

## BIRD NUTRITION

### **IMPROPER FEEDING IS THE CHIEF CAUSE OF DISEASE AND DEATH IN PET BIRDS!!**

A balanced diet consisting of a variety of foods is highly advised.

#### **SEED:**

- Packaged commercial feeds are available and should constitute the majority of the diet.
- Different types of seeds should be offered.
- For example, 3-4 separate dishes containing pellet food (LaFeber's, Kaytee, Harrison's, Bonemzon), treat food, molting food, and/or song bird (finch & canary) food should be available.
- NEVER feed a <animal> a diet of strictly sunflower seeds!!

#### **GREENS:**

- Greens are a valuable addition to <animal>'s diet.
- Common table greens may be used or backyard greens when available. Since greens are high in water and bulk content, a soft-green stool will be passed. Do not mistake this for diarrhea. If <animal> has never eaten greens, it may tend to overeat at first. However, if fed consistently, it will eat only a small amount.
- Remember wash all greens very well!!!
- Suggested greens include Dandelion leaves, fresh branches, etc.

#### **FRUITS & VEGETABLES:**

These are a part of a balanced diet for a bird, but should never be over 25% of the diet. Again, it is important to wash the food

#### **THOROUGHLY:**

Canned fruits should be avoided due to the high sugar content, which tends to cause diarrhea. Suggested fruits and vegetables include oranges, apples, green beans, peas, corn, etc. Various juices and nectars may also be given.

#### **ANIMAL PROTEIN:**

This is most important in carnivorous species of birds, which may be actually fed mice but all birds have a protein need. This may be met by feeding boiled eggs (yolk, white, and shell crumbled together), cottage cheese, milk, or peanut butter.

#### **VITAMINS:**

Vitamins should be added to the drinking water. Of special concern are vitamins A, D3, and B Complex.

#### **MINERALS:**



## Animal Ark Veterinary Hospital of Elkin

188 Claremont Drive, Elkin, NC 28621

Phone (336) 835-1082



**\*Bird Emergencies call (336) 366-7750**

### TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR BIRD HEALTHY

- ☆ Wash your hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and water
- ☆ Feed organic foods/pellets as much as possible
- ☆ Feed immune-stimulating organic fruits and vegetables such as blueberries, strawberries, spinach and broccoli, oranges and carrots (in recommended serving amounts)
- ☆ Provide a minimum of 15 minutes of natural sunlight several times per week
- ☆ Feed natural grain cereals such as Cheerios, Wheaties, etc. as treats
- ☆ Provide 8 hours of complete darkness for rest
- ☆ Avoid white bread products and sweets
- ☆ Avoid candles, incense, air fresheners and smoke
- ☆ Avoid cooking with Teflon coated products
- ☆ Provide fresh uncontaminated water at all times



# Pet Bird Behavior Problems

## Common Behavior Problems in Parrots and Other Pet Birds

By Alyson Kalhagen

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Just like children and pets like cats and dogs, parrots and other pet birds sometimes exhibit behavior problems that their caretakers find difficult to deal with. While there are a number of ways that birds can misbehave and irritate the people that they live with, there tend to be a few behavior issues that are more widely reported than others. Thankfully, most of these problems have rather simple solutions if owners put forth a little time and effort. Read on to learn about the 5 most common behavior problems in pet birds, what your bird means by exhibiting these behaviors, and what you can do to fix them.

### Biting

Biting is one of the most commonly reported behavior problems with pet birds, and it's no surprise -- bites hurt! Thankfully, it can be easy to correct biting behavior in birds if you can identify the cause. If your bird has been chomping at you, ask yourself a few questions about your pet. Could your bird be frightened of something? Could the biting be hormonal in nature? Is the bird simply trying to play with you? Once you are able to figure out where the behavior stems from, you can take steps to discourage it from popping back up again in the future.

### Screaming

Screaming is another undesirable behavior that many bird owners report as a nuisance. While all healthy birds will scream and vocalize at some point throughout the day, problem screaming can be a result of boredom, depression, or some other type of stress that your bird is experiencing. If you've considered all factors and consulted with an avian vet to rule out any medical problems, you may want to talk to a parrot behavior consultant for help with modifying your bird's behavior if the screaming doesn't begin to calm down on its own.

### Destructive Behavior

Destructive behavior in parrots is often a sign that a bird either has a problem with his or her environment or is not receiving enough vital mental stimulation to keep its mind occupied. Birds are very intelligent and they need lots of attention in order to keep from becoming bored. If your bird is showing signs of blatantly destructive behavior, it may be a good idea to assess how you are spending your time with your pet, and take steps to make your bird more included in your daily activities. Doing so can greatly reduce destructive tendencies in most pet parrots.

### Territoriality

Often, birds who suddenly become territorial are simply experiencing hormonal problems due to breeding season. However, territoriality can have other triggers and can be a sign that your bird is not as happy and comfortable with you as you might like him to be. To help curb territoriality and related behaviors, try practicing some bonding techniques with your feathered friend. Improving your relationship on a fundamental level can go a long way in terms of resolving behavior problems with your pet. If you find that your bonding practices aren't helping things improve after a reasonable amount of time, consider hiring a parrot behavior consultant for help.

### Feather Plucking

Feather plucking can occur in cases where birds are severely depressed and unsettled in their environments. If you notice feather plucking in your pet bird, then you should immediately consult with an avian vet to rule out the possibility of diseases such as PBFD. If it is determined that there isn't a medical cause for your bird's plucking, then it's imperative that you take a long look at the way you are housing, feeding, and interacting with your bird. Keeping your pet in a cage that's too small or dirty, feeding food that lacks nutrients, and not paying enough attention to your bird can all cause your pet to start plucking his or her feathers. Keep your bird healthy and happy by doing all that you can to provide the best care possible.

## BIRD CARE TIPS

Non-stick cooking spray can be used to coat cage bars to ease removal of dried droppings and/or food. It also prevents rust.

Use a small, hand vacuum for quick cleanups. Vacuum or sweep up feathers at least once each day.

Keep perches free of dried droppings to help avoid illness and sore feet. Scrape the perches. Clean with sandpaper. A putty knife can also be used to loosen the debris from the perch.

Disinfect perches in bleach and dry them in the sun.

If <animal> is not tame, buy a spare cage to transfer it to while you clean the primary cage.

Change paper on cage bottoms every day.

**NEVER** use paper printed with colored inks. Many of these inks are toxic to birds.

When cutting newspapers to line the bottom of the cage, cut several sections at once. Remove one or two layers daily to help ease cleanup.

<Animal> probably enjoys music as much as you do. Tune in a favorite radio station, especially when you are away from the house.

Tie undyed leather shoelaces into complicated knots, and then hang this toy from the top of the cage. <Animal> will love untying the knots and chewing on the leather.

Offer <animal> balls with bells. These balls, which are usually made for cats, will allow <animal> to entertain itself for hours.

Allow <animal> plenty of supervised playtime outside the cage every day.

Do not offer <animal> foods or drinks that contain caffeine, such as chocolate or coffee. Caffeine is potentially toxic to birds.

Add chili peppers to <animal> diet. There are many varieties; they are nutritious and most birds enjoy them. Bones with some meat left on are relished by many birds, as are pork and beef bones. These bones are an excellent source of protein. Be sure that the meat is well cooked.

Watch closely for any of the following signs of illness in <animal>.

- Change in character or number of droppings.
- Change in food or water consumption.
- Change in appearance or posture. (Ruffled feathers, eyes closed, droopy stance.)
- Noticeable breathing at rest or heavy breathing after exercise.
- Any enlargement-even fat in a bird is abnormal!!!

## **Chronic Egg Laying**

### **What is chronic egg laying?**

Chronic egg laying is the production of an excessive number of eggs or repeated clutches (or collections) of eggs. Chronic egg laying often occurs in the absence of a normal bird mate and outside of the normal breeding season.

Domestic chickens may lay egg after egg after egg, but only with the help of a special diet. Without significant nutritional support, heavy egg production creates a drain on the body leading to depletion of calcium and protein stores. High levels of calcium are required to shell the egg, and calcium also stimulates the uterine contractions needed to push the egg along. Falling calcium levels increase the risk of egg binding or dystocia, as well as the formation of abnormally shelled or shell-less eggs. The production of malformed eggs also increases the risk of egg binding or dystocia.

### **Who may suffer from chronic egg laying?**

Chronic egg laying may be seen in any hen, however this problem is most commonly observed in small psittacines like the budgerigar parakeet, lovebird, and cockatiel.

### **Why are some individuals more likely to be chronic egg layers?**

In the wild, specific environmental cues may stimulate reproductive activity and egg laying. Companion parrots may be strongly stimulated by some of these cues such as:

- \* Long day length
- \* The presence of a mate
- Warm temperatures
- Rainfall
- Abundant food supply

In captivity, some genetic lines also appear to be predisposed to reproductive problems.

### **What measures can you take to minimize egg laying in your hen?**

- Allow eggs to remain in the cage for at least a couple weeks after they have been laid. To minimize the risk of breakage, eggs may be hard boiled or frozen. Craft store “fakes” may also work as substitutes eggs.
- Provide a strict 8-10 hours of daylight per day for a period recommended by your avian veterinarian.
- Halt exposure to the mate (real or perceived). The mate may be another bird housed in the same cage, the same room, or simply within hearing distance. A perceived mate may also be a favorite toy or mirror, or even a human being.

## FEATHER LOSS IN BIRDS

### PROBLEM THAT CAN BE CAUSED BY NUMEROUS FACTORS:

- Mites, lice, bacteria, and fungal (yeast) infections
- Hormonal imbalances
- Dietary deficiencies
- Injury
- Underlying disease processes that secondarily affect the skin
- Psychological problems (boredom, etc.)

*Some of these problems are easy to correct, while others are more difficult or impossible to resolve.*

### MITES, LICE, INFECTIONS

Often these problems can be solved with dusting <animal> with the appropriate insecticide or using oral medications. Diagnosis is made by examination of the feathers under the microscope, or by taking cultures of the feathers.

### HORMONAL IMBALANCES

Sometimes improper activity of the thyroid gland, ovaries, or testicles can result in feather picking. Blood tests or biopsies may be needed for a confirmed diagnosis.

### DIETARY DEFICIENCIES

A lack of protein, fatty acids, certain vitamins or minerals can result in feather loss and/or feather picking. Sometimes the fault is not in the diet, but rather <animal>'s ability to utilize the nutrients included in the food. A good history often provides clues as to the cause. Diet changes generally help.

### INJURIES / UNDERLYING DISEASE

Sometimes an injury or illness (gout, tumors, arthritis) can cause <animal> to hurt or itch. When <sex> hurts or itches, <animal> may pick at the area. Generally these causes are suspected when only one area of the body is attacked. Often it is difficult to cure these individuals because the real cause is not treatable since the stress cannot be alleviated.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL

By far these are the most common causes of feather picking. These types of feather pickers can be the most difficult to cure and have the highest incidence of recurrence. Common psychological factors are:

### **UNHAPPINESS**

This can occur over such minor things as moving the cage to a different location or transferring the bird to a new cage. Arguments between family members can create stress feather picking as well as the disappearance of a favorite family member.

### **BOREDOM**

Generally due to lack of exercise, decreased attention, or no variation in environment. Changes in the cage or more attention can and usually does help. A companion bird may be the solution (although sometimes it will make things worse!), especially if the feather picking bird is very "people oriented."

### **LACK OF PRIVACY**

Usually seen in new birds or established birds after a new addition is made. Usually the addition of a nesting box will reduce or eliminate the problem.

### **BAD HABIT**

This is often the underlying cause, just as some people bite their finger nails or pulls their hair out. There are very frustrating cases to solve.

### **TREATMENT**

Feather picking can vary widely but the method of stopping the behavior is initially the same whatever the cause. An ELIZABETHAN COLLAR (cone-shaped collar) is applied around the neck of the bird. It may take the bird several hours or days to adjust to the collar. During this time, the perches should be placed low in the cage and food/water should also be moved to within easy reach of the collared bird. Often the collar is left on the bird for 1-2 months.!!! This is necessary to try to break the habit that the bird has developed. Often all feathers will not regrow for many months or until the bird goes through a natural molt. In severe cases, the feathers may never regrow or take years to come back.

Occasionally bitter liquids (i.e. Bitter Apple) can be sprayed on the affected area to try to dissuade the bird from picking himself. PATIENCE is very important when trying to solve feather loss problems in pet birds