

CENTRAL HOSPITAL FOR VETERINARY MEDICINE

4 Devine Street
North Haven, CT 06473
203-865-0878

Avian Handouts for New Patients

Julia Shakeri, DVM, Practice Limited to Avian and Exotic Animals
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**** We at Central Hospital for Veterinary Medicine take preventative care just as seriously as treating your bird when he/she is ill. Please make an appointment to further discuss any of the below handouts or for any husbandry questions you may have so that we can make sure to maximize the quality of life your pet is able to enjoy. ****

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Handout Sources:

AAV = Association of Avian Veterinarians
Lafeber = Lafeber Company
Shakeri = Written by Dr. Shakeri

Signs of Illness in Birds

Early signs of illness in birds are frequently missed by the average pet owner. In the wild, a sick bird will attempt to maintain a normal appearance as long as possible. One result of this behavior in companion birds is that by the time signs of illness are obvious, the bird may have been ill for some time. The bird that dies "suddenly" may be the result of failure of the caretaker to identify subtle changes in the appearance or behavior of the bird. For this reason, owners should familiarize themselves with early signs of illness in pet birds so that any therapy and care by their avian veterinarian will have a more favorable outcome.

Evaluation of Droppings

Droppings can be an indicator of your bird's health. Paper towels, newspaper or other smooth surfaces can be used to line the cage bottom so that the number, volume, color, and consistency of the droppings can be noted. A bird's normal droppings will vary in appearance depending on its diet.

Normal Droppings

Feces (food waste material from the digestive tract) can differ somewhat in color and consistency. Diets with a high seed content usually produce homogeneous dark green feces.

Birds on formulated diets normally exhibit soft, brownish feces. Colored pellets may cause color changes in feces as well. Urine is normally a clear liquid. A diet high in vegetable and fruit matter may increase the urine component. Urates (creamy white waste from the kidney) are often suspended in the liquid urine or appear to wrap around the feces.

Abnormal Droppings

- Decrease in the total number or volume of droppings
- Color change of the urates/urine to green or yellow
- Increase in the water content of the feces (diarrhea)
- Increase in the urine portion (polyuria).
- Decrease in the feces volume with increased urates (polyurates)
- Presence of blood
- Any strong odor in the droppings

Some normal variations may be seen in impending egg laying females, baby birds on handfeeding formulas, the first void of the morning, conditions of nervousness and stress, or following a large meal of a specific colored food (e.g., blueberries). Thus, the owner should evaluate several droppings under normal circumstances before becoming alarmed.

Other Early Signs of Disease

The following signs may not require emergency treatment but, because they are abnormal, indicate the bird should be checked by your avian veterinarian.

- Prolonged molt or continual presence of lost pinfeathers
- Broken, bent, picked or chewed feathers
- Unusual or dull feather color
- Stained feathers over nares or around the face or vent
- Crusty material in or around nostrils
- Redness, swelling or loss of feathers around eyes, baldness
- Flakiness on skin or beak
- Sores on bottom of feet
- Lameness or shifting of body weight
- Overgrowth of beak or nails
- Minor changes in talking, biting, or eating habits

Signs of Serious Illness

The following signs may indicate a serious health problem and veterinary assistance should be sought at once:

- Significant changes in number and appearance of the droppings
- Decreased or excessive food or water consumption
- Change in attitude, personality or behavior
- Fluffed posture
- Decreased vocalization
- Change in breathing or abnormal respiratory sounds
- Change in weight or general body condition
- Enlargement or swelling on the body
- Any bleeding or injury
- Vomiting or regurgitation
- Discharge from nostrils, eyes, or mouth

Avoid

- Sandpaper perches
- Air pollutants such as cigarette smoke, insecticides, and toxic fumes from overheated non-stick utensils
- Mite boxes or mite sprays
- Easily dismantled toys such as balsa wood, small link chain items, toys with metal clips or skewers, toys with lead weights
- Access to toxic house plants, stoves or fireplaces, ceiling fans, uncovered toilets, leaded glass, cats, dogs, or young children
- Access to cage substrate



Signs of Illness in Birds

Emergency First Aid

Heat and food are the two most important considerations for temporary care of the sick bird until it can be seen by your avian veterinarian. The bird should be kept quiet and handling should be minimized.

Heat

Ideal ambient temperature for sick birds is 80-85 degrees. A temporary incubator can be made by placing a heating pad along the side or floor of the cage and draping the entire cage with towels, a blanket or cage cover. Space heaters or heat bulbs may be useful as well. Ensure that any cage cover does not touch the light/heat source. If the bird starts breathing rapidly or holds its wings away from its body, the temperature is too high. Certain types of room heaters (e.g., kerosene) should be avoided.

Food

Every effort must be made to encourage a sick bird to eat. Place food within easy access. If the bird is resting on the cage, food can be placed there. Offer favorite foods by hand. An electrolyte solution, such as warmed electrolyte drinks or pancake syrup in water can be offered drop by drop with a syringe or eye dropper.

- Don't attempt to drop food or liquids into a bird too weak to swallow.
- Don't give any drugs or remedies that were not specifically prescribed for the bird.
- Don't wait to see how the bird is tomorrow.
- DO call your avian veterinarian!

Postmortem Examination

If a bird is found dead, the body should be refrigerated (not frozen) and taken to an avian veterinarian to possibly determine the cause of death. This is important to protect the health and safety of family members and other birds in the home.

For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

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- Avian Chlamydiosis & Psittacosis
- Feather Loss
- Feeding
- Health Exam
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Signs of Illness
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Vet?

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Avian Health Exam

Components of the Exam

History

Much of the time spent during a consultation is spent obtaining valuable background information about your bird and the reason for your visit. Historical information is essential for getting to know your bird and the circumstances surrounding a health problem if your bird is sick or injured. Information is obtained about your bird's age and gender (if known), and where and when your bird was obtained. Other vital information is collected, such as diet, supplements, caging and environment, previous health problems, and recent exposure to other birds. If your bird is sick or injured, specific questions will be asked about your pet's condition. It is a good idea to bring any previous medical records, medications, and X-rays if your bird has already been treated by a veterinarian and if you have access to these materials.

Initial Evaluation

Your bird will first be observed in its enclosure. Your bird should be alert and fully aware of its surroundings. If your bird is staying fluffed or keeping its eyes closed, this is a warning sign that your bird is probably very sick. Other important clues to serious health problems include difficulty breathing, loss of voice, generalized weakness, and lameness.

Handling and Restraint

Most birds will need to be physically restrained for examination, with few exceptions. Although some birds do well during examinations, others can be quite fearful and can pose risk of injury to themselves and others in the room. There are a variety of handling and restraint methods that your avian veterinarian will be familiar with, all of which aim to be least intrusive or fear-evoking and yet effective for what needs to be accomplished. Methods are adjusted to meet the needs of the individual bird and circumstances. Comfort, minimal fear, and no pain are the common goals, as would

be for ourselves in our own physician's office. It is generally not recommended to ask your veterinarian or their staff to step your bird up directly from you, or for you to handle and restrain your own bird during the exam. There are resources available to help you train your bird to be a more willing participant in the veterinary exam and even treatments that may be needed. Your veterinarian can guide you to options, principles and some specific methods that may best apply for you and your bird, should this be appropriate.

Physical Examination

Your bird will be weighed, usually using a digital gram scale. Your bird will be carefully examined from tip to toe, including evaluation of the eyes, ears, nares, beaks, oral cavity, choana, neck, crop, pectoral musculing, wings, plumage, belly, vent, legs and feet, spine, and preen gland (if present). The heart, lungs, and air sacs are assessed by auscultation with a stethoscope. If a band number or microchip is present, it will be recorded in the medical record.

Diagnostics

Depending on your bird's species, age, gender, history, and examination findings, your veterinarian may suggest one or more of the following diagnostic tests to further evaluate your bird's health:

Fecal Diagnostics

Visual inspection of your bird's droppings can provide many clues to your bird's health. Bird droppings consist of three major components – feces (normally green or brown and tubular in shape), urates (creamy white and similar to toothpaste in appearance) and urine (clear and watery). Droppings are assessed for changes in volume, color, and consistency of the feces, urates, and urine, and for evidence of fresh or digested blood or undigested food. Feces can be further evaluated for parasites and other potentially harmful

micro-organisms using diagnostics such as wet mount evaluation, flotation, Gram stain, and cytology.

Bloodwork (CBC/CHEM)

Your veterinarian may recommend bloodwork to evaluate the overall health status of your bird. One common blood test is the Complete Blood Count (CBC), which evaluates the quantity and appearance of your bird's red and white blood cells and thrombocytes (platelets). The CBC is used to detect anemia or evidence of a systemic infection or other inflammatory diseases. Another common blood test is the biochemistry profile (CHEM), which assesses your bird's organ functions, such as kidney and liver, and other biochemical indicators, such as blood glucose, blood proteins, calcium, and electrolytes.

New Bird Examination

The most valuable step for a new bird owner is to locate an experienced avian veterinarian, preferably one who is a member of the Association of Avian Veterinarians (AAV). Check with local bird clubs, your closest veterinary school, or with local veterinarians or visit AAV.org to obtain recommendations.

The AAV recommends a veterinary examination of any newly purchased bird within three days after purchase. If disease is present, the likelihood of an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment is enhanced by early detection. Many serious diseases are not visually evident in birds.

Even if the new bird checks out "normal," results of diagnostic tests performed at the initial visit provide valuable reference for subsequent examinations.



Association of Avian Veterinarians

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Avian Health Exam

Psittacosis Testing

Several screening tests are available for the detection of psittacosis, which used to be called "parrot fever." This is an important part of the new-bird exam or annual checkup because the causative agent, *Chlamydia psittaci*, may be transmitted from birds to humans and may also make your bird sick. Many infected birds appear clinically healthy on visual inspection or on physical examination (see AAV brochure, "Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis").

Gender Determination

Most parrot species are monomorphic, meaning that the males and females look alike to us on visual inspection. For these species, gender can be determined with a simple blood test sent to a laboratory.

Microbiology (Bacterial, Yeast, and Fungal Testing)

Your veterinarian may recommend a culture of the choana (throat), cloaca (vent), crop (esophagus), or other sampling sites to determine abnormal growth of bacteria or yeast. At the same time, antibiotic sensitivity tests may be used to determine an appropriate antibiotic if the bacterial growth requires therapy.

Viral Screening

There are several viral diseases of clinical significance to birds. Birds can be screened for these diseases when appropriate after discussion with your veterinarian. Your veterinarian may recommend routine

screening in certain instances, or if your bird has clinical or diagnostic findings consistent with a certain viral disease. Common viral tests include serology (antibody testing), and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR), which looks for minute amounts of viral DNA in the sample.

Radiographs (X-Rays)

If your bird is sick or injured, there is a good chance your veterinarian will recommend survey X-rays to evaluate areas of concern such as the internal organs and skeletal structures. Many veterinarians advise sedation for X-rays. While there is always some inherent risk for sedation and anesthesia in birds, the benefits of sedation include reduced stress, reduced risk of injury, and ideal patient positioning.

* X-Rays are also recommended on wellness examinations. *

Vaccinations Vaccination is available against certain viral diseases, such as avian polyomavirus. Avian polyomavirus is a serious viral disease of birds, particularly of juvenile birds. Speak with your veterinarian about the vaccines they recommend for your pet bird.

* Polyomavirus vaccine is infrequently recommended. *

Quarantine

Isolation and quarantine of a new bird, even those that are believed to be "healthy," is the first and most important thing an owner can do. In order to protect other birds on the premises, it is advised that all newly acquired birds be maintained separately for a period of at least six weeks

following purchase. Many airborne viruses may be spread from room to room by central air conditioning or heating systems, so an off-premises location is preferred.

Annual Checkups

Pet owners are accustomed to taking the family dog or cat to the veterinarian for an annual checkup. It is even more important for a pet bird to have regular examinations because symptoms of disease in birds tend to be much more subtle.

Because birds hide symptoms of disease, signs of the beginning stages of disease often go unnoticed. Annual checkups are advised for early identification and management of potential disorders.

New information about birds is continually being discovered. Consulting with your veterinarian will keep you up-to-date on recent advances. Ask your AAV veterinarian for the latest information brochures and news releases from the AAV.

Online Resources

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Behavior: Normal & Abnormal

Juvenile Feeding Behavior and Defensive Behavior

Baby altricial (hatched naked and fed by the parents) birds have normal behaviors designed to either obtain food or protect themselves from danger. The first is the begging/chirping that prompts the parents to regurgitate food. When the parents begin to feed, the young bird begins head-bobbing to keep the flow of food coming from the parent. Another normal behavior of baby psittacines is "swaying and growling" when the nest is disturbed. This behavior is self defense designed to frighten away predators and gradually ceases as the bird weans.

Sleeping Habits

In the wild, psittacines are active during daylight hours and sleep during the evening and nighttime hours. Caging for sleeping should be provided to attempt to mimic these patterns as close as possible. It may be best to have a sleeping cage in a dark, quiet place – away from evening and night time family activity – in order for the bird to get adequate sleeping time.

Stereotypical Behavior

If the bird develops a pattern of behavior that is nonsensical, incessant, or habitual, such as pacing, head bobbing, rocking, swinging the head or body, or spinning, it should be examined by a veterinarian. Causes could range from disease to boredom. Disease should first be ruled out as a cause, but boredom is a frequent cause of obsessive behavior. Every attempt should be made to provide the bird with environmental enhancements such as toys or interesting foods. Nontoxic, non-injurious items that the bird can destroy or take apart are one choice.

Biting

Birds bite, some more than others. This can be a complex problem and one that can be discussed in detail with your avian veterinarian. Birds also bite to hold on to lift themselves up, like using a third hand. This is "grasping" rather than aggression biting.

Birds bite in self-defense. Until a bird is accustomed to handling by humans, it may try to bite. Avoidance of the bite until the bird is conditioned to handling through positive reinforcement is the best response. If biting becomes a problem, consult your veterinarian for the name of a reputable trainer.

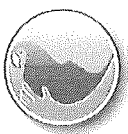
Social Noise

In the wild, many species of birds congregate in the morning and at dusk for social interaction. These activities include vocalizing, eating, and grooming. A common complaint in the pet home is that pet psittacines "scream" morning and evening. This is normal vocalizing behavior of the bird and it may be unrealistic to expect it to change. The bird will consider the humans in its home as its social contact, and want to maintain the "communication" it would normally have with other birds. Try using this time to interact with the bird. Social activity is an important part of the bird's

day, and may help build a proper social flock relationship between you and the bird. The best attitude is to let the bird have its social noise and accept it as part of keeping a bird as a pet. If the bird(s) are outdoors, try to prevent neighbor complaints; create a sound buffer between the birds and neighbors.

Inappropriate Copulating Behavior

Birds that are not paired with suitable mates or that are bonded with their owners may attempt unnatural copulation. The targets of this misplaced behavior are often cage fixtures, toys, human hands, or cagemates. Such behavior should not be encouraged. Removing the inappropriate objects of the bird's affection, are the most common responses to this problem. Sexual behaviors can be curbed by a number of measures including controlling caloric intake, encouraging foraging, cessation of inappropriate petting behavior, removing real or perceived nesting sites, light cycle control, and certain medications. If reproduction is desired, birds ideally should be paired with a mate of the same species. If two species are paired that may produce hybrid offspring, it is best they be separated and properly paired. If the birds are compatible cagemates and where reproduction cannot possibly occur, such as a cockatiel and a budgie, the birds are of similar size, and one is not injuring the other or exhibiting mating behavior, no harm is done by permitting them to remain together.



Behavior: Normal & Abnormal

Talking Birds

Some parrots and softbills talk, most do not. If you want to teach the bird a few words, it is best to separate them from other birds as early as possible, and teach them by repetition. The model- rival method has been shown to be the best method of teaching birds to talk, and even use language appropriately. Investigate which species are likely to talk before purchase if talking ability is important in your choice of a pet bird.

Feather/Skin Picking

Birds that have underlying disease problems or psychological problems may pull feathers or tear at their own or another bird's skin. The bird should be seen by an avian veterinarian at the first sign of feather picking in order to rule out a potentially serious medical problem. Watch for an unusual number of feathers or pieces of feathers on the bottom of the cage.

Some feather destructive behaviors, especially those that involve simply

cutting or shredding feathers may be linked to boredom, poor socialization or anxiety. Proper housing, provision of toys and teaching to "forage" for food is important for any bird. A consultation with a qualified avian behaviorist may be beneficial.

Actual feather plucking may have behavioral origins as well. However, as pulling feathers out is actually painful to birds, this represents a serious behavioral abnormality. All attempts must be made to rule out underlying medical disorders before diagnosing any bird with a strictly "behavioral" feather disorder.

If one bird is pulling feathers from a cagemate, the birds should be separated as this behavior can sometimes lead to injury if the feather pulling becomes too aggressive. Normal molt is a semiannual event not related to behavior but does not usually expose the underlying down or bare skin.

Observation is the best tool for helping your veterinarian with a diagnosis.

Observation

Observation is the best tool for helping your veterinarian with a diagnosis. If the bird exhibits behavior problems, make a video or take notes about what is happening before, during, and after the behavior occurs to take to your avian veterinarian for evaluation. Birds will often continue to eat and drink when they are sick. This common behavior helps sick birds avoid attracting the attention of predators. Ask your veterinarian for the AAV brochure "Signs of Illness in Birds" to help you evaluate your bird's general health.

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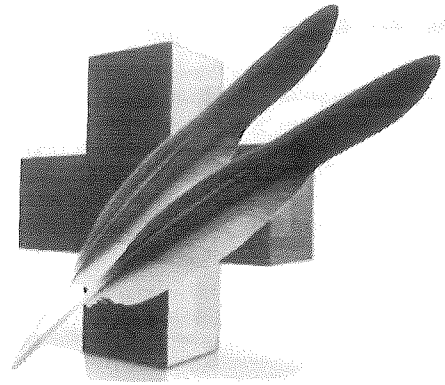
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Do's & Don'ts of Avian First Aid

There are a host of emergencies that require first aid in pet birds ranging from animal attacks, egg binding, and breathing difficulties to fractures, head trauma, and smoke inhalation.



What is first aid?

First aid is the initial treatment given to an injured or ill bird during an emergency. The goal of first aid is to stabilize the bird until veterinary medical care can be provided. First aid is **not** a substitute for qualified avian veterinary care.

What is considered a medical emergency?

A medical emergency is any serious, potentially life-threatening injury or illness that requires immediate attention.

Contact your veterinarian **immediately** if you observe...

- Bleeding that does not stop
- Difficulty breathing
- Extensive burns
- Loss of balance
- Deep cut or puncture wound
- Straining to pass droppings or an egg
- Ingestion or exposure to any potential poison
- Blood in droppings or regurgitated fluid

Contact your veterinarian the **same day** if you observe:

- Loss of appetite
- Eye injury or irritation
- Swallow a foreign object
- Fluffed and ruffled appearance
- Lameness or drooped wing(s)
- Diarrhea
- Self-mutilation
- Sudden swellings anywhere on the body
- Evidence of excessive thirst and/or urination

Be prepared

In order to serve as your bird's first responder, it is important that you are familiar with what is **normal** for your bird—so that you are able recognize abnormal.

- How much does your bird eat and drink on a daily basis?
- How much does your bird weigh? (Weigh your bird regularly using a gram scale).
- How many droppings does your bird usually pass in a day?
- What is the appearance of these droppings? (Just as in any animal, the normal bird can occasionally pass an abnormal dropping. This is a problem when abnormal droppings are passed consistently).
- What behaviors and sounds does your bird make on a daily basis?

Your avian veterinarian can also show you the correct way to **safely** capture and hold your bird to prevent injury to you and your bird. If you cannot adequately restrain your bird, you will be unable to safely evaluate injuries.

You will also want to have a first aid kit and other supplies available. Keep all equipment close together in one convenient place including a home hospital cage, gram scale, towel for capture and restraint, and a first aid kit.

Home hospital cage

The hospital cage or makeshift incubator is one of the most important items you will need in case of an emergency. To create a hospital cage, you will need...

- Cage, crate, or aquarium
- Food and water containers
- Perches
- Paper
- Heating pad or heat tapes (DO NOT use a lamp as this can burn the skin and dry mucus membranes all while disrupting your bird's normal day/night rhythm)
- Thermometer

The hospital cage can also serve as the carrier to transport your bird to the veterinarian, if need be.

First aid kit

The first aid kit can include the following equipment:

• Antiseptic solution (e.g. Betadine)	Dilute solution is used to clean wounds
• Band-Aids	In case you are injured
• Contact information	For your avian veterinarian and the poison control center
• Cotton balls	
• Cotton-tipped applicators	Used to apply medications and clean wounds
• Eye wash or contact lens irrigating solution	Used to rinse foreign objects from eyes or wounds.
• Gauze	
• Hydrogen peroxide	Helps to remove blood from feathers
• Latex gloves	To protect hands & to prevent the spread of bacteria to wounds while cleaning.
• Light	Penlight or even a flashlight to improve visibility
• Metal nail file	Can be used to smooth broken beaks and nails
• Rubbing alcohol	
• Scissors	
• Styptic gel or powder	NEVER apply styptic gel or powder to major wounds, vent, inside of the mouth, or to the eyes or eyelids.
• Topical antibiotic spray or cream	
• Tweezers	To remove debris from wounds, splinters, and ticks
• Writing pad and pen	Take notes on your observations & treatments. Do not rely upon your memory in a stressful situation.

Supportive care

Most, but not all emergencies (*see head trauma below*) will benefit from general supportive care:

- Place your bird in the hospital cage, providing supplemental heat (target 85 F or 29.4 C)
- Provide easy access to food and water.
- Provide normal ambient light during the day to stimulate eating and drinking.
- Keep your bird calm and quite. No handling unless absolutely necessary.
- Monitor your pet for changes in condition.

Specific advice for specific emergencies:

Animal attacks

Seek veterinary attention immediately, even if your bird looks normal after an attack or the physical contact appeared light. Puncture wounds can be subtle and bites can also cause crushing and internal injury.

Bleeding

Determine the source of the bleeding. If the bleeding is minimal, place your bird in the hospital cage and observe to see if the bleeding stops on its own. Schedule a veterinary appointment for any additional medical treatment that may be necessary.

If the bleeding does not stop within 5 minutes, first aid should be initiated. Manually restrain your pet, using the safe techniques demonstrated by your veterinarian...

- *Minor skin wounds:* Apply firm, gentle, continuous pressure for at least 1-2 minutes.
- *Broken blood feather:* Apply styptic gel/powder and direct pressure for 1-2 minutes. Do not pull the blood feather. This is a painful, traumatic procedure only rarely performed by avian with proper equipment, pain medication, and/or anesthesia available.
- *Bleeding beak/nail:* Wipe away the blood, provide general supportive care (*see above*), and monitor for 1 hour (*see below*).

After bleeding has stopped, observe your bird for approximately 1 hour to be sure bleeding does not recur. Schedule a veterinary appointment for any additional medical treatment that may be necessary.

If you cannot stop the bleeding, if bleeding recurs, or if your bird is weak and listless, contact your avian veterinarian immediately.

Head trauma

Head trauma usually occurs from flying into a wall, mirror, window, or ceiling fan. Affected birds can demonstrate depression, loss of balance, weakness, seizures, or even loss of consciousness.

Even if your bird seems fine at first, potentially fatal problems can develop later so take head trauma very seriously. Transfer your pet to the hospital cage, remove perches, and pad the cage bottom with a large towel.

Contact your avian veterinarian immediately and in the meanwhile:

DO NOT provide supplemental heat (which can cause more swelling in the brain and therefore worsen neurologic problems).

DO dim the lights or cover most of the cage.

DO keep your bird calm and quiet.

Heat should NOT be withheld in birds who are cold and not able to maintain a normal body temperature. As their normal temperatures are 105-107F it is imperative that heat be provided for birds suffering from head trauma if there is concern for hypothermia in the opinion of Dr. Shakeri and other veterinarians.

References and further reading

Burkett G. Avian first aid. Proc Annu Conference American Federation of Aviculture

Burkett G. Avian First Aid DVD.

August 18, 2013

Injury Prevention and Emergency Care

Preventing Injuries and Emergencies

Owners can take many steps to prevent injuries, or at least to be prepared when an emergency happens, especially if it's after normal veterinary hours.

1. Find and establish a relationship with a qualified avian veterinarian for regular wellness checks, before you might need emergency care. The wellness check will allow your veterinarian to look for signs of hidden illness, and go over an illness prevention plan for your bird, which will include information on ideal diet, housing, and medical tests that might be beneficial.
2. Keep the number for emergency after-hours care posted where you and family members can easily find it. Remember, not all 24-hour emergency clinics will see birds or other exotic pets as patients. Find out from your avian veterinarian whom to call after hours.
3. "Bird-proof" your bird's cage, and any area of the home where the bird spends time. Common sources of injury in the cage include inappropriately sized cage bars, older cages made with toxic materials such as zinc, poorly constructed toys, or toys that are too flimsy for the size of the bird, and toys or other objects with loose strings that might become entangled around the wings or legs.

Dangers outside the cage include ceiling fans (for birds that can fly), mirrors and windows, stove or other hot surfaces or substances, some houseplants, other pets or animals and small children. Hidden sources of toxins include stained glass, pewter, linoleum, batteries and many others. If you are not sure, or it's not something specifically designed for birds, don't let your bird have access to it.

4. Even after "bird-proofing," supervise all birds outside the cage at all times. It only takes a second for a clever bird to discover something dangerous that might be hidden or missed.
5. Birds greatly benefit from time outdoors in direct sunlight. Ideally, pet birds outdoors are supervised at all times. For birds that might spend time unsupervised in outdoor aviaries, be sure there is a retreat from direct sunlight, heavy winds and rain. Check to be sure cage doors and windows cannot be opened by the bird, predators or even uninvited neighbors. Be sure other animals are not able to climb to the top of the cage and defecate, as some feces can contain dangerous parasites.
6. Never house birds overnight outdoors. Predators, especially raccoons are very good at opening even what appear to be adequately secured cage doors and grabbing birds from the outside

Emergency First Aid for Birds

Some first aid techniques can be useful while waiting for emergency help:

Bleeding from broken toenails, beak tips or feathers

Apply direct, firm pressure using cotton or gauze soaked in cold water over the source, and hold in place for 2-3 minutes. Commercial quick stop products, flour or even a bar of soap held onto the tip of a bleeding nail may help as well. Very mild bleeding may be stopped this way. If the bird is still bright, alert and active, it can be watched carefully over the next few hours. However, if bleeding continues or returns, or the bird appears quiet or tired, get help from an experienced avian veterinarian. Once bleeding from a broken feather is halted, prevent the bird from flapping its wings or from vigorous activity, or bleeding is likely to start again. Birds may need to be held gently in a towel for transportation to the veterinarian.

Most avian veterinarians do not recommend placing a tourniquet or attempting to pull out a broken feather, since this may cause additional stress to a weakened, anxious bird. Bleeding feathers can be pinched closed to stop bleeding. While the broken feather should not be pulled out, a broken/hanging fragment may be carefully removed with scissors.

Recognizing Signs of Injury or Illness

Some signs of injury or illness are obvious, such as bleeding, inability to stand, prolapse from the vent or seizures. However, any unusual sign or change in behavior warrants a call to a qualified avian veterinarian.

See the companion brochure "When Should I Take My Bird to the Veterinarian" for more details.



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Injury Prevention and Emergency Care

The weak bird

Most injured or sick birds benefit from gentle heat (80-85 degrees) and quiet while waiting for the veterinary visit. Use a pet carrier, a plastic container or even a shoebox to provide a quiet, semi-dark environment. Use a heating pad on low with several layers of towel between the pad and the container, a commercial hand warmer (prevent the bird from chewing on it) or even a microwaved baked potato as a heat source. If the bird seems distressed or starts breathing rapidly after providing heat, remove the heat source at once.

If it is going to be a while before the veterinarian can see the bird, and the bird is alert and swallowing, consider offering drops of water sweetened with syrup or honey, one small drop at a time, with a small syringe or an eye dropper. Do not feed a bird that is too weak to swallow.

For More Information

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Basic Care for Birds

Activity

Most pet birds are intelligent, active animals whose psychological needs must be identified and addressed. Locate the cage near family activity in the home. For some species, opportunities may be provided for exercise in the form of supervised freedom from the cage or flying in the home. If the bird is permitted to fly, be aware of ceiling fans, large windows, hot pans on the stove, sticky fly strips, and open doors.

Toys

Toys are useful as mental diversions and tend to encourage physical exercise and beak wear; however, they must be selected with safety of the bird in mind. "Chewable" items include branches, pinecones, rawhide chews, natural fiber rope, and soft white pine.

Many enhancements can be provided to occupy the bird's attention. Some birds like to tear paper and enjoy a cardboard roller from toilet paper. A piece of corn on the cob or pomegranate is entertaining for birds. Even branches with leaves placed on or against the outside of the cage for the bird to pull through the wires is "occupational therapy."

Other enrichments include training, foraging, and human interactions.

Housing

The largest cage that can be accommodated in the home is recommended for birds that are expected to be confined most of the time. The cage must be strong enough to resist bending or dismantling by the bird, made of nontoxic material, and designed for safety and ease of cleaning. In most cases, the cage would need to be wider than it is tall to accommodate stretched wings; however, ample height should be provided as well for long-tailed birds.

Perches

Perches can be purchased, or made of clean, pesticide-free natural wood branches. Perches provide a place to stand, and for some species that love to shred and destroy, a source of entertainment. Perches should be replaced frequently when they become worn, soiled or damaged. Place perches on opposite sites of the cage for species that fly or hop (finches, toucans). More perches can be provided for more agile climbers, like parrots. Perches should be placed so that droppings do not fall into water dishes, and the tail does not rub the side of the cage or fall into food or water dishes.

Food and water bowls

The use of wide bowls rather than deep cups displays the food attractively and may encourage the bird to eat new items. Healthy birds can easily approach the food and water bowls; therefore, it is not necessary in most cases to place bowls directly beside the perch. Birds often overeat or chew on food dishes out of boredom. Placing the food at the opposite end of the cage from the water will ensure that the bird gets some exercise between eating and drinking. It is recommended to have two sets of dishes so one set can be cleaned while the other is being used. Foraging is a great addition or alternative to food bowls for healthy birds. Your avian veterinarian can give you more details about this.

Hygiene

A daily cleaning of the cage floor and bowls helps to prevent problems with food spoilage and permits the owner to inspect the cage floor. Blood on the floor or unusual condition of droppings can alert the owner to potential signs of illness. A weekly thorough cleaning of the cage is recommended.

Cage liners

Newspapers, paper towels or other plain cage liner paper are preferred over wood chips, chopped corn cobs, kitty litter, or sand as cage substrate under the grating, so that the appearance and number of the droppings can be monitored on a daily basis. Birds should not be allowed direct contact with the substrate as it tends to grow bacteria and fungus.

Nutrition

Proper diet is critical for overall health in every species. The easiest way to feed is to use commercial formulated diets especially made for pet birds. Homemade diets can be considered, but are time consuming and should be developed with the aid of a professional nutritionist. A recent study has shown dietary needs for important vitamins, minerals without exceeding calorie requirements can be met with a diet of about 75% pellets and 25% carefully selected vegetables and fruits. With few special exceptions, seeds and nuts should not be a regular part of a pet bird's diet, but reserved as treats only. Birds' dietary needs vary somewhat with species. Ask your avian veterinarian for recommendations on feeding your bird. AAV provides a brochure on this topic with more details.



Basic Care for Birds

Security

Many birds benefit from the availability of a retreat inside the cage for a sense of privacy (e.g., paper bag, towel, nest box). However, for some birds these recesses can be perceived as nesting cavities. If this seems to be occurring, visual security can be provided by surrounding the cage area with furniture, real or artificial plants, or other visual barriers.

Environment

Temperature

A healthy bird can tolerate temperatures that are comfortable to its owner. Sudden changes in temperature may be a potential threat to a sick bird.

Humidity

Pet birds can adapt to a wide range of humidity levels, although birds native to subtropical climates may benefit from occasional increased humidity in the home (e.g., in the bathroom with a running shower, or frequent misting of the feathers with water).

Light and Fresh Air

Opportunities for supervised access to fresh air and direct sunlight (not filtered through glass or plastic) appear to be beneficial, as long as shade is available.

Grooming

Routine grooming consists of nail and wing trimming. For healthy birds, nails are trimmed as needed, when they become sharp and uncomfortable for the owners. Wing clipping should be considered carefully. Wings are generally clipped to prevent escape or injury in the home, for example to prevent flying into windows or ceiling fans. Training is sometimes easier when wings are clipped. However, some owners choose not to clip the wings and allow free flight. The free flight area must be chosen carefully and "bird proofed" to prevent injury.

During molt, older feathers are lost, and new feathers develop to take their place. As the new feather emerges, the bird may groom at the covering of the feather. This is normal behavior and should not be mistaken for "feather picking" or mites.

Leg bands can be removed, if desired. Older open style bands are more dangerous and should be removed. Closed bands (a complete ring) seldom cause injury, but should be checked regularly for accumulation of dirt or wounds beneath the band, or swelling above or below the band.

Most birds enjoy daily bathing, and spend a great deal of time keeping the feathers in prime condition. Some will bathe in a dish or bowl, some prefer a shower or bathing under the faucet. Another idea is to offer the bird a large handful of wet lettuce leaves. If the bird resists any form of bathing, a daily misting with clean water will help encourage normal grooming. Plain water is best for misting and bathing. If feathers become unusually soiled, mild baby shampoo, followed by careful rinsing can be used.

New birds should visit an avian veterinarian as soon after purchase as possible. Afterwards, routine visits help detect signs of illness early and keep birds as healthy as possible.

For More Information

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Feeding Birds

Feeding Companion Birds

A healthy diet is vital to the health and well-being of your bird. For this reason, your veterinarian will spend considerable time during your initial exam and consultation obtaining information about the diet and supplements you provide to your bird, and what your bird actually eats. Your vet may spend a good deal of time advising you how to feed a healthy, well-balanced diet for your bird.

In general, most veterinarians recommend a diet for parrots consisting predominantly of a formulated diet (usually pellets) along with healthy vegetables, fruits, whole grains, and a limited quantity of seeds, nuts and other foods.

Formulated Diets

Formulated diets for birds are most often provided in a pelleted form. Pellets are available in a variety of sizes, shapes, textures, colors, and flavors. Pellets are precisely formulated to include essential nutrients such as protein, carbohydrates, vitamins, and minerals in known quantities based on our current understanding of companion bird nutrition. Pellets are convenient to offer to birds and are far more nutritionally balanced than commercially prepared seed and nut mixes. However, pellets are often less palatable than seeds and nuts, and may not be recognized as food to a bird, particularly if the bird has been fed a seed and nut predominant or exclusive diet for some time.

Dietary Conversion

Conversion to a healthier diet that includes formulated diets must be done with great care and observation. A safe and appropriate dietary conversion plan for your bird can be developed with your veterinarian. You may be asked to weigh

your bird periodically during a dietary conversion, either at home or in the veterinary office.

Vegetables, Fruits and Whole Grains

Dark green leafy vegetables (eg. broccoli, kale, spinach) and red-orange vegetables (eg. sweet potatoes, carrots) are high in essential nutrients such as beta carotene, a precursor to vitamin A, an essential vitamin lacking in seeds and nuts.

Vegetables are also high in fiber and water. Fruits, especially berries, are rich in fiber, vitamins, and anti-oxidants. Whole grains are rich in fiber and other nutrients. Avoid bleached and processed grains such as white rice, bread, and pasta. Instead, offer whole grains such as brown and wild rice, whole grain bread, and vegetable or whole grain pasta. Perishable foods such as fresh fruits, vegetables, and cooked pasta should not be allowed to spoil in the bird's cage.

* Pellets and veggies should be near 100% of the diet.*

Seeds and Nuts

Seeds and nuts are generally high in fat and energy and very low in essential nutrients such as vitamin A, calcium, and certain essential amino acids. Commercial seed and nut mixes often are sprayed with a vitamin mixture, but this spray rarely penetrates the shell. Seeds and nuts can be a small part of the diet of most parrots. Small slivers of healthier nuts such as almonds or walnuts or pieces of seeds can be used as an effective training reward for food-motivated birds and used in foraging puzzles and toys for enrichment.

Fresh Water

Fresh water must be provided at all times. Water can be offered in bowls or in bottles. While drinking water stays cleaner when offered in a bottle, water bottles must

be thoroughly cleaned periodically and closely monitored to make sure they are working properly. Offering two or more water bottles reduces the chances of water deprivation if one bottle fails to work properly.

Feeding Tips

- Carefully monitor TOTAL food consumption during any diet change.
- Introduce small amounts of a new food at a time.
- Gradually reduce the total volume of seeds as you increase the volume of more nutritional foods.
- Clean all food and water cups and remove old food from the cage daily.
- Do not provide supplemental vitamins unless recommended by your avian veterinarian.

Foods to Avoid

- **Avocados:** Although healthy for humans, these fruits contain glycosides which can be dangerous for birds.
- **Chocolate:** Chocolate contains a stimulant called theobromine. If overdosed, this can result in hyperactivity or even convulsions.
- **Fatty, salty, or sugary foods:** These foods, like in humans, can result in a variety of health problems, such as obesity and chronic liver disease. In birds, it is very easy to underestimate how much is being consumed.
- **Alcoholic beverages:** The small size of birds makes intoxication very easily accomplished and very dangerous.



Feeding Birds

Behavioral Enrichment

A healthy and varied diet promotes more than just physical health and well-being, but also serves to provide enrichment and mental stimulation to your bird. Healthy food snacks can be used as training rewards for food-motivated birds, and can be used in foraging puzzles and toys for mental challenge.

Grit

Birds lack teeth, and so food items are swallowed in small pieces and ground up by the ventriculus, the heavily muscled second chamber of the avian stomach. The ventriculus often holds on to a few particles of insoluble material, such as pebbles or soluble grit, to help with the grinding of food. Grit is generally not recommended for most parrots. Grit in the form of ground oyster shell is often recommended for canaries, finches, pigeons and doves.

Other Supplements

Cuttlebones can be offered to small birds and are often relished by reproductively active female birds as a source of calcium for the production of eggs. Mineral blocks can serve the same purpose in larger parrots. Salt blocks should not be offered to birds. Vitamin supplements are not considered necessary for birds on a healthy diet, but may be recommended for birds that are having difficulty converting

to a healthier diet or have evidence of nutritional deficiency based on exam or diagnostic findings by your veterinarian.

Specialized Diets

Some parrot species have specialized dietary requirements. For example, lories and lorikeets are nectar eaters in the wild and are often fed specially formulated liquid diets or mashes that are low in iron. Other species such as toucans, toucanets, and mynahs also require low iron diets. Commercially available diets are also available for waterfowl, backyard poultry, and pigeons, as well as others. Consult with your veterinarian for further information regarding specialized diets for these species.

For More Information

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Avian Nutrition 101 Cliff Notes

Julia Shakeri, DVM, Practice Limited to Avian and Exotic Animals
Updated November 2015

I once met a lesser sulfur crested cockatoo who weighed just under 1kg (2 pounds) at 990 grams. To give a point of reference, we would be happy if this bird came down to 500 grams (1.1 pounds), with most healthy sulfur crested cockatoos weighing between 300-400 grams (0.66-88 pounds). To look at this further, it is more than just being 490 grams overweight, it's being 200% overweight! Daily meals consisted of 1 cup of seeds, buttered toast, cheese, eggs, meat products, and other table foods as they were eaten by the owners. A pelleted diet and veggies were offered; however, he was not interested in them. This bird suffered from fatty masses, sore infected feet, feather follicle cysts, Vit A and other nutritional deficiencies, beak and nail elongation with abnormal angles, liver disease, mineralization of the heart vessels, respiratory disease, and the list goes on... Now this may be an extreme case of diets gone bad but there is so much of this story that can be seen in nearly all overweight birds and those on an unhealthy diet. It greatly affects their quality of life and lifespan!

Diet:

A healthy diet provided in proper proportion to the metabolic needs of a bird is necessary to maintain healthy weight, muscle stores, feather and skin quality, organ function, immune system, etc.

Seed diets are inappropriate for most birds especially when consumed as the majority of the caloric intake. Remind yourself when you look in your pantry that the sunflower, safflower, peanut, corn and other seeds all make the bases for many of the OILS we use in cooking. Seeds also contain a high calorie and carbohydrate content. Feeding a diet comprised of seeds is like pouring oil on a piece of bread and eating that for every meal (Drs. Susan Kelleher and Alan Fudge). Seeds are also deficient in 32 vitamins, minerals, and amino acid needed to maintain normal skin and feather quality, immune function and general health (Clinical Avian Medicine, Harrison-Lightfoot).

Pellets can be thought of as the bird equivalent to dog and cat kibble. They are complete, balanced, and formulated for various life stages and health issues. Just as with our cat and dog pets, special prescription diets exist for birds dealing with various health issues. It should be remembered that even pellets in excess can cause obesity so appropriate portions should be offered for birds that do not stop once they have their fill (think of them as the Labradors, Golden Retrievers and Beagles of the bird world). If offered an unlimited supply of food, most birds will eat 25-30% more calories per day than is needed to maintain a healthy weight, therefore, it is important to offer only the amount of food that the birds NEEDS to meet its daily requirements. Your veterinarian can help you implement a feeding program for your bird based on his or her needs and goals.

Pellets should make up about 50-60% of the total consumed diet for most birds. What should you feed for the remainder? Add in veggies! Just as many owners add in green beans to their dog's diet to help make him or her feel full while on a weight loss plan, adding fresh, non-starchy veggies can help balance a bird's diet. Fresh vegetables supply healthy nutrients, provide satiation, and help control weight. Be sure to avoid fruits (high in simple carbohydrates) and starchy vegetables (high in complex carbohydrates) as any majority the non-pelleted diet portion. Choose a variety of colors (especially of yellow, red, and orange colors, dark leafy greens) and provide them in a bowl separate from the pellets. Peppers are a big favorite with Amazons, and the capsaicin (what gives peppers their punch) within many of the hot varieties has been show to help control some diseases, such as papillomatosis. Peppers are also high in Vitamin A, C, K, B6 and folate. It is so much fun to really look into the health benefits of the various vegetables out there when preparing them for your bird! Remember, vegetables do sour quickly so you will have to remove them after about a 3-6 hour period so your bird does not become ill from consuming spoiled produce. Change the water at least once if not twice daily as many birds enjoy dipping their food in water bowls which can also serve as a reservoir for microorganisms.

You might be wondering, what makes seeds, fruits and complex carbs so bad? It isn't that they are necessarily bad and shouldn't be part of a complete and balanced diet, but many of these items are used as much more than just supplements. We will save the longer discussion on reproductive stimulation and how it affects pet birds for another day, but we will say this: Seeds, fruits and more calorie dense foods are often not readily available as easy pickings in the wild. These items are usually more prevalent during the breeding months and can actually stimulate unwanted reproductive behaviors in our birds, on top of creating an unhealthy diet if fed in excess.

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The take home message should be this: It is great to feed your bird a variety of foods, especially fresh veggies. Fruits and seeds have their place as treats and occasional rewards in a diet, but over supplementation can lead to disease through nutritional deficiency and caloric excess. These items also stimulate reproductive disorders when provided in excess quantities. The benefits of a healthy diet are endless and the common goal is that our birds live longer, healthier lives.

Benefits of Healthy Weight Loss:

- **Decrease in Reproductive Behaviors:** When calories are scarce one of the last things nature tells your body to do is make babies. This makes perfect sense, since a bird would be unable to support offspring if it is only finding enough nutrition to support its own needs. Fat (cholesterol) makes up the basis for all of our hormones, so a normal body weight promotes normal hormonal balances, too.
- **Increased Immune and Health Status:** Not only is a lean body able to better fight infection, but it is also less prone to many of the disorders that arise with obesity, such as heart and artery disease, liver disease/failure, difficulty breathing, hormonal imbalances (such as diabetes), etc.
- **Decreased Inflammation in the Body**
- **Improved feather and skin quality:** This is important for all birds as bumps, cuts and scrapes are a part of life, but especially when feather destructive behaviors are a problem.
- **Increased Energy**
- **Helps to relieve pain associated with Joint Problems/Arthritis**
- **And many more...**

Life Changes that Require More Calories:

- Any increase in activity (such as flight in a bird that was otherwise sedentary)
- Heavy Molting
- Reproduction/Breeding
- Illness of any kind
- **Bottom Line:** Any condition or event that increases the metabolic rate and therefore the caloric needs of your pet

Notes:

- These diet recommendations are not meant to be used for birds such as lorries that consume nectar based foods. Your veterinarian will help you extrapolate this information for your pet and advise you on its specific dietary needs.
- Birds with very specific diet needs, such as soft bills, mynah birds, and toucans, or birds on special diets due to underlying health conditions should always consult a veterinarian when changing the diet to make sure it is complete and appropriate for the pet.

Vitamin A

Vitamin A is one of the most common deficiencies in pet bird medicine, especially in South American species like Amazon parrots, conures, and macaws. At least one Vitamin A-rich food should be fed to your pet bird **EVERY DAY**. Remember, birds can discern color and texture, as well as taste, so changing the form and presentation of the food can make a big difference in whether the bird will or will not accept the new food. There is an instinctive fear of new foods, especially in older birds. In the wild, this serves as a protective mechanism against being poisoned. So, offer new foods often and in the same manner before attempting a new method. Alternative methods to try are hanging the food on the side of the cage or preparing foods in different ways such as peeled or unpeeled, cooked or raw, and placing multiple foods in the same dish (smorgasbord). Most birds usually take **upwards of 2 weeks** in seeing a new food every day before first investigating and/or playing with the food and then actually trying to eat it. Above all...

BE PATIENT WHEN IT COMES TO NEW FOODS WITH YOUR PET BIRD!!! The rewards come in a longer living pet.

Vitamin A content of Foods

Carrots	28.12	Cantaloupe	3.23
Sweet potatoes, Baked	21.82	Lettuce, Romaine	2.60
Sweet potatoes, Boiled	17.05	Persimmon	2.17
Sweet potatoes, Canned	15.07	Papaya	2.01
Jalapeno peppers	10.75	Broccoli	1.55
Kale	8.87	Pumpkin, Fresh cooked	1.08
Spinach	8.00	Green peas	0.92
Chard	7.19	Asparagus	0.91
Dandelion greens	7.00	Green snap beans	0.67
Squash, Butternut	7.00	Peppers, Sweet green	0.54
Peppers, Sweet red	5.70	Squash, Acorn baked	0.43
Mango	3.89	Squash, Zucchini	0.43
Collard greens	3.33	Squash, Acorn, Boiled	0.43

Units are given in RE (Retinol Equivalents) per gram of food.
Thoroughly wash ALL fruits and vegetables.

Unsafe Foods For Birds

Creating a list of foods considered dangerous or toxic to birds can be challenging for a number of reasons.

- First, the term “bird” is fairly vague. Just as humans don’t necessarily respond to foods like other mammals, there are many differences between the anatomy and physiology of birds belonging to the large, diverse group known as Class Aves. Different species will demonstrate different sensitivities to toxins.
- Second, although some official reports of toxicity in birds exist, many descriptions are based on personal stories that have not been verified.
- Third, ‘*the dose determines the poison*’. This means that some food items can be eaten in small amounts or in moderation without problems, but can cause illness or even death in birds when fed in large quantities.
- Finally, some of the toxicology information used by avian veterinarians is borrowed from dog and cat medicine, or even human pediatric medicine.



Better safe than sorry

Avian veterinarians rely on such a wide range of information because it is generally considered best to err on the side of caution. The following list divides potential danger foods into three categories: (1) Foods that most veterinarians agree should never be fed to your bird under any circumstances, (2) Foods that are not recommended but are sometimes fed without incident, and (3) Food items that can be fed with caution.

List #1: Do NOT Feed Your Bird...

- **Chocolate:** Theobromine and caffeine, which are both classified as methylxanthines, can cause hyperactivity, increased heart rate, tremors, possibly seizures, and potentially death when chocolate is ingested at a toxic dose. As a general rule of thumb, the darker and more bitter the chocolate, the more potentially toxic.
- **Avocado:** All parts of the avocado plant contain the toxic principle, persin, and have been reported to be a cardiac toxic to birds. Small birds such as canaries and budgies are considered to be more susceptible, however, clinical signs have been observed in other species like ostriches. Clinical signs like respiratory distress usually develop 12 hours after ingestion; death can occur within 1 to 2 days.
- **Onion, garlic:** Onion and garlic toxicity is well recognized in dogs and cats. Concentrated forms, like garlic powder or onion soup mix, are more potent than raw vegetables. Fatal toxicity has been described in geese fed large amounts of green onions as well as one conure fed large amounts of garlic.
- **Comfrey:** This green leaf herb is popular with some canary breeders, but studies in human medicine have shown it can cause liver damage.
- **Stone fruit pits or apple seeds:** Apple seeds and fruit pits from cherry, plums, apricots, and peaches contain cyanide.
- **Foods high in fat, salt, and sugar:** Although not technically toxic, unhealthy table foods can cause serious health problems in birds.
- **Sugar-free candies:** The sugar alternative, xylitol, has been associated with dangerously low blood sugar and liver damage in dogs.

List #2: PROBABLY Should Not Be Fed to Your Bird...

- Dairy products: Although not technically toxic, bird species that have been tested cannot digest lactose. As the amount of dairy in the diet increases, birds can develop diarrhea.

List #3: Can Be Fed to Your Bird with CAUTION

- Peanuts: Moldy peanuts or peanut products (as well as corn and other cereal grains) can be contaminated by a toxin-producing fungus. ** Only offer human grade peanuts as occasional treats.**
- Certain plants: Birds can eat green tomatoes, potatoes, peppers, and eggplant, however these plants are all members of the nightshade family. This means that the fruits are safe to eat, but the plants themselves are toxic. By the same token, the leaves of the rhubarb plant contain oxalate crystals, which can cause kidney problems.
- Grit: Grit can aid digestion in species that consume whole seeds, like pigeons and doves, however grit is not absolutely necessary for normal digestion in birds that crack seed hulls, like parrots. Some birds will actually overeat grit when ill, which can potentially lead to intestinal blockage.

A special note on mushrooms: Mushrooms are occasionally listed on toxic food lists. Of course there are a few toxic species, however mushrooms that can be eaten by humans are also considered safe for pets. Do NOT offer false morel (*Gyromitra*) mushrooms. Cooking can render these mushrooms less toxic, but does not completely eliminate the potential danger of death.

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Avian Reproductive Behavior

Puberty

The onset of reproductive or “broody” behavior varies with the species.

- Puberty begins at a mere 2 months of age in the Zebra finch.
- Small parrots like the budgerigar parakeet, cockatiel, and lovebird reach puberty between 6 months to 1 year of age.
- Conures achieve sexual maturity between 1 to 2 years, while lorries and lorikeets are 2 to 3 years old.
- Larger psittacines reach puberty between 3 to 6 years of age.
- Males usually achieve sexual maturity at a later age than the female.
- Captive-bred birds tend to become mature earlier than wild-caught birds.

How do breeding pairs behave in the wild?

There are a host of physiologic, anatomic, mental, and behavioral changes that occur with the onset of the breeding season. There are also a number of behaviors that mating pairs exhibit which appear to strengthen and maintain the pair bond.

- Preening each other, particularly in hard to reach areas like over the back, around the vent, and under the wings.
- Feeding each other, regurgitation
- Copulation
- Inspection of the nesting site or nest box

What does broody behavior look like in the pet bird?

Normal sexual behaviors by companion parrots are frequently misinterpreted as “problem” behaviors in captivity.

- Some birds may look for dark places as a sign of nest-seeking.
- Early signs of nest building may include paper shredding and increased wood chewing. (Lovebirds may put strips of paper in their wings while nest building).
- Cage territoriality and aggression may also be observed.
- Some birds masturbate by rubbing their vents against inanimate objects and people.

Some pet birds develop a relationship with their owner that mimics pair bonding. This “mated pair behavior” may induce the need to protect the “mate” and “nest” leading to territoriality and aggression. These birds may also be more likely to ovulate and lay eggs, potentially leading to problems such as chronic egg laying, egg binding, and dystocia. There is also a syndrome of recurrent cloacal prolapse, primarily seen in adult Umbrella and Moluccan cockatoos that may be related to this “mated pair” bond in some instances.

Environmental cues that promote reproductive activity

- The most powerful stimulus for breeding is often a long day (>12 hours of light).
- The nest is also a powerful stimulus for breeding. Parrots are cavity nesters and any dark container with an opening may promote breeding such as a box or paper bag.
- Other stimuli include warm temperatures, rainfall, and an abundant food supply.
- Of course the presence of a mate is another strong motivator. The mate may be real or perceived such as a mirror, a favorite toy, or a human being.

What can you do to minimize reproductive behaviors in your pet bird?

1. Halt mutual grooming and mutual feeding. Grooming over the back and under the wings is a sexually charged behavior birds. Also avoid encircling the body, putting pressure on the back, touching near the vent, or playfully “wrestling” with the beak.
2. Modify environmental cues. Do not provide your parrot with a nest box or any item that could be considered a nest box unless you want to promote breeding behavior. If your pet is demonstrating chronic egg laying or suffers from reproductive disease, your avian veterinarian may advise you on additional environmental cues to manipulate such as photoperiod (day length) or the presence of the mate.
3. Establish yourself as the flock leader to set guidelines for your pet through positive reinforcement training. A better understanding of where she fits in the household “flock” may prevent your pet from mimicking a pair bond relationship with you.
4. Ignore masturbation. If your bird rubs its vent on you, calmly return him to his cage.
5. Improve your pet’s plane of nutrition. Gradually introduce formulated foods and healthy items like orange and yellow vegetables and dark, leafy greens.
6. Do not place your bird on your shoulders during reproductive or broody periods. Any urges to protect its mate or its territory may result in acts of aggression, and a bird placed on a shoulder has great access to the face.
7. Stick training is a valuable tool for maintaining hand control of an aggressive or territorial bird during the breeding season.

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- Central Hospital for Veterinary Medicine -
4 Devine Street • North Haven, CT 06473 • (203) 865-0878

Decreasing Reproductive Stimulation

Julia Shakeri, DVM, Practice Limited to Avian and Exotic Animals
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Many birds, male and female, are prone to reproductive and behavior problems that stem from excessive hormone production. There are a number of ways to help decrease this stimulus and modify the behaviors that occur helping your pet to live a happier, healthier life. Some of this information may apply and some may not, so please use these suggestions accordingly.

1) Diet. Your bird's total consumed diet should be about 60% well balanced pellets (Harrison's, Zupreem, etc...) and the rest fresh veggies (the more color variety the better!). You may offer very small occasional amounts of seeds and fruit, mostly as rewards for good behavior.

We want to shy away from the seeds and fruits because they can stimulate excessive hormone production, both being present in the wet season when most birds are looking for mates and having babies. These food sources are also more limited in the wild than they are in our homes so they are provided in much higher quantities than wild birds have access to.

You also want to avoid offering moist warm mashes to your bird as this can also simulate the giving of a romantic gift. Beware of the bird who excessively head bobs or regurgitates because this is a direct sign that he or she is thinking of you romantically!

Weight control is extremely important. Cholesterol is the basis of all hormones and excessive fat can also lead to many health problems and foster chronic inflammatory conditions. Birds that are kept at a healthy weight (as determined by your veterinarian) will live longer, healthier lives. If a bird takes in only enough calories to support its basic functions and daily activities, it will not have the extra calories available to put towards producing and laying eggs - there are exceptions to this, but as a rule caloric quantity and quality are important keys to helping maintain a healthy bird.

2) Handling. Avoid stroking your bird over the back (especially if a female) and chest (especially if a male). Some birds will also become over stimulated if stroked under the wings. These can all be considered romantic petting to many birds and encourage the production of excessive hormones. Do not let your bird nestle in your hair or regurgitate for you. If he or she does these behaviors simply place him or her back into their cage or on a perch - act as if these acts are your bird's way of telling you to put him or her down and your bird will catch on that these behaviors are not acceptable.

3) Accessorizing No Nos. Remove any bird snuggle buddies, hutches, nests, dark enclosures, mirrors, and any items that your bird is overly bonded with. Some birds can take a food bowl on as a representative mate and the presence of this object in the enclosure can act as a stimulus for excessive hormone production.

4) Energy Outlets. In the wild birds are always busy spending energy flying and foraging for food. Our birds should be given outlets in our homes to help them expend their energy in healthy ways so they do not develop unhealthy tendencies and behaviors. Recommendations are: foraging for food instead of placing it in a food bowl, trick training, flight (when in a safe enclosed area), frequent bathing, new and rotated toys, etc...

5) Hormone Therapy. Your veterinarian may recommend hormonal options to help decrease the circulation of reproductive hormones in your bird. These hormones are usually given as a shot every few weeks or as an implant every few months, are frequently on back-order, and are very expensive. Hormonal therapy is not a cure all. You will need to make the changes as outlined above if you truly want to help your bird from being too reproductively active.

Teaching Bathing Skills

Many companion parrot species originate from tropical environments with high humidity in which they bathe often. Even parrots from arid environments enjoy and benefit from bathing. Bathing stimulates preening and is essential for normal feather health. In fact, inadequate bathing and low humidity have often been linked to feather picking.

Bird Bathing Methods

The method selected will vary with the species and the individual:

- Spray bottles are an easy way to provide showers or mist
- Some parrots like to bathe in their water bowls.
- Many small birds will bathe in a shallow dish.
- Species like lorries & caiques enjoy to be truly drenched and may take their showers at a sink.
- Most parrots enjoy showering with their owner, and shower perches and stands are commercially available. Securely attach the perch to prevent falling. (Pet birds may also be placed on a T-stand in the bathroom during showering to expose them to much needed humidity).
- Some birds enjoy being placed outdoors within their cage to experience natural rainfall when the weather allows. (Note: Maintain close supervision while your bird is outdoors).
- Finally, some birds enjoy “leaf bathing”. Place large, soaking wet, leafy greens in a shallow bowl or on the top of the cage.

Tips for Encouraging your Parrot to Bathe or Shower

DO

...introduce spraying “indirectly” by gently misting to the side of or above your bird.

...introduce spraying with water in a neutral area, away from the cage and cage territory.

...make sure your bird can easily climb out of its bath.

---bathe or shower your bird frequently (daily is ideal, strive for at least 3 or 4 times weekly)

...apply only clean, fresh water to feathers.

DON'T

...punish a parrot by spraying him with water.

Afterwards

- Allow your bird to dry naturally whenever possible.
- Gentle towel drying or carefully blow drying may also be performed. When towel drying, slowly approach from the front and pat the bird dry. Blow drying may excessively dry delicate bird skin. Never hold the dryer close to your pet, and continually monitor air temperature on your wrist or arm. *Blow dryer use is not recommended by Dr. Shakeri. Some blow dryers produce ozone and are teflon coated leading to respiratory disease which can be serious. Also it can be difficult to tell if your bird is getting too hot leading to overheating and burns.*

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Caging the Companion Parrot

The ideal bird cage should be spacious and clean, with multiple perches and stimulating toys. Specific cage requirements will vary with the species and the amount of time your bird will be expected to spend in its cage. Purchase the cage from a reputable manufacturer as many homemade cages are made of potentially toxic materials.

- **Cage size** is the most important factor.
 - Buy the largest cage suitable for the species you will own.
 - Choose a cage that has more vertical than horizontal space.
 - Small, flighted birds such as finches and canaries also need more vertical space, however they also require cages that allow them to fly back and forth.
- **Cage bars** must be close enough that birds cannot stick their heads through them, but far enough apart to prevent trapping of limbs or toes.
 - Welds should be smooth at the joints with no rough edges.
 - Beware of welds do not appear to be factory applied. The solder on cages of unknown origin may contain toxic substances such as lead.
 - Average horizontal bar spacing

3/8 to 7/16 in.	Budgerigar, canary, parrotlet, lovebird
5/8 in.	Cockatiel
1/2 to 3/4 in.	Cockatiel, small conure, other small parrots Amazon, African Grey, small cockatoo, large conure, Ring-necked parakeet, Pionus, Eclectus
3/4 to 1 in.	
3/4 to 1.5 in.	Macaw, large cockatoo, some Amazons/Eclectus

- **Place the cage** where the bird can observe household activity and yet not always be in the middle of activity.
 - Place the cage away from sources of extreme heat or cold such as heaters, stoves, exterior doors, or air conditioning.
 - As an area of temperature extremes, the kitchen is not recommended for housing pet birds. There is also a risk of dangerous cooking fumes such as Teflon released from superheated nonstick cookware.
- Avoid decorative cages sold by non-pet retailers. These cages are usually unsuitable for birds.
- Offer an assortment of **perches** with different diameters, shapes, and textures.
 - Natural wood perches from trees such as dogwood, fruit trees or willow trees are ideal.
 - Never offer perches made from concrete or other abrasive materials as the only perch or the highest perch.

- Do not offer sandpaper perches at all as they are too abrasive for the feet.
 - Rope perches are gentle on the feet, but check them frequently. Remove the rope when it becomes soiled or frayed; unraveled rope strands can become entangled in the toes. (Regular nail trims will minimize this risk). Also monitor your bird to make sure it does not eat bits of rope.
 - PVC piping is impervious to beak damage, however it can be slippery. Parrots do best on PVC perches that have been sanded or bent into shapes for secure footing.
- Place **dishes** high to minimize the risk of contamination from droppings.
- Newspaper makes an ideal **substrate** for lining bird cages. Butcher paper and paper grocery bags also work well. Avoid materials like wood chips and corn cob. These bedding are messy, birds may ingest them, and if not kept scrupulously clean, fungus may grow on these substrates—increasing the risk of Aspergillosis.
- Don't forget to consider your needs as well.
 - A pull-out bottom tray and large entry door make cleaning easier. A large entry door also provides easy access to your bird.
 - Aprons or seed guards keep debris in the cage and off the floor.
 - Outside access feeders decrease the risk of escape.
 - Casters allow a large cage to be easily moved, while a handle allows one to carry a small cage.
- **Accessories**
 - An outside mounted **water bottle** may help to conserve interior cage space. Birds must learn to drink from water bottles. Watch out for birds to stuff the sipper with seeds and other materials.
 - A free-standing perch is a wise investment. Cages with playpens may also work well for some birds; however remember that behavioral problems related to dominance may arise if the bird is at a level higher than its owner.

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Written Sep 1997, updated Dec. 9, 2007.

Parrot Toys & Toy Safety

Parrots are extremely intelligent creatures; and toys are one of the most important items we can purchase for our birds. Many avian behaviorists recommend four types of toys for pet birds:

Climbing Toys

Ropes
Swings

Foot Toys

Nuts
Corn-on-the-Cob

Chew Toys

Natural wood branches
Old telephone book
Paper towel rolls

Puzzle Toys

Pine cones with seeds
Dry pasta filled with treats
PVC pipe w/ holes drilled and treats

When purchasing toys, the number one concern is safety. Avoid toys with small, removable parts. Tighten hanging toys securely, and wet the rope or leather first to ensure the knot is tight enough. Other considerations to look out for include:

Size: Toys must be appropriate to the bird's size.

Bells: Clappers on bells should be securely attached.
Remove clappers if the bird is strong enough to remove it (most birds are strong enough) using a pair of pliers.
Large birds should never have access to small bells.
Avoid old bells as they may be made of heavy metals like lead or zinc.

Beads: Plastic beads are fine for small birds, but should never be offered to large birds. Offer wood beads to large birds instead.
Vegetable dye should be used to color beads.
Recommended size of

beads:	1-in.	Conure
	1.5-in.	Amazon
	1.5-in & up	Macaws, cockatoos

Leather: Leather and rawhide in toys should be of domestic origin. Dyes used to color leather can be toxic. Select non-tanned or vegetable tanned leather.

Chains: Chains should be welded smoothly.

Links should be large enough to prevent trapping of a toe.

Rope: Always use a natural fiber (plastic and synthetic fibers can do great harm if ingested or if they wrap around toes or limbs)
Check rope material frequently and remove the rope when it becomes soiled or frayed.
If rope strands unravel, they can become entangled in the toes. (Regular nail trims will minimize this risk).
Also monitor your bird to make sure it does not eat bits of rope.

Clips: Check clips or connector pieces carefully.
Can the bird get its beak or toes caught?
A clip type connector is safe only for small birds.
Most birds require a quick link type connection (round, key-ring style hardware)
Large birds should have tight C-clamps.
Dog-leash style snap hooks or shower curtain type hooks can be dangerous.

Birds like to chew and many toys will be destroyed. This is good! This is the purpose of bird toys. Because their job is to destroy their toys, always inspect your bird's toys on a daily basis. Also supervise your bird with its toys—particularly new toys.

Finally, not all birds interact with toys, and the ability to play may be learned to some degree.

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Written December 9, 2007.

Household Dangers

There are a host of potential household dangers that may confront our winged companions.

The kitchen is generally not a good place for parrots to hang out.

- There is the obvious danger of the stove with boiling pots of water and frying pans of food.
- There is also the risk of leaks from gas appliances for leaks. Consider purchasing a gas leak and/or carbon monoxide detector.

The efficient respiratory tract of the bird means they are extremely susceptible to the irritating, toxic, and potentially fatal effects of inhaling **strong fumes and/or vapors**. The most well known problem is the potentially fatal release of toxic Teflon gas from superheated nonstick cookware. Other non-stick items include stove drip pans, irons, ironing board covers, bread makers, and other household appliances.

Always keep your parrot out of the room when using spray product of any kind. Problems have been reported with a wide variety of products including:

Air freshener	Hair spray	Plug-in freshener
Ammonia	Heaters, new	Potpourri
Bleach	Insecticides	Scented candle
Carpet freshener	Incense	Self-cleaning oven
Cologne	Nail polish	Smoke of any kind
Fertilizer	Oil-based paint	Spray-on deodorant
Flea bomb	Oven cleaner	Stain remover
Furniture polish	Perfume	Tub & tile cleaner

Problems have also been described with some woods burned in the fireplace, particularly if the fireplace is poorly vented.

The **bathroom** is another potentially dangerous room. Keep toilet seats down to prevent a bird from landing in the toilet bowl. Do not leave open containers of water out anywhere through the house.

Hazards for birds in flight or merely gliding include ceiling fans and large mirrors. Of course there is also a danger that a bird may fly through an open window or into a closed

window. Drafty windows are also a potential source of temperature extremes. Also make sure the bird cage is not placed in an area where sun beats down through the window.

Additional sources of potentially stressful **temperature extremes** include exterior doors, air vents, and fireplaces. Do not place cage in areas where temperature extremes

Also beware of **household items on which your bird may chew:**

- Electrical cords
- Toxic household plants
- Soft plastic rubber items
- Pressure-treated wood
- Paper with lots of colored inks
- Heavy metals may be found in a variety of household items including leaded stained glass decoration, some mini blinds, old paint on woodwork, costume jewelry, and curtain weights.

Finally, beware of **creatures that may chew on your bird**. Other household pets, such as potential predator species like cats and dogs, should always be supervised no matter how long or how well they get along.

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Holiday Hazards

The companion parrot is part of the family! When including our feathered friends in the holiday season we must keep them safe.

- **Christmas tree**—Electric wires represent an enticing danger for pet birds, and ornaments may be made from cheap materials containing heavy metals. Many trees are also sprayed with chemicals.
- Many **holiday plants** are also potentially toxic including:

Poinsettia (<i>Euphorbia pulcherrima</i>)	Mistletoe (<i>Viscum album</i>)
Holly (<i>Ilex</i> spp.)	Yew (<i>Cephalotaxus</i> sp.)
English Ivy (<i>Hedera helix</i>)	Chrysanthemum
- Of course, the holidays are also associated with lots of **cooking**. Confine your pet bird to its cage to prevent accidents with pots of boiling water and pans of frying food. Also, remember the danger of cooking fumes, particularly from overheated nonstick pots and pans. The release of polytetrafluoroethylene (Teflon) fumes is well known to be toxic, potentially cause bleeding and fluid in the lungs, and possible death.
- **Cleaning** agents may also release powerful fumes. Use of items like carpet cleaners and bleach have also been associated with death and illness.
- Never offer **sweet treats** like chocolate and sugary treats to pet birds. Chocolate contains theophylline, which is toxic to birds and animals. Sweets frequently irritate the gastrointestinal tract. Items containing caffeine, avocado, salty snacks, alcohol, and rhubarb should also not be offered.
- The highly efficient respiratory tract of the bird means that strong fumes or **strong smells** may be particularly irritating—and potentially dangerous. Do not expose your companion parrot to scented candles, potpourri, or room fresheners. Also protect your bird from second-hand smokers.
- Holiday **stress** is not just a problem for humans. Take your bird's personality into account when making them part of your holiday. Some individuals enjoy the noise and excitement of holiday festivities, while other birds may become stressed. Shy birds may do better with a view of holiday activity from a distance.

Regardless of your bird's personality, keep their daily schedule as consistent as possible and be sure to spend time with your pet on a daily basis.

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Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis

Chlamydiosis in Birds

Avian Chlamydiosis, also known as ornithosis, is a common disease of many bird species and is caused by the bacterial organism *Chlamydia psittaci*. Bird owners should be aware that this is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be transmitted from birds to humans, and also know its implications. The disease in people is called Psittacosis, or Parrot Fever.

Transmission

Transmission of the disease is primarily through inhaling respiratory secretions or contaminated dust from droppings or feathers of infected birds. Risk of infection is increased by close contact with infected birds that are shedding the organism, therefore, the disease is more common in stressed birds (shipping, overcrowding, or malnutrition) since birds tend to shed the organism when stressed. Infected birds do not have to show specific signs of the illness in order to transmit the disease.

Clinical Signs in Birds

The visible signs of chlamydiosis are typically respiratory or gastrointestinal in nature. Lime-green diarrhea or urates, is a common sign in many species. Although the disease is systemic, the signs primarily relate to the eyes, respiratory tract, and liver. Some birds may show general signs of illness: lack of appetite, weight loss, depression, diarrhea, discharge from the eyes or nares, or even death. However, birds may exhibit few visible signs of illness and these same signs can be associated with a number of other diseases. Some birds that are actively infected with *Chlamydia psittaci* may show no signs of illness. An infected bird may carry the organism and not become identifiably ill until some stressful incident brings it out, if at all. Breeding birds can pass the organism to their young. Baby birds are more susceptible to severe infection than adult birds and may die in the nest or soon after weaning.

Diagnosis

A confirmed diagnosis of chlamydiosis in a live bird is sometimes difficult and depends on the species, length of time since exposure, and general condition of the bird. Your avian veterinarian will conduct appropriate tests and evaluate the results in conjunction with a thorough examination. Current recommendations are that a suspect bird be given more than one type of test, along with evaluation of the bird's condition and history, to achieve a diagnosis. Some veterinarians recommend treatment of all suspected cases with or without a positive test result. It is very important to complete the full course of treatment as prescribed by your veterinarian.

Treatment

If chlamydiosis has been diagnosed, or if treatment has been recommended by your veterinarian, all exposed birds in the household should be treated at the same time to reduce the spread or recurrence of the disease. It is imperative that infected

birds be isolated during treatment and that certain sanitary measures be employed to prevent spread or reinfection of the disease. The success of treatment depends on all of the medication being given in the recommended dosage and time frame. Antibiotic dosage and feeding should be directed by your veterinarian to ensure adequate levels are being consumed. Specific means of treatment should be determined by your avian veterinarian. Depending on the condition of the patient, other supportive treatment may be recommended as well. Your veterinarian will discuss the most appropriate treatment for your bird. Treatment must be continued for a minimum of 45 days. Depending on the state, a positive diagnosis may need to be reported to the state veterinarian.

During Treatment the Owner Must:

- clean the premises of all organic debris and then disinfect with an appropriate disinfectant such as a bleach and water solution (1:32 dilution or ½ cup bleach per gallon of water), 1% Lysol®, or quaternary ammonia compounds for 5-10 minutes of contact time on the cleaned surface to be disinfected. Do not expose birds to the fumes of these disinfectants. Clean daily. Do not use a vacuum or pressure washer.
- use caution when handling droppings and cage debris, take care not to stir up dust while cleaning, keep dust and feather circulation to a minimum; it is recommended to wear gloves, coveralls or disposable gown, disposable caps, protective eyewear (goggles) and a properly fitted respirator mask such as an N95 particulate mask
- separate/isolate and seek medical care for other birds showing signs of disease;
- avoid contact with the birds by elderly, pregnant, sick or very young persons, immunosuppressed persons, or persons on anti-rejection drugs;
- remove all mineral supplements containing calcium as calcium interferes with some medications;
- reduce stress in the bird's environment as much as possible; and
- follow all treatment instructions as prescribed by your veterinarian.



Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis

Psittacosis (Parrot Fever) in Humans

The bacterial organism *Chlamydia psittaci* is transmissible from birds to humans. If

anyone exposed to an infected bird develops flu-like symptoms, that person should seek prompt medical care and inform their healthcare provider about having contact with birds.

Treatment is simple and most often successful in humans, but neglect of the symptoms or delayed diagnosis may result in serious illness, even death, especially in compromised

persons. *Chlamydia psittaci* is not the same organism that causes genital chlamydia infection in humans, which is due to a related organism called *Chlamydia trachomatis*.

The bacterial organism *Chlamydia psittaci* is transmissible from birds to humans. If anyone exposed to an infected bird develops flu-like symptoms, that person should seek prompt medical care and inform their healthcare provider about having contact with birds.

- buy birds from suppliers who routinely screen their birds for the presence of *Chlamydia psittaci* or who are willing

to stand behind the health of their birds in some manner (health guarantee);

- isolate and quarantine all newly acquired birds for a minimum of six weeks;
- maintain appropriate preventative health management as recommended by your avian veterinarian;
- maintain good nutrition and minimize stress;
- maintain adequate records for at least a year as to bird ID, where and when

purchased and from whom, date of illness.

For More Information on Birds

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Basic Care for Birds
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis
- Feather Loss: Cause and Treatment
- Feeding Birds
- Health Exam for Birds
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Signs of Illness in Birds
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Veterinarian?

Preventive Measures

The following recommendations help reduce the incidence of chlamydiosis in flocks or companion birds:

- immediately after purchase, take all newly-acquired birds to an avian veterinarian for chlamydiosis screening tests;

To Learn More About Chlamydiosis

To learn more about chlamydiosis please read the most recent edition of the Compendium of Measures to Control *Chlamydia psittaci* Infection Among Humans (Psittacosis) and Pet Birds (Avian Chlamydiosis) from the National Association of State Public Health Veterinarians, <http://www.nasphv.org/documents/CompendiaPsittacosis.html>

For help finding a qualified avian veterinarian in your area, go to www.aav.org and click "Find a Vet."

Online Resources

Follow AAV on Facebook (www.facebook.com/aavonline) for great tips and the latest news for pet bird owners. You can also find us on Twitter (@aavonline) and YouTube!

Our website, www.aav.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!

AAV offers bird clubs a monthly news bulletin for use in their newsletters. Clubs may contact the Publications Office (pubs@aav.org) for information.



Training Basic Skills

Many parrots instinctively strive for a position of dominance within their flock (your household). Many of the behavioral problems that can arise from such a situation, may be prevented when the owner is clearly established as the flock leader instead. Training serves to build trust between you and your parrot while at the same clarifying the parrot's position within the household.

Skills commonly taught to companion parrots include:

1. Fundamental verbal commands for pet birds are “UP” and “DOWN”.

The two most important things you can teach your bird are to step onto your hand using an “UP” command spoken in a firm, pleasant manner, and to step off with the “DOWN” command. Use these commands consistently. Other important verbal commands are “OKAY” and “NO”.

2. Towel handling

Regular, gentle towel handling or cuddling will make visits to your avian veterinarian much easier for your pet. Lay a towel out flat and place the bird in the center. Gradually pick up the corners. Some birds, particularly young birds, may enjoy playing peek-a-boo. Once your bird is used to this, playfully wrap her up in the towel. Pick her up and cuddle her.

3. Examine wings and toes

The ability to easily touch your pet's toes and wings will make the grooming process much easier. Begin by gentling touching toes while your bird is on a perch or wrapped in the towel. Gently lift each wing with your fingers. When your bird is comfortable with having both wings spread, touch each flight feather. Find a command word to say while touching toes and wings that works for you and your bird.

4. Stick training allows you to maintain hand control of your parrot even when it is feeling a bit too “spirited” to place your hand in its cage. Stick training may be particularly helpful in sexually mature parrots during the breeding season. While playing with your parrot, lay an appropriately-sized branch or dowel rod down on a flat surface like the floor or bed. As your parrot steps on it, gradually lift the stick up. Once your bird is used to this, ask her to step onto the stick using the “UP” command.

5. Regularly **spoon or syringe feeding** a treat makes it much easier to medicate your parrot. Feed a soft, flavorful item like sweet potato baby food. Make sure the food is warm (100 to 105°F), but not hot. Stir well if a microwave is used to prevent hot spots. Do not allow the your bird to “pump” as a baby bird would, just dribble the soft food into the beak.

Training Sessions

- Select a neutral room, away from the cage, and a neutral perch.
- Practice skills with your bird regularly.
- Birds have short attention spans, so a good starting point is to have 15 minute sessions, three times a week, at the same time daily.
- Make sure there are no distractions such as television or conversation with others.
- Be prepared. Get everything together for a training session before removing your bird from its cage.
- Be patient, be persistent, and keep things simple focusing on one behavior each session.
- Use positive reinforcement such as praise, food treats, affection, or a favorite toy. Never yell or hit.

If you are interested in training your pet bird, the information provided here is only a starting point. Excellent sources on training and behavior include, but are not limited to: Sally Blanchard’s Companion Parrot Handbook, Guide to a Well-Behaved Parrot by Mattie Sue Athan, My Parrot, My Friend by Bonnie Munro Doane and Thomas Qualkinbush, and Birds for Dummies by Gina Spadafori and Dr. Brian Speer.

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Written Dec 9, 2007

Water Bottles in Birds

** When possible, which is in most cases, Dr. Shakeri recommends the use of water bowls over water bottles. **

Some bird owners prefer water bottles because open water bowls are vulnerable to contamination from droppings, food, and other debris. Although use of water bottles can make the cage environment tidier, their use can also prevent many normal behaviors that enrich pet bird life. Many birds not only enjoy dunking their food in their water bowls, but some individuals may even bath or splash around in their water bowls.

If you elect to provide your bird with a water bottle, it is imperative that your pet be properly trained and that appropriate equipment is purchased:

Selecting the bottle

Bottles are available in glass, resin, or plastic. Drinking tubes or nozzles are made from stainless steel and a small ball inside regulates water flow. The ball is sometimes colored red for birds, because it is thought this will attract the bird's interest. A metal guard may be necessary between the bottle and cage to prevent beak damage to plastic bottles.

Purchase several bottles so that you can always provide your bird with a fresh, clean replacement. Cage height and bar spacing will determine water bottle size, so have cage dimensions on hand when you shop for water bottles.

Mounting the bottle

Mount the water bottle where it can be easily reached. Instead of directly over the perch, the bottle should ideally hang off to the side. Hang the bottle at a height where the bird needs to extend its neck only slightly to reach the nozzle.

Training your bird

Demonstrate how to release water from the tube by tapping the ball bearing several times while your bird is watching. Most birds are curious and will immediately investigate the water bottle on their own. You can also pick up your pet bird, and gently tap its beak against the metal ball to make water come out.

Training a bird to drink from a water bottle can take anywhere from a few minutes to a few days.

- Do NOT go by the water line to determine if your bird is drinking from the tube as a decrease in water can occur from leakage.
- DO maintain a water bowl in the cage until you are confident that your bird is drinking from the water bottle.

Checking the bottle

After initial installation and after each and every cleaning, press the metal ball bearing several times to release the water. Also check the nozzle daily to make sure it is clear and water is flowing normally. Some birds stuff seeds or other debris inside, or the ball can simply become stuck. Some birds also learn to use their nozzle like a shower, so check bottles frequently to be sure they have not been drained.

Cleaning the bottle

Use of water bottles does not necessarily reduce your bird's risk of bacterial overgrowth. When water bottles are not kept scrupulously clean, bacteria like *Pseudomonas* can overgrow and potentially cause problems.

Most water bottles are dishwasher safe, but also periodically scrub the inside of your bird's bottles and tubes with small bottle brushes.

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August 6, 2013

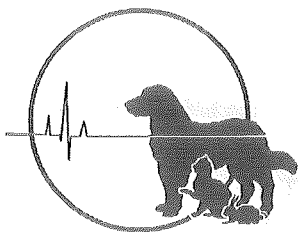
Cold Weather Tips for Exotic Animal Pets

While most exotic pets are housed indoors, there are still some key concepts to keep in mind when winter comes around.

1. Taking your animal outside in the cold (say on a trip to the veterinarian) does not mean that the animal will catch a cold. Take reasonable precautions to shelter it from the elements—wind, rain, and snow; but do not get too worked up about it.
2. Warm up your car before transporting the animal for a long ride. Be aware of it being in the car in regards to stopping at places or for long rides. Treat your pet as you would a newborn infant.
3. Birds can have baths in the winter. We recommend daily baths, if it is not a stressful experience for the bird. Often the best way bathe a tamer bird is to take them into the shower with the owner. Baths should be done early in the day to allow full drying. Allow the birds to dry off in the bathroom before moving to a cooler room. Hairdryers can be used on the cool setting only if they do not scare the bird.
4. Transport reptiles in a warmed container, such as a ventilated cooler, that is kept in the desired temperature zone for the animal. Reptiles rely on their environment to determine body temperature.
5. When housing reptiles at home, remember that the house temperature drops as winter comes and adjust their heat sources accordingly. The most important part of your heating set-up is a good quality digital thermometer. Place the thermometer where the reptile will be and measure the warm and cool ends of the cages as well as the night temperature. If these temperatures fall outside of recommended ranges, then provide a supplemental radiant heat source (lamp—not hot rock or heating pad).

** Hibernation is not recommended for any reptile without a veterinary consultation first. Many pets die every year from incorrect hibernating techniques. Have check-ups and bloodwork done before and after hibernating.
6. Ultraviolet light is extremely important for reptiles. We recommend fluorescent Reptisun® or incandescent PowerSun® from ZooMed®. This light needs to shine directly on the reptile with no glass, screening, plexiglass, etc.... between them and the reptile. Current recommendations also find the former bulb needs to be within 12 inches of the animal, while the second bulb should be about 24 inches away from the reptile, both on 12 hours/off 12 hours. Change the bulb every six months.

7. Christmas trees and holiday treats are not good things for any pet. Chocolate, alcohol, carbonated beverages, caffeine, high sugar, high salt, and high fat food are all harmful to most pets.
8. Watch birds, ferrets, and rabbits for chewing on electrical cords.
9. Carbon monoxide poisoning is also a risk for all pets. Make sure carbon monoxide detectors are near your pets.



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4 Devine Street
North Haven, CT 06473
203-865-0878

Lighting and Your Bird

Julia Shakeri, DVM, Practice Limited to Avian and Exotic Animals
Updated April 2016

Why Is Lighting Important?

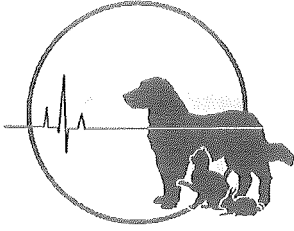
- Birds, just like people, need vitamin D3 to help maintain a normal biological calcium cycle. Without vitamin D3 the body cannot properly use the calcium consumed in the diet causing secondary serious disease to develop. Most fortified and pelleted bird foods contain vitamin D3 but the amounts necessary for each type of bird varies and standards have not been established. Consuming too much vitamin D3 is very dangerous and can lead to organ failure and abnormal mineralization of the organs. Birds cannot utilize the plant derived form, vitamin D2, so the safest way to make sure your bird has proper amounts of this vitamin is through exposure to sunlight (top recommendation) or when this is not possible flicker-free UVA/UVB lighting. The great thing about using UVB lighting for vitamin D3 levels is that the body will only convert what it needs so you don't have to worry about toxicity.

My Bird Gets Sunlight Every Day Through the Window. Is That Good Enough?

- No. The UVB needed for proper vitamin D3 acquisition is filtered out as it passes through, glass, plastic, or any solid barrier. Just think of the last time you were sunburned while sitting in a sunny spot in your living room with the windows closed – it doesn't happen. Even if providing proper UVB lighting and you have that light pass through glass or plastic before it contacts your bird you are filtering out the benefits.

What is the Best Source of Lighting for My Bird?

- Without question, Unfiltered, Direct Sunlight is Best Source of Lighting for Your Bird. Ideally, your bird would get about 30 to 60 minutes of time outdoors in the sun once daily – but even if you can only do this every-other-day the benefits are tremendous.
 - Whenever your bird is outside there must be an area where he/she can retreat to if it is too hot and also one that is safe from the elements. Your bird should always have access to fresh water.
 - Never leave your bird outside in temperatures below 65F, or more ideally 70F, unless they are well acclimated to it. If your bird is well acclimated through daily exposure, then you may be able to have your bird outdoors when temperatures drop down to 60F (and in some cases 55F) provided they have an area where they can retreat to for protection and warmth. Use your common sense – if it seems cold outside then don't take your bird out.
- One to Three Hours of Flicker-Free UVB/UVA Lighting Per Day is a good alternative for those days in which your bird is not able to have sunlight exposure. Although guidelines have not been established my general recommendation at this time is for most birds to have 1 hour of exposure to these lights daily unless they are of species which typically have prolonged sunlight exposure in the wild, such as African Grey parrots, in which case I recommend 3 hours of exposure.
 - Too much exposure to UVB/UVA lighting can cause eye and skin problems, just like in people, sometimes leading to cancer. If you are concerned we may not be providing enough light to manage a calcium imbalance, depending on the size of your bird, we can send out a blood test to evaluate a vitamin D profile.

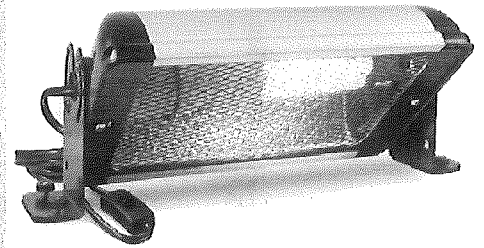
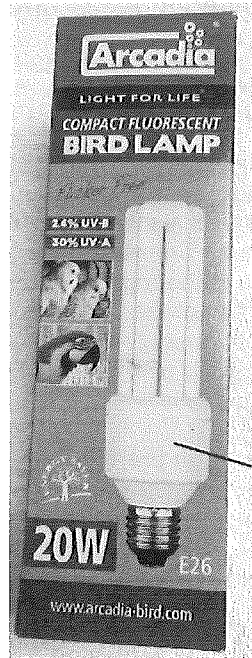


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Why Flicker-Free?... and What UVB/UVA Lighting Is Recommended?

- Birds can see the flicker effect of lighting even when we cannot - imagine having to deal with strobe lighting for extended periods of time. Lights that flicker may lead to stress which is why they are not recommended. Many options exist but below is my current recommendation (and no I am not affiliated and don't get kick-backs from this company or source!).
- Light Bulb:
 - Now available online in the USA, the highly regarded European, Arcadia Bird Lamp (a Compact Fluorescent, Flicker-Free, 2.4% UVB, 30% UVA, Bulb) is available (LightYourReptiles.com – they even test the light before mailing it out to make sure the product meets the high standards your bird needs!).
 - These bulbs need to be replaced annually so use a permanent marker to write the date on the light base as a reminder!!
- Lamps:
 - Arcadia Flicker-Free Lamps also available online (LightYourReptiles.com):
 - Arcadia Cage Mount Fixture for CFL Bird Bulb (What I Use)
 - Arcadia Parrot Pro UV Flood (Water Proof)
 - Arcadia Parrot Pro with Adjustable Stand
- Visit <http://www.arcadia-bird.com/uv-lighting/> for more information.



**Write the Date Here
and Do Not Forget
to Change the Light
Every Year**

Outdoor Light Considerations

- Injury and illness from predators, exposure to the elements (heat, cold, wind, rain), escape, and trauma are higher in birds that are not properly handled and enclosed outdoors.
- Always make sure the bird is either leashed on a flight harness or in a carrier cage when being taken outdoors. Clipping the wings can also be done to help decrease the chances of your bird escaping and flying away, but this comes with its own host of pros and cons to consider.
- Birds should not be left outdoors after dusk, even if within a screened in porch.
- Consider creating an outdoor aviary or other bird safe area on a porch (especially if screened in) for your bird to enjoy unfiltered sunlight.