



Keeping your pet bird healthy

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Birds are ever popular pets; these include Psittacines – parrots, parakeets, budgies, cockatiels and cockatoos – but also chickens, canaries and finches, and even sometimes birds of prey and mynah birds are kept as companion animals.

Preventing disease

The following key points are important to prevent health problems in pet birds:

- Provide a high quality diet, suited for each individual species. Some common human foods can be toxic or dangerous to birds.
- Provide a spacious cage, adapted to each bird specific requirements. Birds shouldn't be kept in a kitchen because cooking in non-sticking pans can release toxic particles to birds. Some species can be kept outdoors in safe and escape-proof enclosures.
- Socializing – most bird species are social animals and require social interactions with other birds or humans. Play time and training can be important activities.
- Environmental enrichment – providing toys, appropriate perches, and creative ways of feeding will keep your pet bird stimulated. Careful with lead/zinc objects as these are toxic to birds.
- Veterinary care – A yearly health check up is important to prevent and early detection of disease. It's also advised to screen and test recently acquired birds for some specific infections.

Signs of disease

Birds are notorious on hiding signs of disease and, when showing usually they are quite ill and require urgent care. Possible signs that something might be wrong include:

- Inactive/sleeping more and fluffed up feathers;
- Refusing to eat;
- Loose stool;
- Regurgitating food;
- Difficulty breathing, any sort of nasal discharge or tail-bobbing;
- Feather loss or damage;
- Lameness;
- Tremors, falling from perch or seizures;.

Common procedures

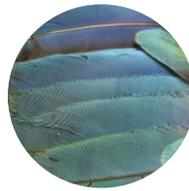
Besides routine health checks, some birds require visits to the vet for the following procedures:



Nail trims – done with either nail clippers or electric power tools; this has to be done carefully as accidents can happen and nails can bleed profusely!



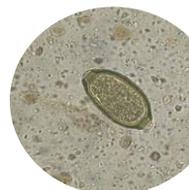
Beak trim – some birds can develop overgrown beaks that require frequent corrections to a normal length and shape. This is done with special power tools. Sometimes, the most difficult cases need to be done under anaesthesia.



Wing clips – this is usually done in some psittacine birds and involves clipping the outermost flight feathers. Feathers are replaced regularly so wing clips need to be done once a year.



Sexing – it's not possible to tell apart males from females in several bird species. A blood (or some feathers) sample can be taken and sent out to special labs to check this.



Fecal testing – birds kept outdoors can be more prone to catch internal parasites. A fecal sample should be checked every 6-12 months for worms and other pathogens.