

How do I know if my bird is sick?

Our pet birds are considered “prey animals.” This is why it is so valuable to know “normal” behaviors and eating habits for your pet bird. Birds try to hide illness and often show minimal changes until they are very sick. It is important to recognize the first signs of illness and to take your pet bird to a veterinarian as soon as you notice changes. Decreased appetite or activity is often sure signs that something is wrong. Remember however, that birds will not always be obvious about this. A pet bird that is fluffed, not wanting to perch, or displaying “tail bobbing” are just a few of the other symptoms a sick bird may show. If you are ever unsure of the health of your bird, please call and one of our trained staff would be more than happy to discuss any questions you may have. The Bird and Pet Clinic of Roseville highly regards the importance of preventative medicine. The best way to help our pet birds is to prevent illness with proper husbandry, diet and biannual exams. We recommend laboratory tests annually for all pet birds as a part of this preventative measure because birds can be so good at hiding illness.

What do I feed my bird?

Not all pet birds have the same dietary requirements, so it is important to first know what specifically needs. For parrots there are different opinions on the best diet for your bird. We recommend feeding pelleted or extruded diets as a main staple and supplementing with fruits, vegetables, legumes and some seeds. There are many different brands of pelleted diets to try for your pet bird so don't get discouraged if you try one and they don't like it or won't try it. Birds are sight eaters, if they have never tried something before they often are afraid of it, or do not recognize it as a food source. Birds are also social eaters, they feel most secure eating in a flock or with you, so you may have more luck getting them to try something new if you have them on a perch at the table with you. (note: humans have bacteria in their mouth that can be harmful to birds so we do not recommend feeding a bird directly from your mouth or a plate that you have eaten off of).

What do I do if my bird lays an egg?

It is certainly possible for a female bird to lay eggs without a male present; the eggs will not be fertile. If your bird does begin to lay, we suggest not taking the eggs away from her for a time. If you immediately remove them, this could stimulate her to lay more and more, which can be tiring for your pet and drain her of energy, nutrients and vitamins that she needs. Frequent egg layers can be depleted of calcium causing seizures and fragile bones. If you want to curb this behavior in the future, try to rearrange the cage toys/items or try shortening the amount of light your pet receives in a day.

What is a blood feather and what happens when they break?

Blood feathers are brand new feathers that come in during molting. They need a blood supply to continue growth but once they reach their desired length, the follicle closes off and the blood supply dries up inside the feather shaft. Normally, this cycle goes undisturbed but some birds might break one for a variety of reasons. If this happens, we do not recommend that you try to fix it yourself. It will probably continue to ooze, so apply direct pressure being careful not to

further damage the wing. The feather might need to be pulled to stop the bleeding and it is necessary that this be dealt with rapidly. Please call for advice as this could be an emergency situation.

How do I disinfect my pet's cage?

The following is recommended for most cages:

When it is cage-cleaning time, place your pet in a temporary cage with food and water, away from any cleaning fumes. Remove and discard any soiled organic materials, like cardboard, newspaper, wood, shavings, natural toys, food items, rope or wood perches. Use soap (Dawn) and water to remove any dirt and debris from the cage, tank or kennel. Some toys and bowls are dishwasher safe and can be cleansed in the dishwasher instead. Mix a solution of 10% bleach (1 part bleach into 9 parts water). Soak or wipe down all appropriate items and surfaces with this. Let dilute bleach sit for 15 minutes before completely rinsing. Be sure all residue is rinsed away as bleach can be toxic to some pets. Place in direct sunlight to dry or let dry overnight. Set up your pet's cage again and enjoy! Repeat this process about 1-2 times a month and don't forget to do a general cleaning of food and water dishes once a day.

Why is my bird picking its feathers?

If there's one parrot problem that has both bird owners and veterinarians alike pulling out their own hair in frustration, it would have to be feather-picking, a bird's willful destruction of his own plumage.

The first thing you need to know about this problem: Feather-picking is a symptom of something else that's wrong with your bird. The only hope you have of "curing" feather-picking is finding out and treating what's behind the behavior.

- Feather-picking relates to a staggering variety of problems, and any one or any combination of the following can be at the bottom of your bird's plucking:
- Health problems. Medical conditions behind feather-picking include allergies, parasitic infections, bacterial infections, abnormal growths (cysts) in the feather follicle, internal health problems, vitamin deficiencies and hormone-associated problems. And that's the short list.
- Low humidity. Many birds come from extremely humid environments, and our houses can't hope to duplicate the conditions of a rain forest (we'd be miserable). The dry air of most houses can be a factor in feather-picking and can also set the stage for some secondary medical problems.
- Boredom and pent-up energy. Birds are active and intelligent, and they don't handle well the strain of being forced to sit around in a cage all day. Without things to play with and stuff to destroy, and without being able to get out of the cage and exercise, birds may direct all their energy toward self-mutilation.
- Psychological problems. Although birds need to have their wings trimmed for safety, a bad wing trim -- too short, with no allowance for an "easy landing" -- can upset a bird so badly that he starts tearing at himself. Obsessive-compulsive disorders can also trigger feather-picking.

- Attention-seeking. You love how your bird looks. He starts tugging at feathers and you freak, imagining your beautiful bird with the broiler-chicken look. Every time he touches his feathers -- even for normal preening behavior -- you rush over. See how this works? "Aha!" thinks your bird. "All I have to do to get attention is pull a feather!"

What can be done with the feather-picker? First, forget the over-the-counter and home remedy "cures." They don't work, and some might even put your bird at risk.

See a veterinarian with experience in caring for birds as soon as the problem appears. Medical problems need to be addressed before looking at any behavioral strategies.

Make sooner, rather than later, your emphasis. In general, the longer your bird has been picking, the greater the probability of an unresolvable pattern of behavior being set. Don't wait a few years before addressing a picking problem. When it starts, you need to start looking for a solution.

After your bird receives a clean bill of physical health, start making environmental adjustments to see whether you can ward off the picking. Prepare for the project to be a long one! Start a diary to record your changes and any effects they may have on your bird's behavior.

Start shaking things up, in small increments. A daily misting with a spray bottle and the addition of a room humidifier may be part of the solution. Also consider different toys, a smaller or larger cage, a new cage location, keeping a radio playing during the day, covering the cage to ensure your bird 12 solid hours of sleep, and more interaction and play with you as possibilities in the war against feather-picking.

Sadly, the definitive answer for feather-picking doesn't exist. The best you can do is be patient, work with an avian veterinarian, and be prepared to love your bird no matter what he looks like. In some cases, feather-picking is for life. In others, the problem is only occasional. Yes, some birds do become full-feathered again, but not every pet bird is bound for complete redress in the plumage department.

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