but not given when it is not doing what you want.

After mastering taking food from you while on a perch, the next step is stepping onto your hand. From there the goal is a short hop to your hand, followed by short flights to your hand, and finally, flying across the room or the house to your hand. Please check out the training resources listed at the end of this book for more details on training. Remember, also, to have your bird microchipped just in case they should ever get lost. See the section on Leg Bands and Identification for more details.

How are wings clipped?

The outer 10 feathers of each wing, called the primaries, are the source of thrust for flight. The remainder of the wing flight feathers provides most of the lift that keeps the bird in the air. You could think of the primaries as the “propellers”. By reducing the size of those propellers, we will still have a bird that can flutter and glide downward but it won’t be able to climb very well. The wingtips also exert some directional control, simply because they generate thrust. Therefore, it’s important to keep wing trims reasonably symmetric. Otherwise the bird will tend to spin in flight. Also keep in mind that the ratio of a bird’s weight to wing surface area is important. It makes common sense that a heavy object needs more “parachute” than a lighter object. So a heavy bird with short wings (e.g., a grey parrot) should be trimmed less than a bird with larger wings and a lighter body (e.g., a cockatiel).

Feathers are trimmed to a consistent length. The flight feathers each have overlying “covert” feathers that cover the base of the feather on the top and bottom side of the wing. The upper coverts (top side of the wing) are longer than the coverts on the lower side. For this reason, we always use the upper coverts as our guide for trims. The feathers are cut at about 1 cm (approximately ½”) out from the tip of the upper covert. Cutting closer than this can create problems when the bird molts. Basically, the newly emerging feathers will have less protection and can be broken and bleed more easily.

We vary the extent of a wing trim by how many feathers we trim. The exact number varies by species, stage of development (age), and other individual health factors. Remember that it is always easy to take more feathers but very difficult to replace them once cut. Therefore, start out cutting fewer feathers, test the bird’s ability to fly, and then take more if necessary. Here are some basic guidelines for trimming:

GUIDELINES FOR TRIMMING WINGS	
<i>Please read the text here for details on how to safely trim wings. These are GUIDELINES only. It is recommended that you start with a low number, test your bird’s flight, and then trim more only if necessary. It is very important that you discuss wing clipping with your veterinarian and establish a method that is functional, safe, and aesthetically appealing for you and your bird.</i>	
Bird species/group	# of outer wing flight feathers (primaries)
Congo gray parrots, Senegals, other poicephalids, large Amazons	4-5
Blue-fronts and other Amazons, Timneh grey parrots, most macaws, pionus parrots, English budgerigars, lovebirds	5-7
Cockatiels, American budgerigars	6-8

Can I do it myself?

Yes, but care must be taken and it is advised that you have your veterinarian show you exactly how to clip and which feathers to cut. Always be mindful that new pin or blood feathers will bleed quite badly if accidentally cut. You may ask your veterinarian to clip the wings during regular health check-ups.

- Wing Clipping -

How often do I need to clip my bird's wings?

Wings need to be clipped again 6 - 10 weeks after the start of a molt cycle as new feathers grow back. It is advised to constantly check the wings of your pet since even a couple of new feathers in the right place can dramatically improve their ability to fly. NEVER assume your bird cannot fly. ALWAYS check it in the safety of your home over a carpeted or cushioned area.

To prevent full flight, the outer wing feathers (primaries) are clipped at a point 1-2 cm distal (out from) the upper wing coverts, as shown here. Typically 4-6 feathers is sufficient and will prevent the bird from falling hard. NOTE that the small covert feathers on the upper side of the wing are used as a guide –the underwing coverts are shorter and should not be used.

With heavy-bodied or short-winged birds, clip fewer of the outer primaries and/or keep them slightly longer. Grey parrots are a good example. In this case, 5 primaries were clipped at a point 3-4 cm out from the upper wing coverts.

Beak and Nail Care

How do birds normally maintain their beak and nails?

Birds normally care for their own feathers, nails, and beak. Excessive length or malformation of beak, feathers, and even nails can indicate health problems or may indicate that they are not being provided what they need to maintain them. The material that makes up the covering of the beak and nails is hard protein called “keratin”. It grows in dense, microscopic plates, similar to the structure of fine, hardened steel cutlery. Through normal wear, the plates flake away and leave an ever-sharper edge. Proper nutrition and a healthy liver are important to ensure the strength of the keratin. Deficiencies in either area will result in soft keratin that deforms or overgrows.

For beak maintenance, birds intentionally grind the upper and lower beak together during periods of rest. So long as the underlying bone structure is intact and their beaks are symmetric, a bird can normally maintain its own beak length. Injuries can make this impossible and require regular trimming. Otherwise, any excessive lengthening can be an indication of health problems and a veterinarian should be consulted. It is *not* advisable to ever attempt to trim the beak at home. The beak is highly sensitive and contains an underlying bone structure and can bleed or be painful if improperly trimmed. A veterinarian familiar with birds will trim or grind the beak properly during regular health examinations as needed.

Birds also bite and preen their nails to scrape away debris and excess keratin, leaving them sharper. In addition, climbing, foraging, and gripping perches tends to help wear away the nails and keep them shorter. Most wild birds are naturally very active during the day and would normally encounter a variety of perch textures and sizes in their wild environment. Birds in captivity also need to be provided a variety of sizes, firmness, and textures of perches. However, despite even providing a variety of perches, nails may still overgrow and require trimming 1-2 times per year.

Can I trim my bird's nails at home?

Yes, but it is important to be careful when trimming the nails. The **quick** is the blood and nerve supply that grows part way down the middle of each nail. In light colored nails it is visible as the pink area inside the nail. In dark or black nails the quick is completely hidden. When cut, the quick may bleed profusely. If you choose to attempt nail trims at home, have a clotting agent or styptic powder (e.g., Kwik-Stop, Bleed-X) on hand in case you do cut the quick.

Small bird nails may be trimmed with a human nail clipper. Larger birds require a stronger dog nail scissor or guillotine type nail trimmer. Nail trimmers should be sharp and clean. Dull, old blades will cause more trauma and pain. A rotary Dremel tool can also be used and tends to cause less bleeding and pain so long as it is only applied in short bursts (long, hard grinding will heat the nail intensely).

During trimming, restrain the bird securely. Toes that move into your trimmers or Dremel at the wrong time can be severely damaged. Nails should be trimmed a little at a time to help lessen the chance of bleeding. If you do small cuts each time the chance of a major bleed from the quick is substantially reduced. If bleeding does occur, remain calm and use finger pressure to pinch the toe just above the nail. This will slow blood flow while a clotting agent or styptic powder is applied into the cut end. Cornstarch or flour may be used in an emergency but is *not* an adequate substitute under normal situations.

Your veterinarian can trim the nails safely during regular health examinations and is prepared to deal with any bleeding should it occur. Some veterinarians may use an electric grinder on the nails of larger birds such as parrots, cockatoos and macaws.

What else can I do at home to help the beak and nails?

Do *not* use sandpaper perch covers as they do not keep the nails short and could cause sores on the bottom of the feet. Natural washed branches from non-toxic trees make great perches. Trees such as elm, apple, plum, pear, magnolia, citrus trees, and poplar are just a few suggestions. Leave the bark on for texture and chewing. They should be of varying sizes and provide the opportunity for the bird to grip or grasp the perch, not just stand on with open feet. Birds are less likely to slip off, startle or fall from perches that they can grasp tightly. Varying sized perches provide better exercise for the bird's feet. For larger birds, a ceramic or cement perch may be a beneficial aid in safely wearing the beak and nails down. Cement or ceramic perches have been observed to cause excessive wearing of the beak if used as the only or most frequently used perch in the cage. For smaller birds such as a finch, budgie, or cockatiel, cuttle bones, lava rock and mineral or iodized blocks may be helpful as a wearing surface for the beak. Mineral, cement, or ceramic perches must not be the only perch options available—remember to have a variety of perch sizes and textures for your bird.

Any changes in the rate of growth, color, texture symmetry or the way the beak or nail grows should be brought to the attention of your veterinarian immediately.

A high-speed (35,000 rpm) cordless rotary tool (e.g., Dremel) works well for reshaping nails.

Typical lower- speed models are not as desirable.

Great care must be taken to restrain the feet and prevent the bird from grasping the spinning tip or toe injury may result. Touching the Dremel for brief periods is recommended to prevent painful heating. Because only thin layers of nail are removed at a time, the risk of bleeding is minimal. Also, the powdered nail residue tends to clot any minor bleeding. Typical results, the foot on the left is yet to be trimmed, the foot on the right is finished. Remember that after trimming the nails, your bird's ability to grasp on tight will be diminished, particularly if they are riding on your shoulder or hand.

Bathing

Does my bird need a bath?

Bathing is very important to the proper preening or maintenance of feathers. All birds do it and most really enjoy the experience. In the wild a bird may bathe during a rain shower, find a puddle, lake, or stream to splash in or nuzzle playfully in wet grasses and vegetation. Bathing encourages healthy preening of the feathers, keeps feathers free of dirt, and preserves their wonderful, natural luster. Central heating and air conditioning tend to create a dry environment. Many of our pet birds come from moist rainforest environments so bathing or dampening your bird gently with a misting bottle is a very natural thing.

How often should my bird bath?

Birds should be offered a bath regularly. The frequency will depend on the bird. Many birds enjoy bathing every day, while others only bathe occasionally. Start by offering a bath to your bird once or twice weekly. You will quickly learn the bird's preferences. We must respect there will be times the bird does NOT feel like a bath. Your bird may have preferences such as the time of day it likes to bathe. It's best if the environment in the home is 60 F or more when bathing tropical species of birds.

How do I bath my bird?

The bird will do most of the work. You will simply supply the lukewarm water. Some birds enjoy using a dish of water. There are special bathing chambers that attach to the side of a small bird's cage and keep water from splashing about the room. A shallow sink of water is convenient, and many birds will frolic under a gentle trickle of water from the tap while dipping their head and fluttering their wings in the water. A clean spray bottle such as that used to mist plants can be utilized gently to simulate rain. Your bird may dance about excitedly with its wings in the air, tail fanned out and turning frequently to catch as much of this light rain as possible. Often you will tire of spraying before the bird tires of being sprayed. Some birds enjoy taking showers with their owners. We recommend that you acclimate them to the sounds and sights of the shower before bringing them into the water. This is easily done by having them perch just out of the splash zone (sitting on the shower curtain rod or a suction-cup mounted shower perch) for the first few times. If they do not seem frightened, you can gently cup water over them or splash them lightly. Care should be taken as *direct* water pressure in the shower may frighten or even hurt the bird. Some smaller birds such as finches and canaries will wet themselves on the moisture dripping from freshly washed vegetation in the cage such as carrot tops or other greens. *Please ensure you monitor a bird's bath time to help avoid accidents such as drowning.*

Birds only need clear, fresh water for bathing. Do *not* use soap on your bird. *Consult your veterinarian for specific directions if you should have to actually wash something (e.g., oils, adhesives, or household chemicals) off your bird's feathers.*

Housing

General Information

A bird is entirely reliant on you for everything in its life. Its happiness and good health are provided by you, the caring pet bird owner. It is important to continually strive to better your bird's life and help ensure the maintenance of a long lasting, healthy relationship between you and your bird.

How big should my bird's cage be?

As a general rule, bigger is better. In the wild a bird would spend much of its day flying from tree to tree in search of food and at play. In captivity, we must allow for some sort of exercise, self-expression and entertainment. The cage must be big enough to move around in with ease as your bird goes from perch to perch and stretches or flaps its wings without striking anything. There are numerous designs to suit all tastes. Generally, a rectangular metal cage, preferably longer than it is tall, is the best. Tall, narrow cages prove to be rather impractical, as most birds do NOT fly straight up and down. Round cages create a situation in which every perch across its width is in some way directly over the perch below it. This leads to constant soiling with feces of all lower perches.

Wood, wicker or bamboo cages may be attractive or decorative but are impossible to clean and disinfect effectively due to their porous nature. These cages will NOT confine larger birds as they are chewed apart with ease.

An all-metal cage is the most practical to maintain. The bars on the cage must be close enough together to prevent the bird from getting its head through the bars. Acrylic cages can also be good provided they have plenty of ventilation holes or a ventilation system. You also need to ensure that the acrylic is durable enough for the species of your bird. A plastic cage built for budgerigars, for instance, would probably not be durable enough for a small cockatoo.

What sort of perches should I have?

A bird spends all its time standing on a perch so careful consideration must be given to this aspect of your pet's environment. Tree branches or wood naturally make the best perches. Providing non-toxic, washed, fresh branches such as apple, elm, ash, maple, or willow will be both functional and attractive in the cage. Natural branches should be selected such that a variety of diameters are available to perch on. This affords various textures, choice of grip and good exercise for the feet. REMEMBER, a bird should be able to wrap its foot around a perch to grasp it, NOT just stand on it. Some birds on perches too big will fall or slip if they cannot grasp the perch. Wood perches seem to help wear the nails down better than other materials. Branches provide an entertainment value for those birds that like to chew. Wood is more difficult to disinfect due to its porous nature but can be washed and replaced often. Other options include various types of rope perches, cholla-wood perches, rubber, and various types of cement, ceramic, and mineral. Again, a variety of textures and sizes is key to healthy feet. If using rope perches, be aware of loose threads as these can become wrapped around toes. Only natural fiber ropes should be used in perches as synthetic threads are more difficult to break if a bird does become tangled.

Keep the perches clean with regular washing. Most wood or mineral perches can even be run through the dishwasher for convenient cleaning. Fresh branches should be cleaned with soap and water. Branches can be heated in an oven at 300 °F for 30 minutes to kill organisms. Be very careful of

exposure to open flames in the oven and be aware that dead branches can harbor a lot of bugs that will crawl out when the wood is heated. We do not recommend sandpaper covers or smooth dowels as perches.

What sort of food and water dishes should I provide?

Dishes are best made from sturdy non-toxic materials that are easy to clean and disinfect every day. Position the dishes such that they are easily accessible and yet not under perches where they will be soiled by droppings. Dishes for larger birds are made of stainless steel or crockery and attach securely to the side of the cage. These dishes may prevent your pet from tossing the dishes around. The dishes should not be too deep, or food will be wasted.

What about toys for my bird?

Being cooped up in a cage all day can be a very boring, frustrating experience. Whether you are home with the bird or not, a pet must have some form of entertainment. They love to play and explore. Toys may include ladders, rope, swings, mirrors, bells, hanging toys, pieces of wood to chew on, or rawhide chew toys. Birds are inquisitive by nature. There are numerous “puzzle toys” and foraging and enrichment toys on the market that will entertain birds for hours. These particular toys challenge a bird to figure something out such as getting a favorite food out or opening a container. Although most companies strive to provide safe toys, there are no quality controls or regulations. Great care must be taken to ensure the toys you purchase are free of potential dangers. Be mindful of snaps, clasps, bell clappers, open chain links, removable parts, easily broken parts, glass or extraneous loose fibers that may be chewed or swallowed or that the bird could become entangled in. Rubber toys that are easily chewed apart can be very dangerous and must be avoided. Make sure toys are large enough not to be swallowed. Glass mirrors are NOT suitable for large birds since they are easily broken. Polished stainless-steel mirrors may be more appropriate.

Some birds like to hide in boxes or paper bags. Experiment with toys and find out what your bird enjoys the most. You may wish to have an assortment of toys that can be rotated on a daily or weekly basis to keep the bird from getting bored. Some birds may appear frightened of new items in their environment. In this case, toys should be introduced slowly (hang nearby the cage) to allow the bird to become accustomed to their presence over time.

Should I clean my birds toys?

Occasionally toys get dusty or soiled. Some birds develop such affection towards a toy that they may even regurgitate or masturbate on the toy in a display of courtship or sexual offering. Remove the toy if this happens. All toys should be periodically washed with mild soap and water. Remember to rinse well with fresh water.

Cage Hygiene

What do I clean my bird's cage with?

The bottom of the cage should be lined with a disposable paper such as newspaper or paper towel that can be thrown away every day.

Newsprint is now free of lead so should be of little concern. White birds that insist on playing in the newspaper may get gray newsprint on their white feathers, but this is easily washed off. The sandpaper that is sold in the pet stores to line the bottom of the cage is of little beneficial value and more expensive. Wood chips and shavings, clay, shredded or recycled paper and corncob bedding are not recommended for many reasons. The dust can be a potential respiratory irritant, especially aromatic cedar. These products also make it more difficult to monitor the bird's droppings (an important way to monitor health) and tend to promote less frequent changing of bedding (leading to mold growth).

Dirt, dust, fecal matter, bits of food and feather dust accumulates constantly on the cage and everything in it. The entire cage should be scrubbed down periodically with soap and hot water. Food and water dishes should be washed daily.

Wood, wicker and bamboo are porous materials that are impossible to sterilize. Dirt and bacteria can penetrate these substances very deeply; therefore, it is advisable to replace these items every 6 - 12 months.

What disinfectants?

Soap and hot water are your best bets for general cleaning. Drying items in direct sunlight can also act as a natural disinfectant as many organisms are susceptible to solar radiation. Stronger household disinfectants can be used when cages are repurposed for a new bird, during treatment for infectious disease, or when items have become heavily soiled or sat unused for long periods of time. Quaternary ammonia compounds (e.g., 409, Simple Green) are commonly available and are generally safe to use around birds. There are also citrus-based cleaners/disinfectants marketed specifically for birds that work well for both cleaning and disinfecting (these can be particularly good at removing droppings from surfaces—e.g. Poop-Off). Dilute chlorine bleach (one cup of bleach to one gallon of water) is also reasonably safe but should only be applied after a good washing as it is quickly inactivated by organic debris. Be sure to follow label directions for use of these products and do not mix them together. Care must also be taken to remove your birds from the immediate area when using disinfectants. Although the chemicals may not be toxic, concentrated fumes can be irritating to a bird's delicate respiratory passages. In addition, when chlorine-based products are applied directly to droppings, specifically the urates (white part of bird droppings), a toxic gas is formed. This is another good reason to wash surfaces before application of chlorine products.

Toys

In the wild most birds are foraging for food for hours at a time, and when they are not resting, they are playing. These activities occupy huge amounts of the bird's day. In captivity, they have food served to them "on a silver platter" with no effort or work. The rest of their captive day can therefore be VERY boring. A bored bird has a higher risk of developing behavioral problems such as feather picking.

Birds are highly intelligent animals and toys are an important part of their mental health as well as their **physical** agility. Toys encourage exercise and provide good wear for the beak and nails. Birds need a variety of toys, some of which should be destructible and other "puzzle" toys that challenge their dexterity and mental faculties. Toys can be rotated in and out of the cage every couple of days such that the bird does not get bored. Do not crowd a cage with too many toys. A good rule of thumb is that your bird has at least one space inside the cage to spread its wings and flap without striking toys.

Safety is top concern. Most bird toy manufacturers are very vigilant regarding safety. Birds can injure themselves even on the safest toy, but the goal is to minimize injuries. Seams of plastic or metal toys should not be loose enough for toes or nails to get trapped. Loops in leather or rope toys should not be of a size that the bird may get its head caught. Also consider that screw-on chain links or clips should not be able to be opened. Birds can hook their lower beak within such clips and severely damage their jaw. Stainless steel, natural non-toxic wood, rope and acrylic make great materials for puzzle toys. Chewables include branches, pine cones, rawhide, natural fiber rope, cloth and soft pine.

Soldered and galvanized metals should be avoided as they are **t o x i c**. Also avoid easily dismantled toys such as balsa wood, small link chain items, toys with metal clips, bell clappers or those with lead weights. If a potential toy is child-safe, it's probably parrot-safe although some electronics would not be appropriate (e.g., if the bird can tear out the electronics and chew on batteries or circuitry). Before giving any non-toy items to your bird to use as a toy (e.g., decorations, ornaments, or jewelry), carefully consider what it is made of and how easily the bird will remove and ingest pieces. Often such decorative items can be made from toxic substances such as leaded crystal or lead- or zinc-containing paints.

Give a new toy a chance because some birds are afraid at first. Play with it yourself and show the bird. Introduce the toy slowly. The bird will decide in time if it likes a toy. Experiment and use your imagination - **safely**. You and your bird can both have fun.

Household Dangers

General Information

Birds are naturally mischievous and will get into many predicaments. It is crucial that you “bird proof” your home. The bird’s cage is its house and the confines of your home, represents the bird’s environment. There are many dangers within these surroundings.

Temperature and Humidity

Moderate and gradual changes ranging from 10-20°F (2-5°C) in temperature are usually tolerated very well by a healthy bird. Sick birds will need a more consistently warm temperature. Humidity in the range of 40 - 50% is ideal for most birds. It is better to have too much humidity than have the environment too dry. If allowed to bathe in the hot sun, a bird must always have access to shade in the event it should become over-heated.

Teflon

Over-heated Teflon-coated cooking appliances and self-cleaning ovens release a colorless, odorless gaseous toxin that does not seem to affect mammals but will cause death to a bird within 24 hours. Your bird does NOT have to be near the kitchen for this to happen. Birds affected by Teflon fumes need immediate veterinary attention.

Air Pollution

Birds have a very efficient respiratory system and are very sensitive to pollutants in the air. Birds are exceptionally susceptible to the effects of second-hand smoke. Cigarettes, cigars and pipes should not be used around your bird. Not only does the smoke affect their lungs and respiratory passages but they can also develop severe skin irritation from contact with hands, clothing, or other items that are exposed to the smoke. If you do smoke, do not do it around your bird and always wash your hands and change your clothing between smoking and handling your bird. Tobacco users should consider smokeless options such as e-cigarettes. Cooking fumes, gases such as carbon monoxide, volatile cleaning products, paints, varnishes, fireplace fumes and dirty household air ducts may lead to respiratory problems so use these products carefully and with plenty of ventilation or your birds removed until the fumes are cleared.

Kitchens

Generally speaking, it is unwise to house a bird in the kitchen, as there are too many potential hazards. Teflon as described above is a priority concern. Hot stove elements, open pots of hot soups or sauces and even a sink full of water may be possible dangers. All cleaning products present possible hazards.

Bathrooms

Open toilet bowls and full sinks or bathtubs are possible perils to a bird. Pet birds do not swim well and may be unable to escape if they fall into a toilet. There are often dangerous cleaning products in a bathroom as well. Various drugs that are kept around most households are potential dangers to your bird. Keep these products locked up and away from your bird.

Other Pets

Cats, dogs and ferrets can be a potential danger to your bird. These animals have a natural hunting instinct, and your bird may become the victim. Never leave these animals alone together unattended. In some cases, birds do get along well with other household pets. Always make introductions under supervision. Consider keeping your bird's wing feathers unclipped so that they can escape more easily from a prowling dog or cat.

Mirrors and Windows

Sometimes birds may fly into mirrors or windows. Hanging curtains, decorations, or applying a sticker to the surface may help deter this.

Fish Bowls

Any open container of water should be considered a danger zone. If the bird flies into it, it may drown.

Noise Pollution

Birds generally seem to enjoy a certain amount of commotion and may become vocal and playfully excited by vacuuming, the sound of an electric razor or the normal activities of people about the house. Excessively loud noise from televisions, stereos, construction or even appliances such as vacuum cleaners or food processors may cause undue stress to some birds. Remember the bird is captive in your home and cannot freely escape these sounds. Exposure to any reasonable noise should be limited to the bird's normal waking hours. Ideally your bird should have 10-12 hours of quiet, dark time for sleeping. This may mean that you need to provide a second, small (travel-sized) cage just for sleeping in a separate room.

Plants (See - Poisonous plants information sheet) Fans

Never allow a bird to fly while a fan of any sort is running (particularly ceiling fans). The bird cannot see the blades while they are in motion and can be severely injured or killed.

Electrical Cords

Birds love to chew and the soft, rubbery, chewable coating of electrical cords may be very enticing. Due to the potential danger of electrocution, facial burns and fire, electrical cords must be hidden away or unplugged when your bird is out.

Open Windows, Doors

Flight is great exercise for your bird. However, not all living situations will allow for your bird to safely fly within the house or outdoors. If there are many members of the household and a likelihood that doors or windows will be left open, it may be best to have your bird's wings clipped (see Wing Clipping). If you leave your bird flighted, please consider the following steps to ensure their safety:

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

1. Recall train your bird: This involves teaching them to fly to you when they hear a call or sounds you make. This is important so that if they escape and are out of sight, you will be able to relocate them and have them fly back to you. Keep the training fresh and perform it often—a great way to play with your bird!
2. Allow your bird to fly regularly in the house so that they have good flight skills. Birds that do not fly regularly often seem to panic and fly too far away too quickly so that it is hard for them to find their way back. They also seem reluctant to fly down from the top of a tree, possibly due to lack of confidence in their ability to descend and land.
3. Get screens for all doors and windows that open.

Lead Poisoning

Lead is commonly found in many places around the house. Examples include curtain weights, fishing weights, older plumbing and electrical solder, older paints, certain types of putty, plaster or ceramic glazes, batteries, pellets from air rifles, certain linoleum, stained glass windows, Tiffany lamps, the leaded foil from wine bottles, some costume jewelry and zipper teeth. Lead is soft, fun to chew on and easily swallowed. Also known as heavy metal intoxication, lead poisoning is life threatening and needs immediate veterinary attention. Contrary to some beliefs, there is NO lead in today's pencils or newspaper inks. Common symptoms of lead intoxication include weakness, stumbling, seizures, regurgitation, and green, loose urine or urates (the liquid white/clear part of normal droppings).

Toys

Most pet bird toys are considered safe for you bird. It is important that you check all toys for loose or open clasps, removable or chewable parts, peeling paint, peeling metal and sharp edges before offering them to a bird.

Chemicals

Cleaning agents, insecticides, pesticides, mothballs, deodorizers, paints, solvents, makeup, personal hygiene products and chemicals, pharmaceutical products, matches, and automotive products are just some of the products that must be locked away from an inquisitive bird.

Safe Plants for Birds to Eat

My bird likes to eat my houseplants. Should I be worried?

Many birds naturally eat plants as part of their diet. Birds will chew on and possibly consume plants in the course of play and curiosity. It is important for owners to be aware of which plants are safe to birds. Few actual studies are available regarding plant toxicity and specific species of birds and so we should err on the side of caution. Some plants will just make a bird sick, and some can kill. (see – **Toxic Plants** handout)

Which plants are Safe?

The following list of indoor and outdoor plants that have been reported as having no adverse effects on **animals**. Please reference the **Toxic Plants** handout as well. Remember that any plant eaten in excess may cause harm or gastrointestinal upset. If there is concern regarding specific plants not listed here, consult your veterinarian, local Poison Control Center, or a reputable plant nursery for more information.

Acacia	Ball fern	Blushing bromeliad
Achira	Bamboo	Bold sword fern
Acorn squash	Bamboo palm	Boston fern
African Daisy	Bamboo vine	Bottlebrush
African violet	Banana	Bottle Palm
Alfalfa	Banana squash	Bougainvillea
Algaroba	Barberry	Brazilian orchid
Aluminum plant	Beech	Bride's bonnet
Alumroot	Begonia species	Bristly greenbrier
American rubber	Belmore sentry palm	Bromeliads
Anthericum comosum	Big shellbark hickory	Broom hickory
Antirrhinum multiflorum	Birch	Brodiaea pulchella
Arabian gentian	Bird's Nest Fern	Butterfly ginger
Aralia	Bitter pecan	Butterfly iris
Arbutus	Bitternut	Bullbrier
Areca, Butterfly Cane	Black haw	Bur gourd
Aregelia	Black hawthorn	Burro's tail
Artillery plant	Blaspheme vine	Buttercup squash
Ash	Blood Leaf	Butterfly Cane
Aspen	Blooming sally	Butterfly squash
Aspidium falcatum	Bluebottle	
Aspidastra	Blue bead	Caeroba
Aubepine	Blue daisy	Calamint
Autumn olive	Blue echeveria	Calathea insignis
	Blue-dicks	Calendula(Pot Marigold)
Baby's Tears	Blue-eyed daisy	Caltha lancifolia
Bachelors buttons	Blunt leaf peperomia	California pitcher plant

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

California Holly	Cinnamon	Cushion moss
Callistemon radyandrus	Cinquefoil	Cyrtodeira reptans
Callistemon viminalis	Cirrhopetalum	
Callistemon citrinus	Cissus Kangaroo Vines	Dahlia
Calochortus nuttalli	Claw Cactus	Dainty
Camellia	Clearweed	Dainty rabbits-foot fern
Chamonile	Cliff brake	Dallas fern
Canada hemlock	Cocks comb	Dancing doll orchid
Canary date palm	Cocktail orchid	Dandelion
Candle plant	Coleus	Date
Candycorn plant	Collinia elegans	Davallia bullata mariessi
Cantebury-bell	Color-band	Davallia richomanoides
Cape jasmine	Columnar	Desert trumpet
Cape primrose	Comfry	Dichelostemma
Carob	Common camellia	Dichorisandra reginae
Carob tree	Common catbrier	Dill
Caroba	Common garden canna	Dinteranthus vanzylii
Carobinha	Common greenbrier	Dogwood
Carolina hemlock	Common snapdragon	Donkey tail
Carrion flower	Common staghorn fern	Dracaena
Carrot flower	Confederate jasmine	Duffy fern
Carrot fern	Coolwort	Dwarf date palm
Casaba melon	Copperlead	Dwarf feather fern
Cast Iron plant	Copper rose	Dwarf palm
Cat brier	Coralardisia	Dwarf Rose-Stripe Star
Cat ear	Coral bells	Dwarf royal palm
Cattleya labiata	Coralberry	Dwarf whitman fern
Celosia globosa	Cornflower	
Celosia plumosa	Cottonwood	Earth star
Celosia spicata	Crab Apple	Easter cattleya
Chamaedorean	Crape myrtle	Easter daisy
Chaparral	Crataegus phaenopyrum	Easter lily cactus
Chenille plant	Crataegus spp.	Easter orchid
Chestnut	Creeping charlie	Echeveria
Chicken-gizzard	Creeping gloxinia	Edible banana
Chickens and hens	Creeping Jenny	Elephant-Ear Begonia
Chickweed	Creeping mahonia	Elephant foot tree
Chicory	Creeping pilea	Elk's Horn
Chin-lao-shu	Creeping rubus	Elm
China aster	Creeping zinnia	Emerald ripple peperomia
China root	Crepe myrtle	English hawthorn
Chinese plumbago	Crimson bottlebush	Epidendrum
Chlorophytum	Crimson cup	Episcia spp.
Chlorophytum bechetii	Crisped feather fern	Eucalyptus
Chocolate soldier	Crossandra	Eugenia
Christmas dagger	Croton	Euopean fan
Christmas palm	Cucumber	
Christmas orchid	Cushon aloe	False aralia

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

Fairy fountain	Hagbrier	Kaempferis
Fan tufted palm	Hardy baby tears	Kahali ginger
Feather fern	Hardy gloxinia	Kalanchoe
Feathered amaranth	Haws	
Fiery reed orchid	Haws apple	Kenilworth ivy
Fig leaf gourd	Haworthia	Kentia palm
Figleaf palm	Hawthorn	Kenya palm
Fingernail plant	Hedgehog gourd	Kenya violet
Fir	Hellfetter	Kharoub
Fire weed	Hemlock tree	King nut
Fish tail fern	Hen and chickens fern	King of the forest
Flame african violet	Hens and chickens	King and queen fern
Flame of the woods	Hickory	Kuang-yen- pa-hsieh
Flame violet	Hindu rope plant	
Florida butter-fly orchid	Holligold	Lace flower vine
Forster sentry palm	Holly fern	Lace orchid
Fortunes palm	Hollyhock	Ladies ear drops
Freckle face	Honey locust	Lady lou
Friendship plant	Honey plant	Lady palm
Frosty	Honeydew melons	Lagerstroemia indica
	Honeysuckle fuchsia	Lance Pleumele
Garden marigold	Hookera pulchella	Larch
Garden snapdragon	Horse brier	Large Lady Palm
Gardenia	Hoya	Laurel-leaved greenbrier
Garlic	Hubbard squash	Leather peperomia
German violet	Hypocyrtia spp.	Leng-fen tu'an
Gherkins		Lemon Balm
Ghost leafless orchid	Ice plant	Leopard orchid
Ghost plant	Imbricata sword fern	Lesser snapdragon
Giant aster	Indian Hawthorn	Lilac
Giant holly fern	Irish moss	Linden
Giant white inch plant	Iron cross begonia	Lipstick plant
Gibasis geniculata	Iron tree	Little zebra plant
Globe thistle	Ivy peperomia	Little fantasy peperomia
Gloxinia	Ivy-leaf peperomia	Living rock cactus
Gold bloom		Living stones
Gold Dust Dracaena	Jackson brier	Locust pods
Gold-fish plant	Jacob's ladder	Lou-lang-t'ou
Golden bells	Jade Plant	Luther
Golden lace orchid	Japanese aralia	
Golden shower orchid	Japanese holly fern	Madagascar jasmine
Good luck palm	Japanese moss	Magnolia bush
Grape hyacinth	Japanese pittosporum	Marigold
Grape Ivy	Jasmine	Maidenhair Fern
Grape Vine	Jewel orchid	Mahonia aquifolium
Great willow herb	Joseph's coat	Malabar gourd
Green ripple peperomia	Jungle geranium	Malaysian dracaema
Greenbrier		

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

Manila palm	Neanthe bella palm	Pink polka dot plant
Manzanita	Nematanthus spp.	Pink starlite
Mapleleaf begonia	Neanthebella	Pirliteiro
Maranta	Neoregelia	Pitaya
Marbled fingernail	Nephrolepsis	Pittosporum
Maroon	Nerve plant	Plantanus orientalis
May Apple	New silver and bronze	Plantanus occidentalis
Mary-bud	Night blooming cereus	Platinum peperomia
Measles plant		Platycterium alicicorne
Melons	Odontoglossum spp.	Plumbago larpentiae
Metallic peperomia	Old man cactus	Plush plant
Metallic leaf begonia	Old world orchid	Polka dot plant
Mexican firecracker	Orange star	Polystichum falcatum
Mexican rosettes	Oregon grape	Pony tail Palm
Mexican snowballs	Ossifragi vase	Poplar
Miniature date palm		Porcelain flower
Minature fish tail	Paddy's Wig	Pot marigold
Minature maranta	Painted lady	Prairie snowball
Minature marble plant	Pampus grass	Prayer plant
Mistletoe cactus	Panamiga	Prickly bottlebrush
Mockernut hickory	Pansy orchid	Prostrate coleus
Monkey Plant	Paradise palm	Purple baby tears
Mosaic plant	Parlor palm	Purple passion vine
Moses-in-the-cradle	Parlor plant	Purple Velvet
Mosiac vase	Parsley	Purple waffle plant
Moss agate	Passion Flower	Purpleosier willow
Moss campion	Parsley fern	Pyracanthus
Moss fern	Peace begonia	
Moss phlox	Peacock plant	Queen's spiderwort
Moss rose	Pearl plant	Queencup
Mossy campion	Pearly dots	Queens spiderwort
Mother-In-Law's Tongue	Peperomia hederifolia	Queensland arrowroot
Mother fern	Peperomia peltifolia	
Mother spleenwort	Peperomia rotundifolia	Rabbits foot fern
Mother of pearl	Peperomia sandersii	Rainbow orchid
Mountain camellia	Pepper face	Raphiolepis
Mountain grape	PepperminPeperomia	Red african violet
Mulberry bush greenbrier	Persian violet	Red berried greenbrier
Mulberry tree	Petunia	Red edge peperomia
Musa paradisiaca	Pheasant plant	Red hawthorne
Muscari armeniacum	Piggy back plant	Red veined prayer
Muscari spp.	Pigmy date palm	Reed palm
Muskmellon	Pignut	Rex begonia
	Pignut hickory	Rhynchophorum
Nadina	Pilea microphylla	Roosevelt fern
Narrow leafed pleomele	Pilea mucosa	Rose
Nasturtium	Pink Brocade	Royal velvet plant
Natal plum	Pink Pearl	Rubber plant, baby

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

Russian olive	Sweetheart peperomia	Walking anthericum
Saffron spike zebra	Sweet william	Wandering Jew
Sand verbena	Sword fern	Washington hawthorn
Satin pellionia	Tahitian bridal veil	Water hickory
Sawbrier	Tailed orchid	Watermelon begonia
Scabious	Tall feather fern	Watermelon peperomia
Scarlet orchid	Tall mahonia	Watermelon pilea
Scarlet sage	Teasel gourd	Wax plant
Sensative Plant	Texas sage	Wax rosette
Shagbark hickory	Thea japonica	Weeping bottlebrush
Shan ku'ei-lai	Thimble cactus	Weeping sergeant hemlock
Shellbark hickory	Thistle	Weisdornbluten
Shiny leaf smilax	Thorn apple	West indian gherkin
Shrimp cactus	Ti Plant	Western sword
Silver bell	Ti hu-ling	White Clover
Silver berry	Tiger orchid	White ginger
Silver heart	Toad spotted cactus	White edged swedish ivy
Silver-leaf peperomia	Tous-les-mois	White heart hickory
Silver nerve plant	Trailing peperomia	Whitman fern
Silver pink vine	Tree cactus	Wild buckwheat
Silver star	Tree gloxinia	Wild buckwheat
Silver table fern	Tropical moss	Wild hyacinth
Silver tree anamiga	True cantalope	Wild lantana
Slender deutzia	Tu fu-ling	Wild sarsaparilla
Small fruited hickory	Tulip poplar	Wild strawberry
Smilax tamnoides vas	Tulip tree	Willow
Spearmint	Turban squash	Willow herb
Spice orchid	Umbrella plant	Windmill palm
Spider ivy	Urbinia agavoides	Winter cattleya
Spider plant	Usambara violet	Withered snapdragon
Spotted laurel		Woolflower
Spruce		Yellow bloodleaf
Squarenut	Variegated laurel	Yellow-flowered gourd
Squirrels foot fern	Variegated oval leaf	Yerba Linda
Staghorn, Elk's Horn	peperomia	Yucca
Star jasmine	Variegated philodendron leaf	
Star plant	Variegated wandering ew	Zebra haworthia
Star tulip	Variegated wax plant	Zebra plant
Star window plant	Velvet plant	Zinnia sp.
Strawberry	Venus fly trap	Zucchini squash
String of Beads	Verona fern	
Striped blushing	Verona lace fern	Safe Trees for Perches
Sugar pods	Vining peperomia	
Sulfur flower	Violet	Citrus (all)
Summer hyacinth	Violet slipper gloxinia	Almond
Swedish ivy		Apple
Sweetheart hoyo	Waffle plant	Apricot

- Safe Plants for Birds to Eat -

Arbutus
Ash
Beech
Birch
Cactus Wood
Cottonwood
Crab Apple
Dogwood
Elm
Fir

Grape vines
Guava
Hawthorn
Larch
Magnolia
Madrona
Mansanita
Mulberry

Papaya
Peach
Pear
Pine (not with stick sap)
Plum
Poplar
Prune
Thurlow
Vine Maple
Willow☒

Toxic Plants

My bird likes to eat plants. Should I be worried?

Many birds naturally eat plants as part of their diet. Birds will chew on and possibly consume plants in the course of play and curiosity. It is important for owners to be aware of which plants are safe to birds. Few actual studies are available regarding plant toxicity and specific species of birds and so we should err on the side of caution. Some plants will just make a bird sick, and some can kill. (see – **Toxic Plants** handout)

Which Plants?

The following list of indoor and outdoor plants catalogues many of the plants considered to be potentially toxic. If there is concern regarding specific plants not listed here then consult your avian veterinarian, a local Poison Control Center, or a reputable plant nursery for more information. Some plants have been included on this list even if there is a remote possibility of concern.

Alderberry Buckthorn	Bleeding Heart or	Chinaberry Tree
Aloe Vera	Dutchman's Breeches	Chinese Evergreen
Amaryllis	Bloodroot	Chinese Lantern
American Yew	Blue Bonnets	Christmas Cactus
Andromeda japonica	Blue-green Algae	Christmas Candle
Anemone	Bottle Brush	
Angel's Trumpet	Boxwood	Christmas Cherry (berries)
Apple (seeds)	Bracken Fern	Christmas Rose
Apricot (pit, leaves and Bark)	Branching Ivy	Chrysanthemum
Asparagus fern	Buckeye	Cineraria
Autumn Crocus (Meadow	Buckthorn	Clematis
Saffron)	Buddhist Pine	Coffee Plants
Avocado (fruits ,pit and	Bulb Flowers	Coral Plant
leaves)	Burdock	Cordatum
Azalea	Buttercup	Corn Plant
		Cowslip
Babies Breath	Cadelabra Tree	Crocus
Baby Doll Ti	Caladium	Croton
Balsam Pear	Calico Bush	Crown of Thorns
Baneberry	Calla Lily	Crown Vetch
Bean Plants	Cardinal Flower	Cyclamen
Belladonna	Castor Bean (Castor Oil Plant)	
Bird of Paradise	Catclaw (twigs and leaves)	Daffodil
Bittersweet	Ceriman	Daisy
Bitter Melon	Chalice Vine or Trumpet Vine	Daphne
Black Elderberry (not berry)	Cherry Trees (leaves, bark,	Datura (berries)
Black Locus	seeds - Not pulp of fruit)	Day Lilly
	China Doll	Deadly Nightshade

- Toxic Plants -

Death Amanita	Heliotrope (leaves)	Lords-and-Ladies
Death cap mushrooms	Hemlock (Poison and Water)	Lupine or Blue Bonnets
Death Camas	Henbane	
Delphinium	Hibiscus	Mandrake
Devil's Ivy	Hogwort	Marble Queen
Dieffenbachia	Holly	Marijuana
Dracaena Palm	Honey Locust	May Apple or Mandrake
Dragon Tree	Honeysuckle	Mescal Bean
Dutchman's Breeches	Horse Beans	Mexican Breadfruit
Egg-Plant leaves	Horse Chestnut	Milkweed
Elderberry	Horse Nettle	Miniature Croton
Elephant's Ear (Taro)	Horsetail	Mistletoe
Emerald Feather	Hurricane Plant	Mock Orange
English Holly	Hyacinth	Monkshood
English Ivy	Hydrangea	Moonseed
English Yew		Morning Glory
Ergot	Impatiens	
Eucalyptus	Indian Laurel	Mountain Laurel
Euphorbia	Indian Rubber Plant	Mushrooms (Amanita, other wild species)
European Pennyroyal	Indian Turnip	
Euonymus	Iris	Narcissus
Evergreen (most)	Ivy (Boston, English + some others)	Needle Point Ivy
		Nephthytis
False Hellebore	Jack-In-The-Pulpit	Nettles
Felt Plant	Japanese Yew	Nightshades
Fiddle Leaf fig	Jasmine	Norfolk Pine
Fig (sap)	Java Bean (Glorybean)	Nutmeg
Firethorn	Jequirity Bean	
Flame Tree	Jerusalem Cherry	Oak
Flamingo Plant	Jessamine, Yellow (leaves, stem)	Oleander
Fluffy Ruffles	Jimson weed	
Fly Agaric Mushrooms	Jonquil	Paradise Plant
Four O'clock	Juniper	Parsnip Plant
Foxglove		Parsley (in excess)
Fruit Salad Plant		Peace Lily Peach (pits, bark and leaves)
	Kentucky Coffee Tree	Pear (leaves, seeds, bark)
Geranium		Pencil Cactus
German Ivy	Lantana	Pencil Tree
Ginko	Larkspur	Penny royal
Glacier Ivy	Laurels	Peony
Gladiola	Lily (many species, Tiger, Easter, Oriental..etc).	Periwinkle
Glory Lilly	Lily-Of-The-Valley	Peyote
Golden Chain	Lobelia	Philodendron
Ground Cherry	Locoweed	Pigweed
	Locusts Honey	Plum (pit, bark and Leaves)
Hawaiian Baby	Locusts, Black	Plumosa Fern
Hawaiian Ti		
Heavenly Bamboo		

- Toxic Plants -

Poinsettia
Poison Hemlock
Poison Ivy
Poison Oak
Poison Sumac
Pokeweed
Poncirus
Poppies
Potato (new shoots, sprouts,
leaves)
Pothos
Precatory Bean
Primrose
Primula
Privet
Purple Sesbane

Ragwort
Rain Tree
Ranunculus Buttercup
Red Maple
Rhododendron
Rhubarb (leaves)
Ribbon Plant
Rosary Peas
Roseary Beans
Rubber Plant

Sage

Sago Palm
Sandbox Tree
Schefflera
Shamrock Plant
Skunk Cabbage
Snap Dragon
Snow Flake
Snowdrop
Snow-On-The-Mountain
Soloman's Seal
Sorrel Spurges
Spindle Tree (berries)
Spurges
Star of Bethlehem
String of Pearls (beads)
Sweet Pea (plant)

Taro Vine
Tasy Ragwort
Thornapple
Tobacco
Tobacco Tree
Tomato Plant (green fruit,
stem, leaves)
Trumpet Vine
Tulip

Verbena
Vetch

Virginia Creeper
Water Hemlock
Wattle
Waxberry
Weeping Fig
Western Yew
White Cedar
Wisteria
Yam Bean
Yellow Jasmine
Yesterday, today, Tomorrow
Plant
Yews
Yucca

**If in doubt remove the
plant!**

Perches – Trees NOT to use
apricot
cherry
peach
prune
plum
nectarine☒

Recognizing a Sick Bird

How can I tell if my bird is sick?

A wild bird cannot stop and rest for long when it is ill or injured. They must continue to forage and maintain themselves. Also, birds that behave oddly will be more visible to predators. This instinct is still present in many pet birds such that illness and injury may not be obvious to you. Annual health evaluations by your avian veterinarian help to detect subtle trends of illness but cannot substitute for a daily evaluation by the owner at home. Take note of the droppings, the appetite, how the bird is breathing at rest, and how they respond to you. If something is off from the normal routine, carefully examine the cage, food, water, and environment. Sometimes there may be simple solutions that prevent big problems. If it still doesn't add up, call your veterinarian. Do NOT wait until a small problem becomes a big one—especially if you are a new bird owner and still learning what is normal for your bird.

The following is a list of signs by general category that should alert you that your bird is sick:

General

Poor General appearance (feathers “ratty”)	Fluffed feathers
Drinking more or less than usual	Drooping wings
Listlessness	Reluctance to move
Lumps, bumps, swellings, or bulges on the body	Trauma
Bleeding	Sleeping more
Weakness	Lack of appetite

Respiratory

Breathing louder or quicker than usual	Changes in the voice
Sneezing	Getting out of breath easily
Tail bobbing while breathing (greater effort)	Obstructed nares (nostrils)
Staining of feathers around nares	Breathing with beak open
Nasal discharge	

Behavior

Slower responses	Unusual tameness
Aggression	Screaming
Repeated behaviors	Frantic behavior

- Abnormal Droppings -

Eyes

Closed eye	Eye discharge
Red eye	Cloudy eyes or other visible lesions
Swelling around the eyes	Quieter than usual (going blind)
Nasal discharge	

Skin and feathers

Abnormal color, texture, shape, or growth of feathers	Baldness or feather loss
Bleeding blood or pin feathers (new feathers)	Prolonged molt
Feather damaging behavior (picking, chewing)	Flaky or crusty skin
Excessive scratching	Overgrown beak
Abnormality of beak growth	Abnormal beak texture, color,
Abnormal color or texture of nails	Overgrown nails
Trauma, cuts, bruises	Sores on skin

Musculoskeletal

Sore feet	Sore wing
Lameness or shifting of body weight	Swollen joints
Paralysis	Weakness
Drooping wings	Not perching, sitting on bottom of cage

Digestive and urinary

Diarrhea (watery feces)	
Wet droppings	
Change in the color of the droppings (i.e. Red,	yellow, tarry, pale)
Decreased droppings	
Protrusions from the vent (prolapse)	
Staining of the feathers around the vent (anus)	
Straining to defecate	
Wet feathers around face and head	
Vomiting or excessive regurgitation	

Neurological

Balance problems
Unconsciousness
Head tilt
Falling Seizures
Not perching, sitting on bottom of cage
Weakness
Paralysis

If you are concerned about anything, consult your veterinarian immediately.

Do not wait until tomorrow!

Abnormal Droppings

General Information

While not usually specific for any one particular disease, a change in the color, frequency, volume, smell, or texture of droppings indicates a problem that requires immediate veterinary attention. To monitor the droppings, the bottom of the cage needs to be covered in paper (newspaper is fine), not bedding. Change the papers EVERY day. If there are great accumulations of droppings, it becomes hard to notice if there are any changes.

What are the components of a normal dropping?

There are three components to the droppings. The first is the fecal component. For most pet birds, this is a green to dark green solid part of the droppings. The second component is the urates, a semisolid white material that consists of concentrated urine. Birds have adapted this form of urine so that they can conserve moisture. Therefore, if your bird drinks a lot of water or eats moist foods, the urates may be less prominent or even absent. The urates should be white. Alterations of color, particularly a lime-green color, can indicate serious blood or liver disorders. The third component is a clear, liquid urine. Again, if a bird is well-hydrated and consumes more moisture, the urine will be higher in volume. It is important for owners to become familiar with their bird's normal droppings, as evaluation of the droppings is an important clue to illness in pet birds.

What is an abnormal dropping?

Simply put, once you get used to your bird's droppings, any deviation from what the normal droppings look like are abnormal for your bird and should prompt a call to your veterinarian. Typical abnormalities may include:

- Small, dark, goeey fecal component. This means that the bird is not eating. If your bird is not eating (e.g., no food overnight) this can be normal. Offer your bird its usual diet and if it eats and the droppings return to normal, it is not a concern.
- Loose or highly segmented fecal component. Normally a pet parrots feces should be a formed, tubular coil within the other liquid components. Certain foods may temporarily cause loose stool formation (e.g., fruits or very watery foods). If this trend continues after resuming consumption of normal foods, consult your veterinarian.
- Greenish urates. This can indicate that red blood cells or liver cells are being damaged. Some common conditions that cause this include Chlamydophila infection (aka, Psittacosis), lead intoxication, and trauma or bruising. This should not be confused with bile in the feces, which is a dark emerald green and is normal during periods of digestive rest (e.g., overnight emptying). Discolored urates will be lime green throughout, not just in flecks or drops.
- Bubbly droppings. This means that excessive gas is being produced.
- Straining or constipation.
- Bloody droppings.

- Abnormal Droppings -

- Excessive urine (called polyuria). This can happen temporarily if eats wet foods, bathes, or drinks a lot of water. It will also occur temporarily when a bird is excited or stressed. If it continues over several hours, especially after resuming normal diet and activity, it may be a concern. While most owners state that their birds have diarrhea, true diarrhea is rare in birds. The most common sign of abnormal droppings in birds is actually polyuria.

What causes abnormal droppings?

Many diseases can cause a change in the droppings. Diet also influences the droppings. If for example, you've decided to give your bird a few blueberries, its droppings will probably be blue or purple for a short period of time. Assuming that the diet has remained constant, common causes of abnormal droppings includes intestinal diseases, kidney disease, liver diseases, bacterial or viral infections, and parasite infections.

How will your veterinarian know what caused the abnormal droppings?

Your veterinarian can run a variety of tests, including blood tests and radiographs (X-rays) to try to determine if any internal diseases have caused the abnormal droppings. The droppings can also be evaluated for parasites of yeast and bacteria.

Anorexia and Lethargy

What are the causes of anorexia and lethargy in birds?

Anorexia (a loss of appetite), and lethargy (listlessness and general inactivity), are commonly seen in sick pet birds. While not diagnostic for any specific disease, they do indicate that the bird does not feel well and probably requires immediate medical attention.

There are many causes of anorexia and lethargy in pet birds. These include cancer, viral or bacterial infections, fungal or yeast infections, parasites, endocrine or hormonal diseases, and organ specific problems such as liver, heart or kidney failure. Anorexia and lethargy are not diseases themselves but indicate a serious underlying medical problem requiring diagnostic evaluation and appropriate therapy.

Do I have to take my bird to my veterinarian immediately, or can I just "wait and watch" and see if it improves?

A wild bird cannot stop and rest for long when it is ill or injured. They must continue to forage and maintain themselves. Also, birds that behave oddly will be more visible to predators. This instinct is still present in many pet birds such that illness and injury may not be obvious to you. In short, they may "hide" their illnesses until they no longer do so. An experienced bird owner will see the subtle changes in behavior that indicate illness but, still, when the symptoms are noticed, they have often been building for quite some time. You should seek veterinary attention as soon as you notice symptoms.

How will my veterinarian determine what's wrong with my bird?

Because many diseases can cause the signs of anorexia and lethargy, several diagnostic tests may be necessary. Common tests for this condition include bloodwork (serum biochemistry and hematology) and radiographs (x-rays). Based on the results of these, other more specific tests, such as lead level, Chlamydia testing, or cultures may be necessary. In severe cases, it is likely that your bird may need to be hospitalized.

Is it really necessary to hospitalize my bird?

Travelling with your bird back and forth to the veterinarian is stressful and consumes precious energy reserves. If your bird is dehydrated or not eating, it may require injections of fluids or tube feeding with a diet made for critically ill birds. Finally, as new information comes to the veterinarian from diagnostic tests, it may be necessary to change treatments or collect new samples for more specific tests as they zero in on the diagnosis. If your bird is present, these changes can be accomplished much more quickly without additional stress of transporting your bird back and forth.

How are birds with anorexia and lethargy treated?

Treatment obviously varies with the cause of the anorexia and lethargy. In general, many of these birds are extremely ill. Hospitalization in an incubator, fluid therapy, tube-feeding, and broad-spectrum antibiotic therapy are usually indicated. If the specific cause of the illness is determined, then medicated early, treatment can be easy and inexpensive. There is no need to wait until your bird is on death's door before it sees your veterinarian.

Respiratory Disease

General Information

Respiratory diseases are among the most common problems seen in all species of pet birds. Because they can have a variety of causes, early diagnosis by your veterinarian and proper treatment is necessary to prevent severe illness.

What are some of the causes of respiratory disease in pet birds?

Respiratory problems can be caused by many factors. Nutrition is important to the integrity of the cells lining the respiratory passages and obese birds will have less space for airsacs to expand and contract as is necessary for efficient breathing. Diets based on seed, nuts, or people food tend to lack sufficient vitamin A and tend to be high in carbohydrates, oils, and fat that creates excessive fat in pet birds. Sometimes bacterial or fungal infections occur, and these may be isolated to the upper respiratory passages (nasal sinuses) or lower respiratory tract (airsacs, lungs, or trachea). Eggs, fluid, or abdominal masses can press against the airsacs and mimic respiratory disease. Allergies are considered uncommon in birds so do not “wait and see” if your bird demonstrates respiratory symptoms. Overheating may cause a bird to pant. If you see this and the weather is hot, immediately move your bird someplace cooler and mist them with water lightly, especially on the feet, to help them cool off. Finally, exposure to environmental toxins such as cigarette smoke and aerosol sprays can cause respiratory disease. Sudden death can occur with exposure to overheated Teflon cookware.

Are certain causes more common in particular species?

Yes, and this is one of the many reasons that it is important to go to a veterinarian knowledgeable in pet bird medicine.

Is it true that drafts can cause my bird to catch a cold?

While it is not healthy for a bird to receive constant direct air flow as it would if placed directly beneath an air vent, respiratory disease won't develop just because of a draft.

What are some of the signs of respiratory disease in birds?

Birds can show a variety of clinical signs. For example, some birds with infections of the trachea or lungs and air sacs may show nothing more than a voice change. Some birds with respiratory disease will have watery eyes; still others will sneeze, wheeze, cough, and have a nasal discharge. Yet other birds will just appear ruffled, fail to perch, and keep their eyes closed. A bird with increased respiratory effort will have a tail bob with each breath.

With all the various causes of respiratory disease, how will my veterinarian accurately diagnose my bird's problem?

The history you provide is very important as is a thorough physical examination. Otherwise, your veterinarian has laboratory tests at his or her disposal. Bloodwork (serum biochemistry and hematology) are important to check general organ function and to see whether the immune system is responding to an infection or whether the red blood cells are present in high or low numbers. A sinus aspirate or flush may also be performed. Sometimes your veterinarian may choose to culture the bird's respiratory discharges to look for specific bacteria and yeast. A radiograph (X-ray) of the bird's lungs and air sacs can often reveal diagnostic information.

Is it possible for me to treat my bird at home with medication sold at the pet store?

Absolutely not! First, a pet store clerk who is not a veterinarian and has no medical training and no access to medical tests is unlikely to correctly diagnose the cause of your bird's problem. Second, most of the antibiotics sold at the pet store are ineffective against most of the causes of respiratory disease in birds. If the cause of the respiratory infection is not bacterial in origin, no antibiotic will be effective. To avoid delaying proper diagnosis and treatment of your bird, you should schedule an appointment at the first signs of respiratory problems.

How is respiratory disease treated in birds?

Once the correct diagnosis is made, your veterinarian may suggest a course of antibiotics if the problem is a bacterial infection. Antifungal drugs are used in cases of fungal disease like aspergillosis, and parasites are most commonly treated with oral or injectable anti-parasitic drugs. Improper diets are slowly corrected and vitamin supplementation is used if vitamin A deficiency is suspected. Seriously ill birds are hospitalized so that injectable and aerosol medications can be employed, and force feeding and IV fluids can be administered if needed.

Excessive Egg Laying

General Information

Excessive egg laying occurs when a female bird lays more than the normal number of eggs or, more commonly, lays repeated clutches (batches) of eggs, especially in the absence of a mate. The persistent laying of eggs may lead to depletion of calcium from the body for the production of the egg shells. In time, this excessive production may result in egg binding.

Are certain birds prone to becoming excessive layers?

Cockatiels, lovebirds, and budgerigars (budgies) are some of the most likely species to become excessive layers, but any species of bird can develop the problem. Hand-raised birds that use their owners as mate substitutes will develop the problem more frequently than wild caught birds.

What causes excessive egg laying?

In the wild, most birds only lay eggs when certain conditions are met, such as abundant nutrition, presence of a mate, presence of a nest, and favorable environmental conditions. Most of the time, these conditions are easily met or exceeded for pet birds. Hand-raised birds see humans as other birds and, so, when a pet bird matures, it may select its owner as a potential mate. Living can be “too good” and create favorable for breeding year-round and not just for a few months a year as would normally occur. The physiological changes that occur for breeding are very taxing on the body so being constantly stimulated to breed or lay eggs can cause severe health problems. Excessive egg-laying and egg-binding are among the more obvious ill effects. In some cases, cysts or tumors of the gonads (testes in males, ovary in females) may cause excessive egg laying.

Are there any health problems associated with excessive egg laying?

Egg laying will use up a great deal of stored calcium. This problem is compounded if the bird does not take in enough calcium in its diet (seed diets tend to be deficient in available calcium). This can cause egg binding, seizures, or death.

There are many types of complications that can occur including tears or ruptures of the oviduct, infection, cysts, egg-binding (egg stuck in the oviduct or cloaca), or cancer of the ovary or oviduct. A common scenario is that eggs may actually be deposited in the abdomen instead of completing their passage through the oviduct. This is called ectopic ovulation and can result in serious inflammation of the abdomen if it occurs frequently.

Birds are often less friendly when they are under the powerful influence of reproductive hormones, and may be aggressive and vocal as they protect their clutch. They may 'display' and become very territorial and more difficult to manage as pets.

What are the recommended treatments for excessive egg laying?

☒ First, make sure your bird is eating a proper diet so your bird will not become malnourished. A calcium supplement may be appropriate at these times.

☒ Decrease the number of hours of daylight exposure, which may influence the stimulus to lay eggs.

☒ Remove anything in the cage your bird is using as a nest. Remove any bedding material your bird is shredding to line its nest, such as paper.

☒ If your bird spends time outside of the cage, prevent it from cavity seeking- looking for a nest under tables, blankets, etc.

☒ Have your bird sleep in a night cage. This is its bed, and only a smaller cage with a perch and a water cup is needed. When your bird is not in its usual cage all the time, it cannot care for its eggs and may stop laying.

☒ If you have been removing eggs as they are laid, stop doing this as it may decrease the stimulus to complete the clutch by laying more eggs. Leaving the bird to sit on her eggs for the duration of a normal hatch (around 21-28 days) will allow her to become broody (do mother bird stuff), rest, and recuperate or catch up a little from the hard work and stresses of egg laying. At the end of this time period the eggs may be removed one every 1-2 days. However, some birds will start the process over again.

If these steps don't work, are there any medical treatments?

Medical therapy may be needed in some cases. Hormone injections can help stop egg laying, but do not work without behavioral changes as well. Never give your bird progesterone injections, as this drug has too many very serious side effects. Lupron can be given and is very safe, although expensive. It is also possible to perform a hysterectomy in cases that can't be controlled any other way. Both options should be discussed thoroughly with your veterinarian

Often, with excessive egg-laying there will come a point when eggs become misshapen, have thin shells, or appear smaller than normal. These are serious signs and the bird is at significant risk for egg-binding.

Behavioral Problems

General Information

There are many types of behavioral problems seen in pet birds. A few common examples include feather picking/plucking, skin mutilation, screaming, destructive behaviors, panic, and aggression.

Often these are maladaptive behaviors in response to something not being right in their health or in their life and they have no healthy way to cope with it. Sometimes the problem will be medical, which is why investigation often includes checking the physical health of a pet bird. More often, these behaviors are the result of some variety of physiological or psychological stress. Some of these stresses are easily recognized or understood by owners (e.g., moving, divorces, lack of toys or activities). Others are easily missed and actually more frequently present, such as chronic sexual stimulation.

What is feather damaging behavior and automutilation?

Feather loss either occurs because the bird is truly losing feathers or because the bird is picking or plucking its feathers. If the owner can tell which is occurring, it often helps narrow down the possibilities of what is causing the problem. Picking is when the bird chews, snips, or over-preens a feather so that it is ragged or shortened. Plucking is when the bird actually rips the feather out of the follicle forcefully. A molting feather slips out of its follicle easily and painlessly, often during the routine of preening. Plucking causes pain and birds that pluck will often become agitated or vocalize. Whether or picking or plucking, the bird will often chew on or play with the removed feather.

Medical causes of feather damaging behaviors and automutilation include underlying infection, tumors, or cardiovascular disease. Generally, these types of contributors are expected to cause focused picking over a small area versus the widespread picking often seen with behavioral causes. Although less common in the USA, there is a disease known as Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease, caused by a virus, which can cause the growth of very poor-quality feathers. Eventually the disease progresses to include the beak and eventually results in death. This disease is easily screened for with a blood test. Finally, liver or metabolic diseases can cause poor feather growth or failure to molt. Your veterinarian can screen for all of these causes.

Why does my bird scream so much?

Most species of parrots are very vocal and can project their voices very loudly. The calls help the birds keep in touch in thick foliage. They are not appropriate for most home environments and loud calls will cause hearing damage to their human caretakers. Some species are naturally louder or call more frequently than others. It's usually normal to expect some increased calling when house members return home or there are exciting and noisy activities in the home. Screaming incessantly or repetitively for attention may be a maladaptive behavior that requires intervention.

Why does my bird get panicked so easily?

Birds in the wild are presented with a constantly changing environment with many variables far beyond their control. However, they adapt well to a variety of circumstances. If this is the case, why do some birds panic so easily and shy away from new people or new items in their cage? Many pet birds are raised in very mundane, unvaried environments and do not learn how to deal with surprises. On the other hand, birds in the wild also have the freedom of movement to size up new situations from a distance and learn by the reactions of their flock whether something is safe or not. If an item is put directly into a pet bird's cage, it has not choices for slowly sizing it up – there is no option of escape! For these reasons, it's important to expose your bird to new people, new things, and new activities, but it should be done slowly and, on their terms, –with the option available to disengage long before the situation escalates to panic. A simple example is the introduction of a new toy. This is best done by hanging the toy in the room or near the cage for several days before moving it inside. Also, the reactions of your bird to a new cage item should be read carefully –if there is panic or avoidance then it should not be immediately placed within the confines of the cage.

Why is my bird so aggressive?

Aggressive behavior (biting, flying and attacking, etc.) can be learned –often by reinforcement because it has produced dramatic reactions from people in the past. It can also be driven by sexual hormones (see below). Dealing with aggression should include changing your own responses to the behavior and careful avoidance of scenarios which will encourage or escalate the behavior. If sexual behaviors are involved, then there are also changes that need to be made to the bird's lifestyle (see later in this section).

Common (easily recognized) stressors:

Much of the time, picking or plucking appears to be a behavioral disorder. Stresses such as drastic changes in home environment, loss of flockmates or human companions, strife amongst the human flock, or unsettling events can cause feather picking to start. Parrots are intelligent creatures and appear to have a good capacity to deal with change, provided that they have been made accustomed to a variety of living situations and are provided options and outlets for adapting to their surroundings. In other words, if a bird is acclimated to multiple caretakers, to travel, to self-entertainment, and to varied surroundings, it will be much better prepared should its living situation change. Birds that are not tame, not interacted with regularly, or that only know (or have access to) a very narrow range of activities, people, or surroundings are much more likely to be stressed by big changes.

Chronic Sexual Stimulation (aka “Hormonal Behaviors”)

Sometimes behavioral problems may occur as a means of coping with the stress of chronic reproductive activity. Birds invest a lot of energy and biological resources to breeding which is why it usually can only be accomplished once every year or more in the wild. While the remainder of the time, their gonads actually shrink and become inactive to save energy. In captivity, life is easy with an abundance of rich foods. This easily promotes the secretion of hormones that make a bird ready for breeding. Certain feedback that they get from their environment, such as certain types of attention from people or mates or the presence of a nest site, further reinforce the secretion of hormones and bring the bird more strongly into breeding readiness. If this occurs over long periods of time, as is often the case, then it has damaging effects on their health and behavior. This can be further compounded if the relationship swings from strong to weak on a rapid basis.

In other words, consider that you may be “telling” your bird (through your actions) that you love them, romantically, and want to marry them, and raise babies. To a parrot, that's a big commitment and

requires a lot of cooperation to pull off. A few hours later, you disappear all day. When you come home, you cuddle and love them again, then disappear again without helping find a nest or lay eggs. Each time you perform nuptial behaviors with them (feeding rich foods by hand, protracted periods of cuddling or “allopreening”), you are, in essence, making a sexual bond with them. When the cycle cannot proceed through the steps of laying, brooding, and raising young, your bird’s body and mind are severely stressed. Sometimes feather picking may result as a means of coping with this.

Why won’t my bird stop damaging its feathers or chewing itself?

Once feather picking or plucking has occurred for weeks or months, it may be more difficult to reverse. For one thing, each time a feather is plucked, damage occurs to the follicle. This can eventually damage the follicle sufficiently that it cannot grow new feathers correctly at all. Also, the behavior becomes more habitual and there’s even some thought that a low-grade endorphin-addiction is created. This is based on the idea that endorphins are being released whenever pain is caused.

How do you diagnose the cause of feather/skin damaging behavior?

Because there are many causes of feather loss, often a multitude of diagnostic tests must be run. A good history (supplied by the owner) and a thorough physical examination are critical and may help narrow down the list of possibilities. Routine diagnostic tests include various blood tests, fecal tests for parasites, cultures to check for yeast and bacteria, and radiographs (x-rays) to rule out various internal diseases. Sometimes, skin biopsy and culture are needed to get a definitive diagnosis.

How is feather/skin damaging behavior treated?

That of course depends upon the cause of the disorder. Beak and feather disease is a fatal condition that cannot be treated. Other skin and feather infections may respond to antibiotics or antiviral medications. Parasites can be eradicated with an anti-parasitic drug. Behavioral feather picking is difficult to treat; treatment may be attempted with behavior modification and certain types of drug therapy. Owners should be aware at the outset that even if a diagnosis is reached, it may be difficult to cure a bird with a feather disorder, especially if the cause is behavioral.

Behavioral Homework for Your Bird

What are the Elements of a Balanced Lifestyle?

There are three primary elements to a parrot's daily life: Nutrition, Social Interaction, and Maintenance Behaviors (see Figure 1). Nutrition and foraging refers to the make-up of the diet and the time and energy involved in finding, extracting, eating, and processing food. Social interaction includes time spent in a flock setting vocalizing, preening, flying, and displaying. Maintenance activities include all the things that a bird has to do to maintain its physical health, outside of eating, such as sleeping, preening and bathing. Once these areas have been satisfied, there are additional behaviors and activities that take place on an annual cycle, such as reproduction, molt, or, in some cases, migration. However, if the three basic categories occupy most of a bird's time and energy, the annual activities, particularly reproduction, may not take place at all. It comes down to budgeting of time, nutrients, availability of mates or nests, etc. Realizing this is the first step to recognizing how we can change a pet bird'

Getting Off Balance

In a wild setting, birds work hard, most of the time, to find food, watch for danger, and take care of themselves. A natural equilibrium establishes which may or may not allow for extra activities. In captivity, basic needs are met easily and so there is an enormous surplus of time and energy intake and a minimal amount of physical activity required. This extra time and dietary energy can be utilized for breeding even if the other required elements, such as a mate or nest site, are minimally available. For many captive parrots, this is enough to be reproductively active on a continuous basis, often without ever being able to ever complete the cycle and enter a phase of rest and repair. Because physiological changes for breeding are so intensive, it is believed that birds that are constantly in this condition are very prone to a variety of medical and psychological illnesses. Resulting medical conditions include osteodystrophy (loss of bone calcium), hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver), egg coelomitis (inflammation of the abdomen from internally ovulating), oviductal or ovarian cancer and cysts, egg binding, cloacitis (inflammation or infection of the cloaca), cloacal prolapsed, and stroke. Undesired behaviors that can result include feather or skin destructive behaviors (feather picking/plucking), obsessive compulsive behaviors, and screaming or other attention-getting behaviors (e.g., separation anxiety). Birds that do not enter breeding condition, but still cannot satisfy their needs for activity, mental exercise, or social interaction, can also exhibit some of these problem behaviors. At the very minimum, birds that are not allowed to achieve lifestyle balance probably experience more stress and do not behave and interact with their human flock to their full potential.

Social Interaction

Most wild parrots are social creatures except, perhaps, when they pair up and concentrate on raising young. Commonly the birds will spend brief periods of time allopreening (preening the feather on each other's heads) or otherwise interacting and vocalizing with a flock. These flocks can be very noisy and active. As birds' surrogate flock, we need to fulfill this role without inadvertently taking on the role of mate. Talking, dancing, training, and playing games with your bird are excellent ways to fulfill your bird's need for social interaction. Even just having your bird nearby on a perch, stand, or travel cage, wherever you are at the time, is good quality time. To avoid the impression that you are a willing mate, avoid prolonged cuddling, allopreening, or perching on your shoulder. To a parrot, these can suggest a more intimate interest.

Nutrition and Foraging

This cornerstone of daily activity includes the search for food and the act of extracting, eating, and processing it. This can occupy as much as 6-18 hours of a wild parrot's day. The activity of foraging also engages the bird's mind as it flies, takes in all the sensory information, watches for predators, learns from its flock members, and concentrates on discovering, manipulating, and extracting food items. In contrast, a pet parrot may only spend 20-30 minutes a day simply eating out of a bowl in isolation from others. During

periods when social interaction is limited, as is often the case when we, the surrogate flock-mates, are away earning a living, other maintenance behaviors such as foraging and feather care should be increased to fill the time. This in turn may be very beneficial as a part of behavioral modification treatments for abnormal behaviors such as feather picking, screaming, or pair-bonding behaviors.

There are three keys to successfully teaching your bird to forage: Diet, starting simple, and consistency. Foraging rewards should be tiny pieces of extra special food that is not present in the regular diet. For most parrots, the basic diet should be limited to pellets and vegetables, thus freeing items like fruit, pasta, Cheerios, whole-grain crackers or other non-fatty people foods for use (sparingly) in training and foraging. Listed below are some basic foraging ideas. Remember to start easy if your bird has never foraged. On a daily basis, assemble, play with, and disassemble foraging items in front of your bird at first as they may not even understand that food can be concealed. Once they understand that rewards are involved, they will begin exploring and learning on their own. You are the surrogate flock so your bird will be naturally interested in whatever you show interest in on a regular basis. As your bird masters a particular technique, you can begin to randomize rewards, increase difficulty, and combine techniques. For example, every foraging device may have a tasty nut piece at first but later you can hide pellets or beads or toys instead. For combination, you could place wrapped items in a bowl that is itself wrapped with cardboard. Interestingly, the increase difficulty and less consistent reward can actually increase your bird's drive to forage as they search harder for that desired reward. Give these techniques a try:

- **Foraging perch:** A piece of non-treated wood (e.g., pine lumber) drilled with holes into which rewards fit tightly. The reward should be visible but not accessible without chewing down through the wood. This perch material can be used with your training perch, when the bird is outside of the cage with you. The wood can also be used as a perch in the cage, or even hung in the cage to increase the challenge.
- **Wrapping food bowls:** Wrap the food bowls with paper or cardboard so that your bird has to spend time chewing in to get at the food. You may have to teach your bird the first time by punching a starter hole, or simulating the foraging activity yourself, acquiring your bird's favorite food item, and not sharing it with the bird after you find it.
- **Treat wads:** You can individually wrap rewards in small pieces of paper, corn husks, snowcone cups or Dixie cups, or other materials. Not all wrappings need to contain a reward, either.
- **Buried treasures:** Pellets or more valued rewards can be mixed in with wood buttons, dry beans, or other items so that the bird has to dig through to find its food. Some parrot species, such as grey parrots, can be particularly stimulated into new foraging behaviors by having a "sandbox" and buried treasures provided.
- **Commercially-available toys:** There are a variety of toys available that require birds to unscrew parts or manipulate components to get at their reward. See the Resources list at the end of this packet for ideas on where you can find commercially available foraging toys. Remember that you can gradually increase the difficulty by stuffing the toy with wrapped food items, sticks, or other clean debris.
- **Foraging tree:** A "tree" complete with challenging foraging stations can be made of lumber, sticks, plastic pipe, or rope. See the Resource section at the end of this handout to learn where you can acquire the DVD "Captive Foraging" which demonstrates how to build and train your bird to use a foraging tree.

- **Trick training:** By asking your bird to perform a desired behavior for a reward, you are, in essence, providing a modified foraging activity for your bird. In addition, you are also having a lot of fun, and are satisfying your bird's need for social interaction. See the Training section later in this handout and check out the training opportunities in the Resources list at the end of this handout.

Maintenance Activities

Maintenance activities include sleeping, preening, and bathing –the basic physical needs of a bird in addition to eating. While we do not generally need to encourage maintenance activities, we do need to provide for them. A regular allowance for quiet, dark conditions for proper sleep is important as is provision of bathing opportunities. Although covering your bird can provide some privacy, if there is still activity and noise in the room, it is unlikely that the bird will completely rest. If possible, we recommend that you provide a small accessory cage (such as a travel cage) in a separate, darkened room, such as a bathroom or spare bedroom. The “sleeping cage” need only contain the basic essentials: a perch and water and possibly food if you may be delayed in removing the bird the next morning. As a general rule, your bird should have the opportunity for 10-12 hours of rest daily. If this schedule is consistent, you may be able to diminish “hormonal” or sexual behaviors since photoperiod, or day length, has some influence on the secretion of reproductive hormones. Some experts also believe that breaking up the bird's daily environment by activity (e.g., sleeping, socializing, and feeding) could help decrease a perception of their cage as a breeding territory.

Providing for your bird's bathing needs is usually relatively simple. Some birds will prefer to bathe in a bowl while others will enjoy showering with you. Most will accept gentle misting with water. Some like to splash in the sink under a gentle stream of water. We encourage you to experiment to find your bird's favorite method. Frequent bathing is a good thing and the only requirement is that your house is at least 55-60°F. If they really enjoy bathing, it can be a daily activity but we recommend an opportunity at least 1-2 times a week.

Getting Back Into Balance

As mentioned earlier, an imbalanced lifestyle can lead to abnormal behaviors. For example, if a bird is picking its feathers, this could occur because of a lack of social and foraging activity. If social interaction and challenging foraging activities are introduced, there may be less time available for over-preening. Of course, there are other reasons for feather picking including health problems which should be checked out by your avian veterinarian before starting treatment yourself.

Balancing daily activities should, as closely as possible, fit the natural biology and behavior of your bird's species as well as the lifestyle constraints of your home. Maintaining a balance of healthy social interaction, foraging and nutrition, and maintenance behaviors requires conscious effort by the owner. In the wild, a multitude of external pressures and natural processes shape and mold the bird's lifestyle. In the absence of that, you become the master of the bird's environment. It's a tall order to try to provide the stimulation and boundaries that nature provides, but it's up to you to do your best. I recommend that you become as much an expert as you can on your bird's natural lifestyle. There are some resources at the end of this packet that can help get you started. Here are some encouraging tips to help you keep it in perspective.

- **Check out** the resources at the end of this handout. You can never have too much information (or encouraging stories) to help you be the master of the bird's domain.
- **Be the flock:** Since many pet birds are hand-reared, they often have learned to recognize people as other members of their species. This recognition and the interaction that comes with it is what

helps to make parrots such enjoyable companion birds in our homes. Normally, other flock members would teach a juvenile bird what social behaviors are appropriate through a system of observational learning and trial and error. To set your bird up for lifelong success (which can be up to 100 years in some species), it is important for you to fill this role as mentor. Recognizing this role is key to understanding how your parrot views you and learns from you. Consider opportunities to take your bird with you to work, on trips, or even on errands occasionally. On these adventures, provide for your bird with opportunities to meet other human “flock” members and expand their social and live in flocks.

- **Get involved** with a local bird group. They can provide encouragement, support, and advice. As with any information, carefully consider the practicality and substantiation (e.g., scientific basis). In other words, take all advice with a “grain of salt.”
- **Homework** is important for your bird. Consider the intellectual and social strengthening you experienced during your upbringing. A structured environment is equally important to shaping your parrot’s behavior.
- **Patience and consistency** is a must for any behavior modification program. Everyone in the home must be on-board with the program. Results will usually come in small baby-steps. Don’t give up!
- **Well-trained and adjusted** pet birds are less stressed, better nourished, and less likely to develop illness. We also gain enjoyment from our pet birds if they are well adjusted, trained and behave well in our homes. This is your ultimate goal, and it is attainable.
- **Call us** to discuss your birds behavior and health any time that there is a question. Every bird and household is different so we will do our best to help you find the solutions that fit your unique situation.

Training & Behavior Modification Concepts

Define your goal: It is essential to know what you are trying to train your bird to do, otherwise how will the bird ever learn what you want? Be sure to choose small, achievable goals at first.

Use small steps or approximations to reach the goal: “Rome wasn’t built in a day,” right? Nothing complicated is learned in one great chunk –not even by humans. However, breaking it down into small, short steps and practicing these steps over and over can provide the building blocks for a variety of complicated new behaviors.

Use of bridges and cues: A bridge is a sound, such as a clicker, a spoken word, or a whistle, which is used in conjunction with the bird performing a desired action. The associated eventually builds so that the bridge becomes a cue –a sound used to signal to the bird it is time to perform that behavior.

Positive Reinforcement: This is the presentation of a stimulus following a behavior that serves to maintain or increase the frequency of the behavior. Positive reinforcers are desirable items or interactions such as food rewards or moments of verbal interaction or a pet on head. The reward should be consumed or completed within about 10 seconds so that the training can continue smoothly.

Negative Reinforcement: The removal of stimulus following a behavior that serves to maintain or increase the frequency of the behavior. These tend to be unpleasant stimuli that the bird avoids. Negative reinforcement can be effective but the learner generally does not continue learning beyond the minimal

amount necessary to avoid the negative stimulus. For this reason it is NOT generally recommended.

Positive Punishment: The presentation of an aversive stimulus following a behavior that decreases or suppresses the frequency of the behavior. NOT RECOMMENDED as it will tend to produce counter-aggression, escape behaviors, and, finally apathy.

Negative Punishment: The removal of a stimulus following a behavior that serves to decrease or suppress the frequency of the behavior. This can be used carefully to replace inadvertent positive reinforcement of undesired behaviors and is particularly helpful if acceptable replacement behaviors are positively reinforced. Example: A bird is screaming in your presence and you leave the room until it stops for a couple of minutes. Then you return and offer a treat or positive interaction for being quiet.

Targets: A target is something used to focus a bird's attention and direct their next step. The bird is always rewarded when the target is touched or followed. If this rule is not violated, there is no end to the types of tasks and tricks that can be trained. A target can be as obvious as a colored stick or as basic as a raised finger.

Station: This is where all the neuron-building takes place. The station can be a portable perch or anything that the bird is comfortable sitting on but which is not distracted by other birds, people, food, toys, etc. The bird will learn that this is where the best rewards are to be achieved and should look forward to the time spent at this special spot.

Don't change the rules: Once you hold out a reward, or a hand for stepping up, or a target, and the bird, follows through, you must let them have their reward. If you've decided it's too easy for them, reset the scenario after the reward and make them try again with a slightly harder goal. On the flip side, if it looks like too big a step, withdraw the reward, step back for a second, and then step in with a new, easier goal to achieve.

Patience: Animal training takes time and patience! This is especially true if the bird has significant social issues to overcome. Take your time and celebrate and repeat the small achievements along the way.

Ending on a good note: Try to end training sessions on a good note. If you see a hard-won breakthrough, give the bird a good reward and call it a day –unless it's clear his favorite reward is continuing the training!

Foundation Behaviors to Teach Your Bird

- **“Step-Up”:** Stepping up is a foundational maneuver upon which most training and behavioral guidance relies. If your bird is already fairly tame or even used to know how to step-up, then simply press your hand gently up against the front of your bird's legs and say “step-up” (or use whatever bridge or cue you prefer). Once the bird places its foot onto the edge of your hand, hold still and provide a firm and solid perch with your hand. A shaking, hesitant, or unsure hand will not be a desirable perch for most birds to transfer their weight to. If your bird is not tame, you may have to start by “bribing” your bird to your hand by offering a small food reward. If the bird does not respond immediately then eat the reward in front of them (with obvious relish) and try again later. When they do step onto your hand to get to the bribe, avoid the temptation to lift the bird away the first few times. Repeat the exercise a few times before finally beginning to lift the bird away. If they seem uncertain, offer them a reward or set them down and start again. Remember, the priority is to build trust before building new behaviors.

- **“Step-Down”:** Stepping down is important simply to allow for you to guide your bird’s movement. To step your bird down, with your hand positioned lower than the perch you desire it to go to, gently roll your hand towards the perch, shifting the bird’s weight forward so that they step down. In most cases, the bird should be encouraged to grasp the perch with its beak, and then climb up to the perch from there. In this sense, the bird is actually climbing up when being stepped down most of the time. A target or food reward can be used to encourage a bird to step onto a perch for the first several times –particularly if the bird seems unsure about a new or odd-looking perch.
- **“Stay”:** Staying on a perch, where placed, is important for your bird to experience “normal” flock social interaction while outside of its cage with you. This simple behavioral requirement will allow your bird to share time with you, but not on you, and will preclude your bird from having free-roam throughout the home. The free-roaming pet parrot is at increased risk of traumatic injuries and household poisonings. Behaviorally, the free-roaming pet parrot will be at risk of developing pair-bonded interactions with one person, and may be less able to be guided into general flock interactions with others in the home. Portable tabletop perches are great for this training since they can be put anywhere and are not usually higher than people. Set your bird on the perch and occasionally offer a stroke or reward –as long as they stay put. If they climb down and walk around, put them back without any verbal cue or other reward. Come back a few minutes later and offer a reward if they stay put, or work to devise other positive reinforcement methods that will help your bird decide that staying on the training perch is a desired thing –from their point of view.

Inappropriate Pair Bonding

Should your pet bird view you more as a mate than a member of its flock, there is a greater risk of reproductive and behavioral problems. There are four main control points that we can use to encourage or discourage our bird’s sex drive.

- **Diet:** If the diet contains excess fat or simple carbohydrates or if there is a rich variety presented on a regular basis, this can support reproductive drive. See “Foundation Diet Recommendations.”
- **Social Interaction:** Normally, most birds do not give each other extensive physical pleasure unless they are pairing up. Long petting sessions or touching your birds in sexually-stimulating ways will reinforce the perception of you as a willing mate. Regular amounts of shoulder time may also convey a perception of sexual intimacy with you.
- **Nesting sites:** Reproductive readiness starts with certain external influences but is strengthened when a bird is able to carry out nuptial actions such as nest exploration or nest building. If your bird tends to explore cabinets, closets, clothes piles, or under furniture or bed covers, this activity should be curtailed and replaced with other activities such as foraging.
- **Photoperiod and sleep cycle:** Variations in day length may affect reproductive drive. I recommend maintaining a consistent day length of 10-12 hours. You can place your bird in a small sleep cage at night if their cage is in a room where sleep may be interrupted. A sleep cage can be a small travel cage and needs only to have a perch and some water. Going to the sleep cage should be positively reinforced, particularly during the first uses.

Recommended Resources



The Gabriel Foundation is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to enriching the lives of pet birds and promoting responsible ownership. They have an online store that is an excellent place to shop for training perches, foraging toys, and books and videos. Proceeds go to help the Gabriel Foundation's rescue and education efforts. Their website is at www.thegabrielfoundation.org.



Good Bird is an excellent web resource and magazine dedicated to enriching the lives of captive birds. They can be accessed at www.goodbirdinc.com



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