



Managing feather plucking in pet Parrots

Filipe Martinho, MRCVS

Feather plucking or, more correctly, **Feather Destructive Disorder**, includes a variety of actions, ranging from excessive preening to feather plucking and, sometimes, self-mutilation. It's still not completely understood what causes it but it's believed to be a combination of medical and psychological problems. Some species are more prone to feather plucking (e.g. Cockatoos and African grey parrots). All cases are challenging to manage and can be somewhat frustrating for both owners and veterinarians, as relapses and failure to response to therapy are common.

Possible causes for feather plucking

It can be difficult to know exactly what causes this disorder on every individual bird but it's usually a combination of some of the following factors:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Internal parasites
- Systemic disease (specially liver)
- Inflammation of skin or feather follicles
- Some viral infections
- Boredom or poor environmental enrichment
- Stress
- Separation anxiety in bonded birds
- Sexual frustration

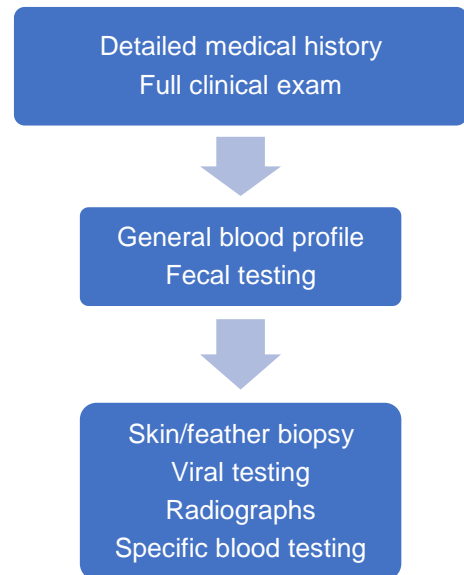
Managing feather plucking cases

Your Veterinarian might discuss some of the following points with you, in order to manage/control this disorder:

- Diet change
- Reduce daily hours of light to 8-10h
- Rotate different toys (chewing, food puzzles, etc.)
- Positive reinforcement of other behaviors
- Avoid stroking back/tail
- Bath/spray feathers daily
- Stimulate food foraging
- Train your bird to learn new behaviors
- Leave a radio/TV on
- Avoid telling off your bird when plucking
- Place a collar (last and temporary resource)

Diagnostic approach

It's important to understand what might be causing the feather plucking disorder, as well as excluding other contributing factors. Your Veterinarian might advise to do some of the following steps:



Medication

Some birds might require medication in order to control any diagnosed causes for feather plucking, as well as reducing this behavior. These might include:

- Meds specific for diagnosed medical disorders
- Anti-inflammatories/painkillers
- Hormonal implants
- Psychotropic drugs

It's not possible to rely solely on these medications as the approach to feather plucking is multifactorial and a long term commitment.