

Your Parrot Place Newsletter

Article Compilation 2000 - 2004



With articles by:

Marilu Anderson, Gudrun Maybaum, Carolyn Swicegood, Bill Kiesselbach and Taylor Knight.

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Articles by Marilu Anderson, Gudrun Maybaum, Carolyn Swicegood, Bill Kiesselbach and Taylor Knight

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Taming, Training & Tricks Parrot Training Course

I have to say that **I am impressed** with the easy to follow format. I just had to share this with you because it reminded me of a very important thing. Yes, teaching your parrot tricks is cute and fun, but **there is something more** important that happens as a result. You both get to learn how to **communicate** with each other, **build trust**, establish or improve your **relationship** AND get to spend **quality time** with your bird. **That is priceless.**



In fact, on the audio CD I just got done listening to there are some **great techniques for taming your parrot**. I know some of you out there wish you could handle and interact with your parrot, but for some reason can not. You may have a rescue parrot that has been abused in the past, a very scared bird that freaks out when you come within 5 feet of its cage, or maybe your bird tries to bite you. **You can improve your relationship with your bird!**

I wouldn't be recommending Chet's product if I didn't personally review his program and found it to be really helpful. I have been having some difficulty with, April, my Umbrella Cockatoo, and I know these techniques will help. **I have seen an improvement after only three days**. Alex, my African Grey was already 'waving' after just a few minutes. This is going to be fun! **Even us experienced parrot owners could learn a new trick or two**. This taming and trick training package is about a lot more than just teaching your parrot tricks!

You can get a **free parrot training 3 Day E-course and training video**, just by visiting this link <http://www.birdtricks.com/parrot-training>

When you get there just sign up on one of the signup forms on their site, and they will send you the training course immediately.

The course will teach your parrot to:

- Stop Biting
- Perform Tricks
- Tame ANY SIZE bird you could possibly own

Chet Womach, who owns the site, also has an advanced course that you can read about at his site, and I must say, I have bought, and own all the parrot training products out there. Chet's training courses are excellent.

Taylor Knight

P.S. Either way, at least go to his website to get the **Free 3 Day E-Course and video**. <http://www.birdtricks.com/parrot-training>

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[Taylor Knight](#)

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Parrot Articles

The Indian Meal Moth (*Plodia interpunctella*)

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant

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Who among us bird owners did not have them every once in a while? The Indian meal moth or grain moth are the most common insect pests of grain products stored in the home pantry. The larvae is seen on ceilings and counters are often the first indication of their presence.

There are four stages in the life cycle of an Indian meal moth: The egg, which is so small that it is almost not visible. After that it develops into the worm like larva. In the larva stage it develops a kind of capsule/cocoon around itself in which it hatches into the adult moth.

The life cycle from egg to adult can take from 25 to 305 days. An adult moth can lay 40-400 eggs over a 18 day period. They preferably lay their eggs in or even on the outside of the package of grains, seeds, nuts, grain products, dried fruits, chocolate, biscuits, bread meal, breakfast foods, cereals, corn meal, corn starch, cookies, crackers, dry dog and cat food, flour, garden seeds, and red peppers. The eggs hatch in 4-8 days and then the larva begins searching for food. They can penetrate almost anything except cans and vacuum sealed bags. While this larva is eating our food and that of our pets, they spin a continuous strand of webbing wherever they are. This webbing can spoil more food than the larvae can ever consume.

Depending on the food, temperature and length of the days in another 21 to 70 days this larva mature and we have the moth flying around our house and starting the cycle over again.

All of this may sound scary, but there is no reason to panic. They are not dangerous, just annoying. Most of our food today contains enough chemicals that the meal moths does not like it anyway. But they are still a problem with our bird foods, especially those that are natural with no preservatives, which these bothersome insects just love.

If you have food that is contaminated enough that you can see considerable webbing that the larva have created, throw it away. Any other food, store for two days in the freezer, because that will kill the larva. You can also add some bay leaves to the food. Bay leaves stop the larva from hatching. There are also moth traps on the market that do not use pesticides. They put out a scent that attracts and captures the male moth which prevents further mating and egg laying.

I would suggest freezing all your bird seed, and other grain type foods and pellets for a couple of days as soon as you get it. Store the food in a cool, dry place. It is much easier to prevent the problem than to get rid of the moths once they have gotten established in your home. You could also set up a couple of moth traps just for a little extra insurance.

If you already have an infestation, the moth traps work very well. However, it can take up to 3 years to get rid of all of them.

References:

<http://www.caes.state.ct.us/FactSheetFiles/Entomology/fsen003s.htm>

http://www.pantrypest.com/indian_meal_moth.htm, <http://www.pestproducts.net/mothtrap.htm>

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 07-2003.

Myths About Parrots

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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There's a lot of myths out there about parrots as companions. They all bring a smile to my face, but let me highlight a few of my favorites!

Myth #1 - Parrots are easy, low maintenance pets!

Absolutely my all-time favorite! For some reason, non-bird people assume that because parrots live in cages and don't require litter boxes or daily walking, they are minimum care, easy pets - nothing could be further from the truth. As any bird owner worth his sweet potatoes can tell you, these little guys need as much time, attention and "stuff" as any human child! The two page application I have people fill out when they want to adopt from my "Matchmaker" program asks if they're willing to chop, cook, and bake for their bird and if they'll seek counseling for behavior problems. Parrots need a varied, well balanced diet, big cage, a playstand or two, lots of toys, a carrier, trips to the vet and groomer, and daily hands on attention. Of course, the rewards more than make up for all the expense and inconvenience! Since their lifespan is close to ours, getting a parrot is a lifetime commitment (or should be.)

There's lots of words that describe sharing your home with a parrot - fun, messy, loving, expensive, entertaining, noisy, enriching, etc., etc. - BUT easy and low maintenance they are not!!

Myth #2 - You need to get a baby and/or hand feed it yourself to truly bond!

Not true, not true! While Amber, my Blue and Gold Macaw, who I raised from 2 months of age, and I have a wonderful and close bond, I have equally close bonds with Ozzy (my Eclectus) who came to me at 8 years of age, and Niki (my Gold Capped Conure) who joined us at age 7. The important thing is to get a bird who was hand raised and well socialized by nurturing caregivers. Birds are capable of forming many bonds throughout their lives, and transition well provided they were raised with good guidance.

One of the advantages to getting an adult parrot is that "What you see is what you get." With babies, you need to be skilled in proper training techniques and provide constant guidance. You may or may not end up with a talker. With adults, personalities are well formed and there's less chance of making a mistake in training. In fact, for the novice, you can actually learn from your bird! So, while babies are all sweet and adorable, don't ignore the wonderful possibilities of adopting an adult bird, who's been raised well.

Myth #3 - Egg laying and "nesty" behavior means you must get a mate or give the bird to a breeder!

Also not true! I've written a lot lately on sexual behavior in both immature and adult parrots, as springtime always brings up those issues. While a few birds really do seem to want the family life badly, they are the exception to the norm, in my experience. For most birds, hormonal influences in spring are just a part of everyday life and after things settle down, the birds return to normal. If your hen lays eggs, it is important to leave the eggs with her for 3-4 weeks and let her do as she wishes with them - removing them will cause her to lay more, leading to calcium depletion and possible egg binding. So, don't assume your bird can't be your pet anymore just because she is laying eggs or he is playing "wiggle butt" with toys.

Myth #4 - All African Greys are great talkers (but neurotic) and all cockatoos are cuddly teddy bears!

Oh, boy! The species stereotypes are abundant and I've just picked a few of the most common. All parrots CAN talk and African Greys are well known for their frequently large vocabularies. However, I know some who say only a few words, or nothing! There's no guarantee ANY bird will talk. Talking is like biting - all parrots have the capacity, but whether they do or not is up to them (and a bunch of other factors!) By the same token, not all Greys are "neurotic" - they are highly intelligent and very sensitive, so don't always deal well with poor techniques on the part of their humans. On the other hand, though, well socialized Greys are as well adjusted as any other properly raised parrot.

Cockatoos do love to cuddle and would be surgically attached to their humans if possible, but they can also become demanding, manipulative, aggressive and out of control (as can virtually any parrot poorly handled). Treating your Cockatoo like a teddy bear, to be cuddled when it's convenient and "put on the shelf" otherwise will result in an unhappy, needy bird.

All parrots need balance and routine in their lives, and all parrots can get grumpy at times, or if they feel their needs are not being met. While there are traits unique to different parrot species, it's important to treat each bird as an individual and not to let blanket stereotypes sway your thinking unfairly, either pro or con.

While there's plenty more myths out there (write me back with some of yours!), the bottom line is to educate yourself, get your hands on all the books, websites, and magazines you can, join a bird club, talk to lots of knowledgeable bird folks and sift through what you find, to see if it's the truth or yet another myth or misconception about our wonderful companion parrots.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 04-08-2001.

Should I Adopt an Older "Second Hand" Bird??

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

E-mail: bill@incentiveman.com Reprinted with permission.

This question is asked all the time. Generally, the myth that "second hand," (or third, or fourth hand) birds, will not bond to a new owner is patently incorrect. While they may carry some "emotional/behavioral baggage" and may need additional patience and lots of love and compassion, most of them are "redeemable." They have evolved to be able to eventually adjust and bond to new partners, speak "care givers," by instinct alone. If their mate dies or is eaten by a predator, they have to be emotionally able to attach themselves to someone else in the flock. It is no different here. It does take patience, sometimes over many months.

Please consider this: There are literally thousands of unwanted birds that were often bought on impulse. They all desperately need a permanent home. Successful relationships do require an understanding of these birds and an absolute willingness for unconditional acceptance. Anyone who is prepared to seriously commit him or herself, who is ready to love, understand, respect and have patience with their new charge will end up with a rewarding and wonderful experience. Prior to acquiring any bird, baby or mature, we as care givers have the ethical and moral obligation to familiarize ourselves and be aware of the challenge that faces us. There are excellent books on the subject of keeping parrots and it is incumbent upon all of us to take advantage of the outstanding work already done in this field: To be aware of their physiological and psychological requirements. These requirements are identical for bird babies and "seniors." The same mutually painful consequences for ignorance and the same rewards for being informed and treating the bird with respect, compassion, patience and understanding for and of the species invariably apply.

There are some who insist that "rescued" birds know what has happened and that they are grateful to those who gave them security and a real loving home.

We must always remember that parrots in general and greys in particular are not just birds, they are highly evolved and extremely sensitive, intelligent and perceptive creatures who deserve to be treated as what they are: Someone very, very special.

In summary, there are no "second hand" birds - there are only birds in need of a loving home. Some of our best known avian behaviorists are strong advocates for the adoption of unwanted birds - in many cases over the acquisition of babies. There is a very good reason for that: Firstly, they desperately need us and secondly, adult birds, albeit rejected by their owners, have the potential to becoming outstanding companions! It is all up to us!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 04-22-2001.

Parrot Rules

Author Unknown

I know these have been floating around out there for a long time, but that doesn't make them any less true!

1. If I like it, its mine.
2. If it's in my beak, its mine.
3. If I can take it from you, its mine.
4. If I had it a little while ago, its mine.
5. If its mine, it must never appear to be yours in any way.
6. If I'm chewing something, all the pieces are mine.
7. If it looks like mine, its mine.
8. If I saw it first, its mine.
9. If you have something and you put it down, it automatically becomes mine.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 05-06-2001.

Parrot Health, Safety and Wellbeing

5 Ways to Pamper Your Parrot

by [Taylor Knight](#)

www.yourparrotplace.com

We are all busy these days and I know it's hard to meet all the demands in your life. But, it's time for a breather. Take an some time with each of your feathered kids and give them the royal treatment. I know some of you out there have multiple birds, so it doesn't have to be all the parrots in the same day! Get into the habit of doing at least a short version of this regularly. Your parrots will thank you! Some birds are more 'social' than others. Two of mine I can pick up and snuggle with without fear of needing stitches. The other one I have to be really careful with. I use a stick as his main form of transport. No matter what level of 'snuggliness' your parrot prefers, you can adjust each step to your parrot's comfort level.

I hope both you and your feathered kids have a great time. Not only is this a great time for your bird, but you get a relax a bit as well. For an added bonus, turn the phone off!

Spend some quality one-on-one time

Just hang out together. Let them help you pick up around the house. My cockatoo likes to help me fold laundry. One of my African Greys prefers to chat in English back and forth. My other African Grey likes to sit on me and get scratches while I lay on the couch.

He runs up and down me, the couch and sometimes perches on my knee and just sits there. You could put on some rainforest or classical music and just sit quietly together for a little bit. There are no rules, the point is just to give your bird your undivided attention.

Share a meal

Fix up some nice vegetables, fruit, pasta or any other bird-safe dish that pleases your parrot's palate. Share with your bird, heck, eat off the same plate. One bite for you, one little bite for them. Of course, remember to give them their own spoon or fork so you don't give them your icky human germs.

Interactive Play

Hand toys like birdie bagels, barbells or marbella shapes; a piece of rope, a popsicle stick, a towel, even a wadded up piece of paper can be really run interactive bird toys.

There are hundreds of safe and fun things to play with. Lighten up and show your bird a good time. One of my African Greys loves to play catch with a wadded up piece of paper. When catch time is over, he loves to shred it up. It doesn't have to be expensive, it just has to be fun!

New Toy

Give your parrot something new to do when hanging out in inside the cage! Remodel a little. Rearrange the toys that are in there and purchase a new one. Parrots get board! Why not buy an extra toy or two for later while you are at it. You could rotate the toys when your parrot loses interest in it. I have a birdie toy box that all my toys go into. Periodically, I pull their current toys out and put some from the box in. The others go back into the toy box for later use. If the toys are damaged quite a bit, see if you can use the parts from several toys to make a new toy. Rotating and recycling toys prevents boredom, saves you money and gives your parrot a change of scenery regularly.

Shower

What pampering session would be complete without a nice shower or bath? Depending on your parrot's preference, let them splash around in the sink or tub. Mist your bird with a squirt bottle or for a finer water spray you could use a birdie mister like Mr. Mister. I use a Mr. Mister for all my parrots, in fact they have their own shower perch. Whatever they prefer, make it fun!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 07-2004.

A Gift from Mother Nature (Grapefruit Seed Extract - GSE)

by Carolyn Swicegood

Eclectus Land of Vos web site

www.landofvos.com

Join the world's largest Eclectus Email list here:

<http://www.landofvos.com/tec.html>

Mother Nature has provided an extraordinary substance from a surprising source to benefit her feathered creatures. An extract of a simple food item has proved to be effective in combating hundreds of pathogens that affect birds, including parasites, bacteria, virus, and fungi. This food-derived substance is used by a growing number of aviculturists, pet bird owners, and veterinarians. It is a natural, safe and non-toxic disinfectant and cleaner as well as a preventive against disease-causing pathogens. It is used to disinfect food and water, to prevent mold growth on home-grown sprouts, to clean cages, aviaries and homes as well as to treat a variety of illnesses -- all without harming birds or the environment. Surprisingly, this powerful product is made from the lowly grapefruit seed! The antimicrobial properties of the extract of grapefruit seeds and pulp were discovered in 1972 by Jacob Harish, a physicist and immunologist, as a result of his curiosity about the bitterness of grapefruit seeds.

At the University of Georgia, tests were conducted to evaluate Grapefruit Seed Extract (GSE) as a disinfectant in tests against E. Coli, Salmonella sps., and Staph aureus. According to Roger Wyatt, Ph.D., and Microbiologist for the university, "Our studies indicate excellent potential for these products (GSE). ...The toxicological that I have reviewed indicated that this product and the active ingredient poses very low toxicity. As you know this is important because most disinfectants that are currently used in either animal or human environments have moderate to high toxicity and extreme care must be exercised when these products are used... In view of the reports that we have discussed, the wide spectrum of activity that GSE offers (antiviral, antibacterial; Gram positive and Gram negative, antimycotic, and antiprotozoan) will undoubtedly aid in its acceptability."

Dr. Wyatt's findings have been confirmed by a variety of clinics and labs, as well as universities from around the world. GSE is non-toxic, environmentally safe, and quickly bio-degradable. It causes no side effects and is often dramatically less expensive than existing treatments or chemicals for similar applications.

Some physicians have found that GSE is as effective against candida, a yeast infection, as Nystatin or other antifungal preparations. It is also effective against protozoans such as giardia or entamoeba histolytica. Researcher Dr. Leo Galland says that it is more effective than prescription medicines such as metronidazole against these protozoal parasites. There is considerable research to support the claims of GSE's efficacy as a natural antibiotic, anti-fungal, anti-protozoan, anti-viral and antiseptic disinfectant. As a germicide, GSE has multiple uses and it is non-toxic and non-irritating when diluted as directed.

Bio Research Laboratories of Redmond, Washington, USA, tested GSE, a commercial chlorine bleach, and colloidal silver against Candida albicans, Staphylococcus aureus, Salmonella typhi, Streptococcus faecium, and E. coli. GSE proved superior and the test report concluded:

"All microorganisms tested were inhibited with moderate levels of GSE liquid disinfectant. High levels of chlorine bleach inhibited the test organisms, but moderate levels were not effective. Because the GSE liquid was inhibitory at much lower levels, it may be assumed that it is ten to one hundred times more effective than chlorine against the organisms used in this study. On average, GSE proved to be ten times more effective than the colloidal silver."

GSE is compatible with most antibiotics. It does not produce the negative side effects associated with antibiotic use. Proponents of GSE claim that it does not attack normal gastrointestinal bacteria as antibiotics do. To ensure that this is not a problem, I would use a probiotic after treating with therapeutic dosages of GSE. Even if it is unnecessary, it will do no harm. GSE rarely causes allergic or toxic reactions. Aspirin is said to be 25 times more toxic than GSE.

Grapefruit seed extract is available in health food stores. GSE has been proven in laboratory tests to be 10 to 100 times more effective as a disinfectant than chlorine, colloidal silver, and iodine.

According to The Journal of Orthomolecular Medicine, Volume 5, No. 3, USA, 1990, an international research team examined the effect of GSE on 770 strains of bacteria and 93 strains of fungus and compared this with 30 effective antibiotics and 18 proven fungicides. GSE was found to perform as well as any and all of the tested agents.

GSE USES AND DOSAGES

To disinfect surfaces in the aviary and nursery such as brooders, incubators, cages, perches, and carriers, make an all purpose cleaner by adding 30 to 60 drops of GSE to a 32-ounce pump spray bottle filled with water. Mix well and spray.

To disinfect wood surfaces, apply a few drops of GSE to the cleaned wood while still wet. Let stand for half an hour.

To clean formula from baby parrots' faces and feathers after syringe feedings, add a few drops of GSE to a bowl of warm water to wet the cleaning cloth. It kills bacteria and gets the skin and feathers squeaky clean.

To sterilize syringes, pipettes, spoons, and other handfeeding utensils, make a solution of 15 to 30 drops of GSE per pint of water. Soak between feedings.

To make your own antibacterial soap for the nursery and kitchen, add ten to fifteen drops of GSE to an eight-ounce pump dispenser of handsoap.

To make a disinfectant soak for produce, add 10 to 15 drops of GSE per gallon of water and submerge the fruits and vegetables for 15 to 30 seconds.

To make a disinfectant spray for produce, add 20 or more drops to a quart spray bottle and spray on fruits and vegetables.

To prevent the growth of algae and mold in incubators and humidifiers, add three or four drops of GSE per gallon to the water reservoir.

To clean and disinfect cutting boards, apply 10 to 20 drops of GSE to the cutting board. Rub it into the board with a wet sponge or cloth. Leave the GSE on for at least 30 minutes and rinse.

To purify water, add 10 drops of GSE per gallon of water and stir vigorously. It is more effective than iodine.

To treat skin fungi, parasites, or bacterial diseases of the skin of birds and other pets, mix 30 to 50 drops of GSE per quart of water and spray on the infected area.

To prevent the growth of pathogens and to kill existing parasites, (such as giardia from well water), use one drop of Nutribiotic GSE in an eight-ounce water cup. There are claims that GSE has cured a number of parrots with stubborn cases of giardia. Daily use is safe but a probiotic can be used if you are concerned about maintaining healthy intestinal flora.

To boost the cleaning power of dishwasher detergent for bird dishes, add 15 to 30 drops of GSE to the dishwasher along with detergent.

To disinfect towels and cloths used for baby parrots, add 30 to 50 drops to the wash cycle, or add 10 to 15 drops of GSE to the final rinse to ensure that the laundry is fungi and bacteria free.

To disinfect carpet in bird rooms, add 10 to 15 drops of GSE per gallon of water to the reservoir of the carpet cleaning machine.

Birds cannot tell us their symptoms and since GSE is a broad-spectrum treatment, it is quickly becoming the first line of defense for many pet owners, breeders, and veterinarians. Birds can safely be given GSE every day as a preventive or remedy. There has never been a report from any source stating that GSE has ever harmed any living thing. I do not sell Grapefruit Seed Extract but as you have read, I definitely am sold on GSE for birdkeeping.

Citricidal® liquid concentrate is triple the potency of NutriBiotic® GSE liquid. For online information about GSE or Citricidal, visit www.nutriteam.com.

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A Moving Experience

by [Taylor Knight](#)

www.yourparrotplace.com

Moving is about as stressful a time as any in our lives and the lives of our fids. Having just completed moving the "gang" into a new house, I thought I would share some of the things that helped our move go smoothly. The feathered crew (Alex and Zeke, African Greys and April, Umbrella Cockatoo) have settled in nicely and things returned to normal quickly. Granted, the move was to a nearby city and we were not on the road in the U-Haul for more than an hour, but I believe preparing the birds had everything to do with their reduced stress level and smooth transition.

I also want to mention that there is the coolest service for moving called [PODS](#) (Portable On Demand Storage). I had it delivered to my old house the weekend before the actual move. This allowed me to pack up all my non-essentials at my leisure, clear out the house and cut down on the stress and chaos of the actual moving day. They took the "POD" away and stored it at their warehouse until the day I scheduled it to be delivered to my new house. I only had to rent a U-Haul for a few left over things and the bird cages.

Everything but a blanket, pillow, alarm clock, bird supplies and cages (that didn't get into the POD) were packed up in the U-Haul the night before the actual move. Renting the U-Haul for an extra day was really worth it! All I had to do on moving day was gather up a few things, place the birds in the carriers, load up the cages and away we went to our new home. My "POD" was delivered to my house later that afternoon and I had as much time as I wanted to unload it. It arrived on a Friday and I scheduled the POD pickup for the following Tuesday.

The reason I recommend a service like PODS is that it relieved so much stress. I was calm, the birds were calm and I could focus on making them more comfortable instead of running around loading things up at the last minute. I will never move without PODS again - it was that good!

The move actually took place in several stages.

- **Stage 1 - Keep the Fids Informed**

House hunting is always both exciting and exhausting. But, when I found a house I really liked and the offer was accepted, I showed the flyer with the picture of the new house to the fids and told them all about it. I told them how nice it would be for them to have a bigger room with nice big windows and everything. Yes, I really did this! They may not understand all the words, but they get the fact that something is up.

When my old house sold and the paperwork was progressing along nicely, I started packing. I made sure they saw what I was doing and I would talk about the moving day and how exciting it would be.

- **Stage 2 - Prepare the Fids**

A few days before the actual move, I cleared out my master bedroom and moved the fids out of their normal "bird room" and into the master bedroom. It was only across the hall, and not in totally unfamiliar surroundings. But, it conveyed the message to them loud and clear that change was coming. I made the move in the morning so they would have time to get used to the new room before bedtime.

After their first night in the master bedroom, I introduced the idea of travel. They have all been in carriers at one time or another, but I didn't have three carriers, I only had one. I went

and bought a new one and borrowed another to make three. Three days before moving day, I placed each carrier in front of the cage of the bird that would be using that particular carrier. I placed them there all set up and ready to go with the doors open.

After they stayed at the carriers for a few hours, I took each parrot and placed them in the carrier briefly. Just long enough to close the door, tell them how good they were and take them out again. The next day I kept them in there a little bit longer, about 5 to 10 minutes or so. The third day, I placed each into their carrier for about a half an hour. I also picked them up in it and walked around the house. All the while telling them how good they were and about moving day the next morning.

- **Stage 3 - Moving Day**

I woke up early. We were supposed to arrive at our new house at 8 a.m. because the phone company, cable and internet company, etc. were arriving that day to set things up. And you know them, they are so exact on the appointment times, "Sometime between 8 a.m. and noon" was about as precise as it got. I needed my phone and internet hooked up pronto, of course, what's an online parrot supply store going to do without the online part and a phone?

I talked to the fids for a little bit and told them this was it. Moving day was here! Then I put them in their carriers and started loading up their cages. (They have big cages.) They all went in their carriers without a fuss. I put them by the front door so they could watch their cages being loaded and telling them how exciting their new home was going to be. The last thing I did was put them all on the front seat of the U-Haul with me and drove off to our new house.

Along the way, I picked up my helper for the day who would help me get their big cages up the steps to the new house. April actually greeted her with a big "Hi!" She wasn't stressing at all! Upon arrival at the new house, the first thing we did was to bring the birds inside and put them in their new room. Of course, I was talking to them the whole time. Then, we unloaded cages and one by one they were placed inside. I prepared their food and water like I always do and tried to keep things as normal as possible for them. All that was completed and the birds completely set back up in their cages before anything else was done.

- **Stage 4 - New Digs**

I kept things as normal as possible for them. After a day or two they were pretty darn comfortable. That's when I started being a tour guide. Each was given a tour of a different room. I went from room to room, one a day or a whole house tour. It depended on the bird's comfort level. I made sure to point out the windows to them and have them touch it so they know not to fly into it. Things returned to normal quickly and they really love their new space!

I really believe that it went so smoothly because each of the steps prepared them for the next. I was shocked at how quickly they adjusted to life at the new house. They were even back to talking within hours of the move. April even talked IN THE U-HAUL. I hope this has been helpful to anyone considering a move in the near future!

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The ABC's of Beaks

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

Beaks, Bills, Face Knives, Beakers - whatever we want to call them, they are an integral part of our Hookbills! So, let's break the beak down into some understandable lessons:

A. Anatomy - What is a beak?

It is not "dead" material, like hair or fingernails - rather, it is a living organ, the tip of which contains a bundle of sensitive nerves. The beak itself consists of keratin (a protein called the rhamphotheca) which covers bone (the premaxilla or upper beak and mandible or lower beak). Directly above the beak is the cere, which is the soft skin containing a parrot's nostrils. All parrots use their beak as an extra "hand," for climbing, exploring, tasting, sensing, etc. "Beaking" is a stage of developmental growth, where young parrots learn how to use their beaks for various tasks. It serves in the role of a number of tools, such as knife, hammer, chisel, anvil, can opener, etc., but all the while retaining a high degree of sensitivity.

B. Basics - So what do we do in dealing with our bird's beaks on a daily basis?

Most birds love having their beaks touched and rubbed and it's a great way to bond with your parrot to touch and stroke his beak. It's important to set guidelines on appropriate beak use, using commands like "Gentle" to let your parrot know if he's using too much pressure. There's nothing wrong with letting your parrot "beak" gently and appropriately on your fingers. However, that beak can also be a deadly weapon, so be cautious about letting parrots shoulder perch. If a parrot is over stimulated, it's important to keep him down on your forearm or hand, in order to intervene on any aggressive behavior. I do not belong to the school that says "no beak on skin" - you simply need to set guidelines and pay attention to what's going on.

C. Care - To care for your bird's beak you need a combination of good nutrition and proper toys.

Some beak deformities can occur from improper handfeeding techniques but they can also occur from congenital problems or dietary deficiencies. It's important to catch these problems early in order to correct them. Beak overgrowth can be a problem for parrots who don't have enough chewable perches and toys - it can also indicate problems with protein metabolism, or liver and kidney disease. I advocate cuttlebones, mineral blocks, grooming perches, and a variety of soft and hardwood toys to keep beaks in shape. Beak trimming should rarely be necessary for birds with good diets and lots of toys, but if needed, should consist of only gentle clipping and/or filing. NEVER let anyone use a Dremel tool on your parrot's beak (or nails) the high heat can cause nerve damage. By the same token, never let anyone talk you into beak trimming (or beak notching EVER) as a way to deal with biting. Behavior work can help with constant biting, but don't attempt to deal with it by disabling your parrot's beak.

Parrots use their beaks to eat, climb, play, show affection, and explore. All of this is natural and appropriate. Problems with beaks require help from an avian vet, nutritionist, or behaviorist, so it's important to pay attention to what's going on with your parrot's beak on a regular basis.

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Aloe for Birdkeepers

by Carolyn Swicegood

Eclectus Land of Vos web site

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Allopathic medicine is barely a century old, but the practice of using plant remedies such as Aloe vera can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Aloe vera, a succulent member of the lily and onion family, was used to treat a variety of health problems. There is a valuable lesson in this ancient wisdom for aviculturists who prefer using natural preventive remedies and treatments for their birds whenever feasible. Aloe vera, also known as the burn plant, possesses powerful healing properties that are beneficial to both birds and their caregivers.

There are hundreds of species of Aloe vera but the Aloe Barbadenis variety is the plant most frequently used for healing. It contains a wound hormone that accelerates healing of injured surfaces such as skin, nails, and feathers. Aloe vera has proven to be beneficial as a topical treatment for minor wounds and burns. When taken internally, it improves immune function, detoxifies, and promotes general healing. Scientists have found that Aloe vera gel is useful as an astringent, an anti-inflammatory agent, a natural antibiotic, a coagulating agent, and a pain inhibitor. No other plant can claim as many healing properties as Aloe vera, which truly is a "pharmacy in a leaf."

Aloe vera can be useful to birdkeepers in the following ways:

- * It promotes the healing of wounds and prevents infection.
- * It is a safe and natural analgesic.
- * Aloe spray discourages feather destruction.
- * It stimulates the immune system making it an effective preventive remedy.
- * It can be used as a coagulating agent for the treatment of broken nails and blood feathers.
- * Aloe detoxifying formula can save lives when conventional treatments fail.

ALOE FOR HEALING WOUNDS -- The prevention of infections that sometimes result from skin wounds is important to a bird's health. Aviculturists should consider the natural medicinal benefits that Aloe vera provides as a remedy for such abrasions. Aloe penetrates all the skin layers, which helps to account for its healing properties when treating burns, cuts, scrapes, abrasions and other skin problems. It draws infection out of wounds as it helps to regenerate healthy tissue. Aloe contains fatty acids that have anti-inflammatory properties, as well as the wound healing hormones, Auxins and Gibberellins. Aloe vera also has antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties that are effective defenses against a broad range of microbes. The Aloe vera plant produces at least six antiseptic agents: lupeol, salicylic acid, urea nitrogen, cinnamonic acid, phenols, and sulphur. All of these are recognized as antiseptics because they kill or control molds and other fungi, as well as bacteria and viruses.

Extensive research since the 1930's has shown that Aloe vera gel has the ability not only to heal wounds, but also to treat ulcers and burns by putting a protective coating on the affected areas and speeding up the rate of healing.

ALOE AS AN ANALGESIC -- It seems to be a well-kept secret that Aloe vera is an effective pain killer. The lupeol, salicylic acid and magnesium in aloe have strong analgesic properties with no known side effects, making it helpful to both birds and their caregivers. Aloe spray is an excellent analgesic for birds because it does not require hands-on application. Tame birds might allow the owner to apply aloe gel or other medications directly to their wounds, but birds that are not so tame or birds that are upset can be treated more easily with aloe spray. Consequently, Aloe is one of the most valuable items in the Avian first aid kit. George's Aloe Spray by Warren Laboratories is available in many health food stores in a reusable eight-ounce spray pump bottle for about \$5.00. You can easily make your own spray by purchasing additive-free, steam-distilled aloe juice (not gel) and an inexpensive spray bottle. Steam-distilled aloe does not require dilution or refrigeration and will stay fresh for months.

All birds bite and all birdkeepers eventually are bitten. The only effective painkiller for a crushing bite is Aloe vera gel. To treat a bird bite on a finger, fill a rubber finger cot with aloe gel and wear it on the finger for as long as the pain-killing benefits are needed. Five minutes usually is sufficient to stop the pain, but it can be used for as long as needed. Aloe also helps to coagulate blood in injured tissue and minimize swelling and bruising. If you have older Aloe vera plants with large leaves, you also can cut open a leaf and wrap it around an injured finger. To treat bite wounds on other parts of the body, spread a generous amount of Aloe vera gel on the wound as often as needed to control pain. Aloe preparations are sold in pharmacies, supermarkets, and department stores. Read labels and look for the highest aloe content with the fewest additives.

ALOE FOR FEATHER DESTRUCTION -- A popular use of Aloe vera is a topical spray to soothe the irritated skin of birds that engage in feather plucking. Dramatic results can be obtained with this protocol when used on parrots that destroy their feathers due to itchy skin. Even in cases of psychological plucking, aloe spray can slow down feather destruction because damp feathers seem to discourage plucking. Feeding our birds Aloe vera also can help to prevent feather destruction. Its effectiveness is due mainly to magnesium lactate, a chemical known to inhibit the release of histamines responsible for skin irritation and itching. I use George's Aloe Spray but one can use a clean, new pump spray bottle filled with steam-distilled aloe. Distilled aloe contains no additives. Research indicates that steam distillation destroys the mucopolysaccharides which are considered to be the main active ingredient of Aloe vera, useful when it is taken internally. However, when used as a spray, the steam-distilled Aloe vera seems to be just as effective.

ALOE AS AN IMMUNOSTIMULANT -- Aloe's beneficial effects on the Avian immune system makes it a great preventive remedy. Aloe contains at least twenty amino acids, nine enzymes, many polysaccharides, small amounts of vitamins and minerals, trace elements, growth stimulators, and naturally occurring electrolytes. Extensive Russian research has shown that Aloe vera successfully removes toxins from the body and acts as a boost to the immune system. Aloe vera contains an immune-stimulating complex, galactomannan, a class of polysaccharides that acts as an anti-inflammatory and increases cellular membrane fluidity and permeability. Galactomannan apparently binds to a receptor site and activates macrophages, which are the cells that control the immune system. The macrophages secrete infection-fighting agents. With at least 23 polypeptides (immune stimulators), Aloe helps to control a broad spectrum of immune system disorders.

If you grow the Aloe Barbadensis plant, your birds will enjoy several thin slices of the largest stalks of the aloe plant as a treat when they appear lethargic and in need of an energy boost. Pure aloe juice added to dry food or to drinking water in the ratio of one part aloe juice to three parts pure water also can make a positive difference in the energy level of birds.

ALOE STOPS THE BLEEDING OF BROKEN NAILS AND BLOOD FEATHERS -- For many years, styptic powder -- known to birdkeepers by several brand names -- was considered the treatment of choice for birds' broken toenails or blood feathers. However, some deaths have occurred when blood feather follicles or open wounds were treated with styptic powder. In less severe cases, it has caused tissue death at the site of application. Cornstarch, flour and powdered sugar are natural products that are just as effective for stopping bleeding. Unlike styptic powder, they are non-toxic. Of all these natural substances, cornstarch is my top choice. When the dry substance is combined with Aloe vera gel, it is even more effective. Aloe not only helps to stop bleeding, it helps the dry medium (such as corn starch) to adhere to the bleeding nail or feather follicle. It also has anti-bacterial properties that can prevent infection, and best of all from a bird's point of view, it stops pain quickly. One can make a paste of Aloe vera gel and cornstarch to apply to a broken nail or feather follicle, or aloe gel can be applied directly to the nail or feather follicle before applying the cornstarch.

Besides the danger of styptic powder causing tissue burn or toxicity, there is an additional danger of birds and their owners inhaling the powder which is a toxic irritant to the respiratory system. I no longer keep styptic powder in my Avian first aid kit. Cornstarch and aloe are much safer and are just as effective as styptic powder. Why keep something around that a birdsitter might mistakenly use on your birds' skin and cause a painful burn when aloe combined with cornstarch works just as well? If you do not feel secure without a styptic product for your birds, remember that it is strictly for broken nails, and not broken blood feathers or skin wounds.

ALOE DETOXIFYING FORMULA CAN SAVE BIRDS' LIVES -- Any time that a bird appears to be seriously ill, a veterinarian should be consulted. Sometimes bird illnesses defy diagnosis and do not respond to traditional treatments. In the event that professionals give up and send a bird home to await the inevitable, there is an Aloe vera remedy that has saved the lives of numerous birds that did not respond to professional help.

In my years of birdkeeping, my small flock of Eclectus parrots has been amazingly healthy except for one Eclectus hen who became severely ill several years ago. She was treated by two excellent veterinarians who tried everything in their power to restore her to health. They finally gave up due to a lack of response to traditional treatments, which included tissue biopsies, exploratory surgery, and a host of medications. Once she was sent home without hope of recovery, there was nothing to lose by trying alternative remedies.

I turned to health food stores in search of help. One of the veterinarians told me that the sick hen had liver damage so I chose a natural remedy for this condition. It was a product called "Aloe Detoxifying Formula", a concentrate of Aloe vera and liver-cleansing herbs including milk thistle which often is prescribed for liver problems. This was several years ago and the formula at that time was: double-strength Aloe vera gel (200:1) with Aloe vera pulp, milk thistle, burdock, dandelion, echinacea, green tea, red clover and blue cohosh. Because all of the ingredients were non-toxic and since there was no protocol for treating birds with it, I simply gave the ailing hen all the formula that I could get into her. I added it to her drinking water and she drank more than she had in weeks. I added it to her bird bread and other dry foods and she also ate more than she had eaten since the beginning of her illness.

The hen's general demeanor and her energy level changed quickly and dramatically, which was more than I had dared to hope for. She started to perch again and to notice her surroundings. She quickly recovered so completely that when one of her vets did a recheck of her blood two weeks later, he said that if he had not drawn the blood himself, he would not have believed the results. Her liver values had returned to 100% normal! This beautiful hen has produced many healthy chicks since then, and she has never again been ill. Although the cause of her illness was never identified, I have no doubt that the Aloe Detoxifying formula was responsible for her recovery.

Since I did not really expect a successful outcome from the treatment, I did not record the details, such as the amount of the detox formula that she was given. Since then, several vets and breeders have used this formula to save newly hatched chicks that failed to thrive. The brand name of the product that I used is Naturade and they still make this product, although the formula now also contains 100 mg. of Arabinogalactan, a naturally occurring polysaccharide (sugar) derived from the Larch tree. It has been shown to promote beneficial bacteria while reducing pathogenic bacteria in the digestive tract of animals. The formula still contains all of the original ingredients. Many birdkeepers consider Aloe Detoxifying formula an important part of their first aid kit, and many veterinarians now use the product for their Avian patients.

If I were stranded on that proverbial desert island with my birds and could have only one first aid item, the choice would be easy. Aloe vera is the next best thing to a magic potion for birdkeepers.

Additional Aloe vera information:

On "poisonous plant lists" on the Internet and elsewhere, you might find that Aloe vera is listed among the poisonous plants on several lists. Authors of such lists attempt to be thorough and accurate by including every plant that has any part with any toxic properties, no matter how mild.

In the case of Aloe vera, the toxic component of the plant is not what most of us would consider "poisonous". It is actually an irritant that can cause skin rashes and upset stomachs. The yellow sap just under the skin of the Aloe vera stalk is the problem. It is this yellow-green sap or "Aloe bitters" that is used as a purgative. It should be avoided for all other purposes. Since it is actually marketed as a remedy, it can hardly be considered a true poison.

If you use the fresh Aloe vera stalk, peel away the tough outer skin and remove all remaining yellow-green sap with a paper towel, running water or both. Many prefer to use prepared Aloe which is widely available in health food stores, pharmacies, department stores, and other places to avoid the problem of the Aloin or Aloe "bitters". Typical comments from poisonous plant lists are:

"Ingestion of the latex just under the skin of the Aloe stalk can cause a cathartic (purging) reaction by irritating the large intestine."

"Aloe is a popular house plant due to its reputation as a healing plant for burns, cuts and other skin problems but contact dermatitis can occur in sensitive individuals."

"If you use fresh Aloe, cut away the skin and inner layer of yellow juice leaving only the actual gel. The yellow juice, especially prominent in older plants, is the primary irritant in the cases of contact dermatitis."

By purchasing prepared Aloe gel or juice, you can avoid the "mildly toxic" properties. Since the bitters are actually sold as a remedy or purgative, I don't think it can be considered a true toxin. Many vets, including Avian vets, recommend Aloe vera for their feathered patients but since parrots are exquisitely sensitive to toxins, (mainly to inhalants rather than ingested toxins) it is understandable that anyone who is unfamiliar with the "low degree" of toxicity of Aloe vera, and perhaps unaware of how widely it is currently used in the treatment of parrots, would hesitate to recommend it.

I have used both fresh and prepared Aloe products for well over ten years with my birds and have never had one Avian case of even an upset stomach, in spite of the fact that I also feed them fresh slices of Aloe leaves without peeling away the skin. Parrots would "peel water" if they could and they instinctively peel away the problematic yellow sap just under the skin before eating it. I

also have never experienced the contact dermatitis which is included in the warnings, nor have any of my parrots.

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Aloe Vera

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Aloe vera

Biological name: Aloe barbadensis L.

Family: Aloaceae

History

Aloe vera is one of the oldest known therapeutic herbs and is renowned worldwide as a healing plant. It originated in the Cape Verde islands off the West African Coast. First mentioned in the Egyptian "Papyrus Ebers" in 1550 B.C. for its medical and embalming value, aloe vera was supposedly used to embalm the body of Christ.

Both the Greek historian Dioscorides and the Roman naturalist Pliny recommended aloe vera about 2,000 years ago as an effective remedy for constipation, burns, wounds, bruises, skin irritations, kidney problems and more.

It is referred to in many scriptures all over the world and down through the ages. Hindus call it the "silent healer," Chinese the "harmony remedy" and even Christopher Columbus mentioned its importance.

Description

Aloe vera leaves have a bitter yellow latex right below the outer skin. This latex contains an anthraquinone called barbaloin, which is activated by the intestinal flora and acts as a laxative. In its raw form, it can cause uncontrollable bowel spasms. Aloe vera juice is usually extracted from the whole plant and is used for chronic constipation. The juice should not be used regularly because it depletes electrolytes from the body and can cause muscle weakness.

In the '70s, American scientists found a way to separate the gel from the leaf and stabilize it. This inner mucilaginous part of the plant, the gel, is sterile, contains most of the plant's nutrients and is the part most used in treatment of various ills. So far, 200 nutrients have been found in the gel of the leaf, just a few of which are: 8 essential amino acids, 12 non-essential amino acids, 12 anthraquinones, 10 enzymes and many minerals and vitamins.

Medicinal Value

The list of ailments aloe vera is used for in holistic medicine is even longer than the list of nutrients. It has been successfully used in the healing process of burns, wounds, gastric ulcers, and as a treatment for diabetes and diabetic wounds. A polysaccharide in aloe vera, called glucomannan, works as an anti-inflammatory. Another one, Aloctin A, has immune system stimulating and anti-tumor properties. Other parts have shown antiviral properties.

Among its other healing ingredients, aloe vera contains salicylic acid, which is the main content of aspirin. The salicylic acid and magnesium in aloe are thought to work together for an analgesic effect on burns. It was used in 1935 to treat third-degree x-ray burns, and more modern medicine uses it to treat atomic radiation burns. Applied to wounds, the gel not only reduces pain and infection, it stimulates cell regeneration and therefore the growth of new tissue and skin. Scarring can be reduced significantly by using aloe vera.

Because of its ability to balance the pH of the blood and increase digestion and absorption, aloe vera gel strengthens the immune system. Taken regularly over a period of several months, it helps to regulate the function of the liver.

Not only holistic medicine practitioners use aloe vera. In treating HIV-infected patients, Dr. Reg McDaniel stated, "It appears that acemannon neutralizes the [AIDS] virus by transforming its protein envelope, thus preventing it from attaching itself to the T4 cells." Dr. Robert H. Davis, a physiologist at the University of Pennsylvania College of Podiatric Medicine, has conducted research on aloe vera since the early '70s. Results of laboratory tests on animals indicate that aloe vera can prevent and arrest arthritis, improve wound healing, inhibit pain, block inflammation, restore bone growth, and act as a vehicle for the delivery of nutrients to the body. Dr. Davis stated, "Aloe vera contains the greatest number of active substances of any plant I've looked at."

Plants grown outside in the bright sun contain higher amounts of nutrients than aloe vera grown indoors. But it grows very easily indoors and, though it has less nutritional power, can be of invaluable help in many cases.

Case Study

Jeremy is a 19-year-old female blue and gold macaw. The story begins when we realized that she was eating and drinking ferociously, had an absolutely liquid stool and was losing weight at a very rapid pace. The first veterinarian I went to told me she was hypothyroid. She appeared everything but hypo to me. Her glucose was 1080 and her weight down to 820 grams. But the vet said a high glucose level is normal when a bird is stressed by such things as a trip to the vet. After a five-month odyssey in which I stabilized her a little, we got her to Dr. Barno at Rock Creek Veterinary Hospital. By then Jeremy's glucose was down 200 points and her weight up 100 grams, but she was very weak. Dr. Barno suggested two insulin shots per day. Because of the trauma for Jeremy of getting a shot twice a day and knowing about the damage insulin does to the body, I refused.

During all this time, I was reading whatever I could find about diabetes. One of the most important things was a diet high in fiber and I kept running into aloe vera over and over again.

Slowly but surely, I developed the following recipe for her:

- 2 oz of fresh organic finely chopped vegetables
- 1 teaspoon of psyllium husk powder
- ½ teaspoon of slippery elm bark powder
- 1 teaspoon of organic peanut butter
- 1 teaspoon of aloe vera gel

Her glucose level dropped, she gained weight and, as long as she gets this food, she is relatively stable. She is still diabetic (glucose level 350/400) and her feathers are becoming greener, but her old spirit and strength are back.

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Allergies

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About 30 years ago, I thought I was very odd because I had an inherited nickel allergy. It was not a big deal; I just did not wear jewelry and avoided Band Aids™, and I was fine.

Twenty years ago, I met my first friend with food allergies. Ten years ago, I knew a bunch of people who had pollen allergies. Today, I know more people with allergies than without.

Now, how does one get a food or pollen allergy, after living 10, 20, 30 or more years on this beautiful planet? There are many different ways. Perhaps the body does not get enough nourishment, is too weak to ward off chemicals or gets overloaded with them. A very common allergy is too much food of one kind.

In some cases, things we should have done in the first place can help, like eating a wider variety of fresh and possibly organically-grown foods. For a while, we maybe even have to use supplements to restore the immune system's strength.

It is very interesting that the food to which people react allergically is the food they eat most. In Scandinavia, an allergy to cod fish is the most common; in Japan, rice allergies; in the U.S., wheat is one of the foods that causes the most allergies.

Allergic food reactions are a response from the immune system when it believes a food is harmful to the body. It creates antibodies to this food and, when the food is eaten the next time, releases chemicals to protect the body. This process can take place within minutes to hours after the food is eaten, and the symptoms are so different that, more often than not, they are not recognized as an allergy. When the allergens reach the blood, they trigger a cascade of symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, or cardiovascular system.

Allergens can cause blood pressure to drop or, when reaching the lungs, can cause asthma or, when reaching the skin, can cause eczema or hives. Usually, the weakest point in the body is affected first.

And there is no cure. The only way to prevent an allergic reaction is to find out which food or chemical is causing it and avoid it. While there are many food allergies, the most common are: milk, eggs, peanuts, walnuts, cashews, soy, wheat and shellfish.

Synthetic vitamins, extracts, and concentrates often create allergic reactions in humans, especially in children. If it is bad for kids, couldn't it also create problems for parrots? In addition, recent research indicates that feather-plucking and self-mutilation is often caused by food allergies. There is evidence that even some behavior like biting and screaming is caused by the reaction of certain foods with the body. It makes sense. When does a bird bite or scream? When it is irritated maybe?

Allergies that are not recognized and treated often turn into serious problems. There are probably many birds whose allergies go unrecognized who go through all kinds of treatment yet whose conditions worsen, because the medications cause an additional burden for their system instead of relieving it.

Often in trying to help our feather-plucking birds, we try one supplement after another. It might be a better idea to eliminate one thing for a time from the birds' diet and see if something changes. Although this is a long and tedious process, it may be shorter and safer than trying one

treatment after another without knowing the problem that causes the plucking.

When we take a look at research that indicates people become allergic to the foods they eat the most, we can start right there with our birds. If I look at the most common foods that cause allergic reactions in humans, 5 out of 8 are fed on a regular basis to most birds: soy, wheat, peanuts, walnuts and cashews. Would one of them not be a good place to start? That is easy with walnuts and cashews, but what about peanuts, soy and wheat?

Birds on a pellet diet get their share of them easily, because most pellets contain a relatively large quantity of each. And when the rest of a bird's food is not composed of a great variety, an allergy can easily develop.

If a bird already has an allergy, it is the best to examine the ingredients of its food. Then, pick one of the most common ingredients and start feeding in a way that it avoids that element. If nothing changes after one week, pick the next one. Like I already said, this is a tedious process but, with an allergy, it is the only way to get the bird well again.

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/factsheets/food.htm#A>

<http://www.foodallergy.org/>

http://webmd.lycos.com/content/pages/10/1625_50515

<http://www.qi-whiz.com/pu/pellet.html>

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Being Prepared

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

With the recent passing of my father and my month long trip to Arizona to say goodbye to him and provide assistance to my mom - I've gotten to thinking - thinking about preparedness, and planning, and - most of all - where our birdies fall into all of this. (Everything in life seems to get me thinking about birdies - and where they fall in ALL things, I guess!!)

My parents were not bird owners, but they were (and my mom still is) extremely organized, "plan ahead" kind of people. This means they have a "Living Trust/Will" where everything (all the way down to every final arrangement and detail) has been planned and provided for years in advance. Even so, as the one who had to take care of everything, there seemed to me to be a tremendous amount of phone calls, letters, decisions, notifications to be taken care of, which can be time consuming and confusing.

Anyway, to get to the point, all these musings on my part made me realize how important it is for us to consider our avian companions and make suitable arrangements for their future care and well being. It's a topic no one likes to think about - something very easy to put off - and off, and off! But, if we do nothing, what happens to our precious birdies when we are gone? Over the years, I've worked at retail bird shops that suddenly "inherited" birds when owners died, had numerous vet friends who found themselves in the same position, and gotten calls from distraught family members who have no desire to become bird parents. Often, the birds end up at the Humane Society, pet shops, or passed from family member to family member to stranger to ? who knows what fate, in the end. Not a pleasant thought, if you adore your birds as much as I adore mine!

So, what do we do? We need to plan NOW for our bird's futures! Decide where and to whom you want your birds to go in the event of your passing (or even severe disability). Some options include family members, friends, bird sanctuaries, breeding programs or zoos. If you have a friend or family member in mind, be sure you sit down and thoroughly discuss what adopting your bird means. Does the person understand the work and responsibility involved and know it is a lifetime commitment? If you have a sanctuary, zoo, or breeder in mind, contact them and find out exactly how your bird would be incorporated into their flock and what care will be provided as well as steps to take now. Whatever you decide, it's imperative that you record your wishes in a will or other legal document involving your estate. Be specific. Also, make sure to spell out immediate care needs so your companions are not left in limbo before the will is read and your estate settled.

Planning ahead for the future of your birdie buddies will ensure not only their well being, but give you tremendous peace of mind as well. Don't ignore your bird's future. They're depending on you!

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Blood Feathers

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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I recently got an e-mail asking me to do an article on blood feathers, as a lot of birds are molting now and this person already had to pull one on their grey. Then I got a call asking if a client could clip the one new feather that came in on each wing of her cockatiel, allowing him some flight. She wasn't familiar with blood feathers and could easily have cut into one had we not talked. So it seems prudent and timely to get into some basic anatomy lessons!

First, what is a blood feather? Quite simply, it's a growing, new feather with a live blood supply. Because of the blood still nourishing the feather, the shaft of the quill will look dark - maroon or almost blackish, instead of the usual white or clear look of a fully emerged feather. Once the feather has grown in completely, the blood vessels shrink and dry up as they're no longer needed by the fully formed feather. Normally, blood feathers are seen on the wings and tail, also on the crest of birds like cockatoos.

Blood feathers are completely normal - problems arise when they are either cut or broken. That's one of the reasons I suggest using a professional groomer to do wing (and nail) trims. Cutting a blood feather on a wing will cause profuse bleeding, which can be impossible to stop, requiring pulling the feather so the bird doesn't bleed to death! That's what the forceps or hemostats listed the first aid kit in my recent First Aid article were for! In a pinch, you can also use needle nose pliers.

NEVER use styptic powder to try and stop bleeding on soft tissue - if the cut is a small, mild one you can sometimes coagulate it sufficiently with corn starch, however.

Some birds are just prone to breaking blood feathers, especially lutino mutations of many species, particularly cockatiels and ringnecks. Birds who are nervous and thrash around a lot are also apt to break blood feathers. It's another reason to ensure a large cage is provided for your bird - one too small or overcrowded makes it easier for a bird to break a feather. Knowing your bird's habits and peculiarities can help prevent problems. Remember to visually inspect all birds daily - even a quick once over morning and night can help you catch a problem early. Feather pluckers also often chew into blood feathers, though in my experience, they usually coagulate and stop bleeding on their own. It can still be unsettling, though, to find blood drops on the cage papers in the morning!

Regarding wing clipping - to protect incoming blood feathers, leave the feather on each side of a blood feather on the long side to support it. Also, never clip up into the wing coverts or blood feathers are left unprotected and much more apt to break.

To pull a blood feather, locate the break, then grasp the feather with hemostats just above the break and pull firmly and quickly in the direction of growth. Obviously, the bird needs to be restrained, preferably in a towel. Removing the feather should stop the bleeding. If not, a portion of the shaft may be remaining. If that happens and it is broken below skin level, you will probably need to get to a vet. Apply pressure and corn starch as a lot of blood can be lost before getting to the vet's office.

Pulling a blood feather is very painful for a bird, so it's not something you want to do unless absolutely necessary. It's also something you need to approach with confidence. If you're uncertain, contact a professional. Leaving a profusely bleeding feather alone, hoping it will just stop on it's own can kill your bird!

So, watch your bird carefully when new feathers are coming in. Provide a nightlight for cockatiels and others prone to "night frights." Use a professional groomer that you trust. Don't overcrowd the cage. Have your first aid kit and the vet's phone number handy, just in case!

P.S. Broken blood feathers are the ONLY feathers that should ever be pulled. Pulling feathers to force new growth or for cosmetic purposes is something I seriously disagree with - question anyone who suggests doing so!

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First Aid

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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Unfortunately, accidents can - and DO happen, so it's always a good idea to be prepared! While accidents usually produce obvious injuries, illnesses are often kept well hidden by birds. In nature, if you're sick you pose a threat in making your whole flock vulnerable to predators, so parrots have become adept at masking signs of illness. This is one reason that it's vital to have a "well bird" check-up annually. (I'll discuss that in a future article). Needless to say, once a bird is showing obvious signs of illness, he's often very sick and needs immediate vet attention. First Aid Is intended to help you get by until you can see the vet, or in treating minor injuries.

It's helpful to have a "hospital cage" for emergencies - a smaller, easily portable cage where you can isolate a sick or injured bird and easily move him to a warm, quiet, area of your home. It's advisable to have a quarantine area as well - for new birds coming into the home, as well as sick birds recovering from an infection. This area should be well separated from the rest of your birds to prevent air-borne transmission of germs, as well as those spread by direct contact.

Some of the signs of possible illness include: more time on cage floor, talking and playing less, fluffed feathers, lack of appetite, drinking more water, personality changes (such as becoming bitey or not wanting to come out of the cage), tail bobbing, puffy eyes, sleeping on both feet with head tucked, droopy wings, sneezing or coughing, "clicking" in chest, vomiting, diarrhea, soiled vent, etc. I won't go into specific diseases here, but hopefully you get the general idea - if things are "different," get to the vet! Other problems include broken blood feathers or egg binding.

It's a good idea to put together a first aid kit (Your Parrot Place has a nice one for sale!)

Include:

- Eye and skin wash
- Styptic powder
- Corn starch
- Antiseptic wipes
- Cotton Swabs and balls
- Eye dropper
- Assorted bandages - gauze, adhesive, vet wrap
- Scissors
- Latex Gloves
- Forceps or hemostats
- Betadine or iodine swabs
- Adhesive tape
- Penlight
- Heating pad and/or lamp
- Hydrogen peroxide
- Pedialyte (Electrolyte solution for babies)
- Hand feeding formula and syringes
- Phone number for vets and poison control

Generally, with any illness or injury, remove the bird to a hospital cage and put him in a warm, quiet, dimly lit room (bathrooms can work). Provide fresh water (and Pedialyte if needed). Feed favorite foods (healthier things you know he'll eat) plus warm foods like cooked rice or oatmeal. IN addition, spray millet is often enjoyed by smaller birds. If he's not eating well on his own, offer some warm food with your fingers or a spoon. If need be, you may have to mix up hand feeding formula and give by cup or syringe. If you've kept your bird in the habit of eating from a spoon or

cup, this will be easier. DO NOT use over the counter remedies from pet stores. It's too much of a guessing game. I know a Pionus who became psychotic after being given an OTC bird "remedy" and would not stop thrashing around her cage. A little chamomile tea can help the bird relax and ginger tea is good for digestive upsets. If you're familiar with herbal remedies, you can safely use those without causing harm to your bird. NEVER give antibiotics without knowing your bird actually has a BACTERIAL infection (and which bacteria!)

Broken blood feathers (or those accidentally clipped) can be hard to stop bleeding. Do not use styptic powder on skin or soft tissue - only on bleeding nails. Otherwise, use corn starch as a coagulant. If the blood feather (immature feather with live blood supply) won't stop bleeding, it has to be pulled or the bird can bleed to death.

A note on egg binding: If a hen is on the cage bottom, fluffed up and straining, she may be "egg bound". Put her in a warm, humid place (like the bathroom). You can rub some vegetable oil around her vent. Egg bound hens can die fairly quickly, though, and if the egg does not pass within several hours, she needs to get to the vet immediately (a good diet with extra calcium will help prevent this.)

So get in the habit of inspecting your birds on a daily basis, and being alert for signs of distress. Read up on diseases and gain a basic knowledge of illness in birds. "Bird proof" your home, avoid toxic fumes and unsafe toys. Have a first aid kit and hospital cage available. No what's "normal" for your bird and act quickly if things don't seem right. Find a good AVIAN vet and see them annually. Be sure your house and your bird's cage and play areas are as safe as possible. Feed the best diet you can to ensure your birds best possible health. Wouldn't it be nice if your first aid kit never gets used?!

The First Aid kit available at Your Parrot Place (under accessories) contains most of the essentials such as: Styptic Powder, Latex Gloves, Eye Skin Wash, 1"x6 yd Sterile Bandage, Scissors, Locking Forceps, Iodine Swabs, Antiseptic Towelettes, 2"x2" Gauze Pads, Cotton Swabs, Adhesive Tape, Hand Wipe, Emergency Info Card, Directions, and Case. Perishables, like hand feeding formula, should be stored in the freezer and replaced every six months.

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Hot Tips for Cool Birds

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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It may only be Memorial Day weekend, but last week we Portlanders saw unseasonably warm 90 degree days burst upon us! So, it's not too early to talk about hot weather dangers and how to "summerize" your companion birds.

When the mercury climbs into the 80's, 90's and above, we need to be concerned not only about heat itself, but also sun exposure, drafts, humidity, and increased bacteria in wet food. Parrots do best in homes kept between about 68 - 75 degrees, and when temperatures rise above, we need to make some adjustments in home environments. Always make sure cages aren't kept directly in front of windows; birds always need access to shade. Those of us living in the Northwest (humans and birds alike!) look forward to sunny weather with almost spiritual zeal!! (We see so little of it, after all!) When I lived in Arizona for 10 years, my birds and I swore if we never saw the sun again, it would be too soon - but after our first winter in Oregon, Amber and I greeted the final arrival of summer (in mid-July) with wild abandon, as we took our daily walks to the park. Sunshine provides health benefits to birds, as the Vitamin D aids feathers and vitality. The fresh air from open windows is also a boon, but keep up on wing trims and screen windows to avoid escapes!

By now, most folks are aware of the benefits of full spectrum lighting. Unfortunately, window glass filters out some of the beneficial rays, so an outdoor aviary or safe cage is great to utilize in summer.

When traveling, be sure not to leave birds closed in cars unattended, as suffocation can occur. If you live in a hot, dry climate and/or use air conditioners a lot, also use a humidifier to keep air from being too dry it's hard on skin and feathers. Be sure cages aren't getting drafts from air conditioner ducts. If temperatures cool down a lot at night, don't leave cages too close to open windows to also avoid drafts and chilling, and, of course, turn off ceiling fans when birds are out! One of the best things about summer is that birds can enjoy a daily bath or shower every morning, and be left to air dry throughout the warm summer months.

Although birds can adapt well to a wide variety of temperatures and climates, problems arise when temperatures fluctuate suddenly, instead of gradually increasing so that birds can adapt to the changes.

Be sure to offer plenty of fresh, pure water (change 1-2 times per day minimum). If birds are "soup" makers or "water-poopers," consider switching them to water bottles for health's sake. Remember too, birds don't know the difference between bowls of water intended for drinking and those intended for bathing!

Lastly, if you know me, you know I suggest ½ the diet be comprised of fresh veggies, cooked whole grains/legumes, and some fruit - and that you remove wet food after 3-4 hours, due to spoilage. In the summer, though, you may need to remove it after only 1-2 hours, as bacteria proliferates at higher temperatures. Dairy products and eggs, especially, should be removed after 1 hour. So, now that the sun is out, let your bird bask in the sunshine and fresh air, eat abundantly of nature's spring and summer harvest and enjoy the fun and benefits of daily baths. Celebrate the season - before you know it, Fall's grey skies will be here again, and it'll be cuddle-up time for you and your birds.

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How to Keep Your Bird Busy

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant

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In nature, your bird would be busy the whole day. Birds fly to find something to eat, play with their flock mates, bathe, etc. When we have them in our homes, we generally only spend limited time with them. Even when we don't have to leave for 8-10 hours to earn some food for them, we still have things to do, while they have to occupy themselves when they don't eat or sleep.

How can we keep them occupied? There are many toys that keep them busy for a while, but usually that is not enough. Some birds are happy to chew up all kinds of things, others need challenges, and a toy that is very interesting to one bird may be rather boring for the next. Usually with a little attention we can find ways to entertain them.

So, what can we do to provide stimuli and entertainment when we don't have time to interact with them? One possibility is to provide something to get your bird to work for its food. There are many different toys that do that; for example, Hide-A-Treats, Pyramid Puzzle and Carousel Treat holders. My birds always look to see if something is in there, even if they found nothing the last few times they looked. If they have several of these kinds of treat providers, the goody can be put into another one every day.

There are lots of simple things that give them something to do, like paper, boxes, old socks, etc. With 14 birds, I sometimes have to be very inventive to find the right thing for each bird. For some of my Conures and my Indian Ringneck, the wood blocks to shred can't be big enough. The smaller birds get the rest of the blocks that the bigger birds leave. One of my conures and my macaws don't touch anything but leather. They chew for hours on anything - even just strings, as long as it is made of leather - and turn them into tiny little pieces. My red-fronted loves metal things, which are best when they can be taken apart.

My cockatoo needs challenges. He needs things to take apart, and it is even better when he can rebuild something from them. His favorite is bunches of quick links on a chain. Unscrewing them and putting them on the bars of his cage occupies him for hours. Also, all kinds of chains are another favorite. I have one plastic chain that he tied on the cage bars in a way that I can't get them off anymore. I hope that one day he will get tired of them there and take them off again. He also likes goofy links, because he can take them apart and put them all over the cage on the bars or at the perch or on other toys. He has chains and ropes woven all over his cage. I just hang them there and he produces all kinds of art with them.

Some other birds like things that rattle. My GW, for example, sometimes likes to chew wood blocks, other times she does not even look at them for weeks and takes a sisal rope apart or rattles her plastic toys for hours.

Some birds just like to organize things, so for them some containers with things to take out and put back in are a lot of fun. For example, my grey loves a box on his cage floor, loaded with wood blocks, plastic toys, and pieces of bird kabobs. He takes them out, puts them all over the cage, and puts them back into the container. Sometimes he chews some of them up. The container can also be rolled around and makes wonderful noises that way. Socks also occupy him; he chews the most artistic designs into them.

For almost 9 years, I thought my budgies didn't like to chew anything, until the day I put some balsa buddies in their cage. The thing was gone within a few hours. It just takes the right thing.

It does not do much good to just provide a bunch of toys. We have to figure out the right ones. It sometimes takes awhile and some money, but when we find the right object, it is a lot of fun to watch our little artists working. So, go for it!

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How Did They Get This Old?

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant
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Every once in a while I hear about very old parrots. Like the Sulphur-crested Cockatoo from a couple I met. They inherited the bird from their parents, who had inherited it from their parents. This bird had been a member of this family for 117 years. Or the 75-year-old Amazon.

My first question in a case like this is, "What did your grandparents, parents and are you feeding this bird that it got this old?"

Pellets are a relatively new product, and the belief that seeds are good for parrots has only been around for about 50 years. So what did these "oldsters" eat? Human food! Vegetables, fruits, maybe some meat and bread. People did not eat as much meat in the first half of this century because it was too expensive to eat it every day. And, until not too long ago, most people cooked from scratch every day. Many had kitchen gardens and planted their own food or got it from the neighbor or farmer around the corner, or even at the Saturday market where it was fresh from the fields. Not like today - harvested unripe, stored in warehouses, gas ripened and then on the road for days or weeks.

The fruits and vegetables were harvested ripe and fresh — fresh enough to contain still more vitamins, minerals, enzymes, phytonutrients, fatty acids, amino acids, etc. than we find in the produce we buy today at the grocery store. Beyond that, the use of chemicals and fertilizers has increased tremendously since these good old days. So, the produce of old was what we would call organically grown. In short, fresh, whole, live food. A diet loaded with nutrition and fibers gave these "oldies" a pretty good head start in the age game.

We are at the point where people are more aware, and even doctors recommend, that it takes a variety of foods, including lots of fresh raw vegetables and fruits to stay or become healthy. So why do we think a diet consisting solely of pellets, seeds and some supplements is healthy for our birds? What about all the nutrition that get lost due to storage and processing? How about the fiber of fresh green foods, the trace minerals, micronutrients, cofactors, etc.? How do they get them? Through fresh, raw, whole, live foods. There are no supplements that can substitute fresh, raw, whole foods.

Some people want to improve their birds' diets by cooking for them and, while I think it is okay to give your bird pasta, rice, legumes and other cooked stuff every once in a while, on a daily basis they need fresh food. And the wider the variety the better, what does not mean, is you have to give them 10 different kinds of vegetables or fruits a day. It is ok to feed one kind for one day and a different one the next day. That still provides variety. A variety that seems rather natural to me, because as far as we know about some parrot species, they sometimes eat the same thing for quite while. E.g. there is this flock of scarlet macaws in Mexico, which comes every year at the time the almonds are ripe in the area. They stay until they have wiped out the almonds and then they leave. Nobody knows what else they eat during the rest of the year. But this few weeks could be the only time they eat almonds.

If you have just one bird, I know he wants to eat everything you eat. That should make it very easy to modify his diet; if you eat it and have the right attitude (which is not: "Yuck, this needs more artificial flavor."), your bird will eat it. Your bird knows if you like it or not.

It's also important to play with the recipe until you find what your bird most likes. Baby food in jars is a wonderful taste enhancer for bird food. After a while, you may be having fun "creating" new recipes for fresh bird foods. Everybody has a recipe for birdie bread; why not for healthy

fresh birdie treats?

If you have more than one bird it is even easier, because you just have to get one bird to eat it. The others will follow. And I cannot stress enough the most important factors: love and patience. I have birds that just jumped into it and ate everything. They probably needed the nutrition very badly. But I had other birds that needed the nutrients just as much who refused to look at this new stuff. And I do not exaggerate when I say I put the fresh food in some cages for month after month without those birds even looking at it. But one nice day they will go for it.

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The Importance of Being Bathed

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

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Sweetum Baaaaaaath!?! Sweetum is my 4 year old African Grey male and he always says what he wants. His needs are identical to those of all birds, whether they are in our care, or not. In the middle of winter with snow on the ground and the ponds frozen I observe cardinals, jays and finches taking their regular bath in the creek behind our house. They do that because they NEED it and they have a choice. Our parrots do not have a choice. They have a drinking dish or a water bottle, hardly a place to take a bath. Some bird care givers relate that their birds hate to bathe and consequently they give up trying. The bird's continued aversion to water shows how poorly he/she has been taught. Bathing with birds, as with our very own kids often does not come naturally--as with human children, we must always be the benevolent teachers.

Taking a bath is physiologically and psychologically important for our birds, as vital to their emotional and physical health as their "daily bread," their socializing sessions with us, their 10 hour uninterrupted sleep time and their selection of toys in a clean cage. Bathing cleans the dander or feather dust, moisturizes the skin and just makes them "feel good." Dirt, as with humans is an invitation to skin problems, disease and misery. Taking a bath is a must and it is our responsibility to provide opportunity and means.

While they all need to bathe, the frequency and intensity may vary and be based on individual preferences, ambient humidity in the house as well as species requirements. We know that Eclectus parrots, for instance, due to the construction of their feathers need to be bathed more often than other parrots. Eclectus are known for their love of bathing and have been observed under lawn sprinklers, in bathtubs and trying to get into their drinking dishes. They should be soaked to the skin. Cockatoos, for instance, who produce copious amounts of dander must be bathed frequently and intensely--most of them love the experience. The cardinal rule: everyone needs to bathe--at least twice a week!

It seems that many birds must learn to take a bath and although some display a reaction to certain sounds like vacuum cleaners, which often triggers an instinctive bathing behavior reflex--the actual bath is another matter altogether. I have a male Eclectus rescue who goes absolutely nuts when he hears the vacuum cleaner but if I grab the spray bottle he wants nothing to do with it. While there may be other reasons for it from his "previous" life, the appearance of the bottle is very stressful to him. Inca, my blue headed Pionus absolutely loves the Vaporetto but he hates the bottle! I suggest that we always respect the preferences of our birds--there is usually an easy way, its up to us to find it.

There are a number of ways to initiate them into the art of bathing. I take mine into the shower with me. I have a couple of shower perches on the wall with suction cups--the kind that swing out. Even when they were babies, I put them on the perch out of the reach of the water, exposed them to the humidity and light mist and just let them watch me while I bathed my "wings." At best it was an introduction and at worst it gave us time to interact. Eventually I would just take them off the perch and hold them under the shower low down at bath tub floor level so they won't get hurt should they fall off. None of my birds likes the spray bottle and runs when they see one. It has always fascinated me how docile they get under the shower. When I get a rescue, usually a bird I have never seen before and who might be anxious, the shower works for all of them. I have never been bitten in the shower and everybody always gets satisfyingly wet. So for me the shower works best. Sweetum now just loves to join me in the shower. He babbles and whistles and stares and we have long conversations. After a while his eyes begin to close and he takes a nap!

One can also fill the sink with about an inch of water and initiate them that way--or, if the bird is not too large, use a shallow bowl and fill that with about an inch of water... and for some the old spray bottle works quite well--as long as they don't get sprayed in the face but rather like rain--from above.

There are lots of ways to teach our psittacines to take a bath--as long as we remember that in all cases we need patience and tenderness. Some will take to bathing like "ducks to water," others need special consideration. It is up to us to figure out what works best for them.

IMPORTANT: as a general rule we should always use only fresh water--it may be warm or cold. There is one exception: when giving a feather picker a bath, aloe may be added. Aloe helps with itching skin and its taste inhibits the picking. We should also avoid letting them go "nighty-night" while still wet--especially if their environment is at human temperature levels. In their "home" which in almost all cases is quite warm and humid and where it frequently rains in the evening and at night, being wet when it gets dark is pretty much the rule and no big deal--but it is a lot warmer there.

So, please, give them frequent baths, your feathered companions will thank you for it.

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The Kiss of Death

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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Our companion parrots LOVE our mouths - to kiss us, eat from our mouths, feed us, clean our teeth (they're all budding dental hygienists!) We love them in return - and want to kiss them back, share our food, nuzzle, and bond. Unfortunately, the human mouth is a breeding ground for many nasty pathogens harmful to birds, especially bacteria, like E. Coli. I constantly remind people NOT to let their birdies come in contact with their saliva, yet it keeps happening.

I know how hard it is to resist a cute little beaker and exploring tongue on our face and lips, yet the consequences can be deadly. I've known people who routinely fed their unweaned baby parrots from their own mouths, or who prechewed nuts for their birds, or regularly let their buddy clean every single tooth in the evening as they sit and watch TV together. It seems innocuous enough - most of us don't worry about catching anything from our birds and, in fact, there are very few diseases that WE can get from THEM.

But the danger we don't think of is from US infecting THEM!! We humans have very different digestive systems and immune systems from our parrots, so many of the common bacteria in our mouths and bodies that don't make us sick can be devastating to our birds. In fact, there's not many places on earth nastier than the human mouth!! (Just ask a doctor about the seriousness of a human bite!) Last year, some friends of mine lost one of their beloved Quakers, and spent many months nursing the other one back to health, due to an E. Coli infection from human saliva.

Just recently, another friend discovered that her African Grey has a bacterial infection from - you guessed it! - SALIVA!! Fortunately, it's mild, but he has to undergo a 10 day course of antibiotics nonetheless. So, please, please, PLEASE - resist the temptation to "swap spit" with your birdie - we can share our love in much safer ways that don't put our loved ones at risk of illness, or even death!!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 04-01-2001.

Sick House Syndrome - Is Your Home Safe for Parrots?

by Carolyn Swicegood

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Do you and your parrots live in a safe environment? According to the Environmental Protection Agency, indoor air is our worst pollution problem. Research tells us that whatever the quality of outside air, it nearly always is worse indoors, where we spend ninety percent of our time and where many of our parrots spend all of their time. A Massachusetts Special Legislative Commission has concluded that indoor air pollution accounts for fifty percent of all the illness in the United States. In one study, twenty-four percent of the people complaining of the flu actually were suffering from carbon monoxide poisoning.

Some homes, usually those twenty years or older, were constructed of materials now known to be dangerous. Most homes have a problem with toxins emanating from carpets, cabinets, draperies, and many other sources. Outgassing refers to the fumes that a substance gives off as it ages or degrades. Outgassing is responsible for the "new home" smell that sometimes causes stinging, watery eyes. Signs of a sick house include a musty, stuffy smell and other unusual and noticeable odors. Feeling noticeably better outside the home also can indicate an indoor pollution problem.

Airtight buildings block out nature's ability to clean the air. Before the energy crisis of the seventies, most houses were not especially energy efficient. Small openings in their structure were left unsealed, so fresh air passed freely through them, diluting and carrying away toxins. The oil crisis spawned the development of airtight houses in an effort to make them more energy efficient. It is believed that resources saved on energy by making our homes airtight have been spent on medical bills to treat the resulting health problems.

Parrots are exquisitely sensitive to toxins, especially those in the air that they breathe. We all remember the stories of canaries being taken into coal mines as sentinels to warn of the accumulation of deadly gases because they were so highly vulnerable to the adverse effects of toxic fumes. The respiratory system of birds is so much more sensitive than ours that they will be harmed by unsafe indoor air long before we become aware of the danger.

Parrots have been described as "magnificent athletes". They are capable of flying long distances, so their respiratory systems are extremely efficient. While humans breathe at the rate of twelve to sixteen breaths per minute, large parrots take twenty-five to forty breaths per minute. Therefore it is not surprising that polluted air rapidly takes its toll on their health. Respiratory problems are one of the most common ailments in pet birds and any problem that interferes with breathing must be regarded as potentially life threatening.

Humans breathe in about fifty pounds of air every day. We are as much what we breathe as what we eat. People who live in "sick homes" often suffer from a variety of health problems including allergies, asthma, sinus conditions, respiratory problems, chemical sensitivity, pneumonitis, cancer, chronic fatigue, and aspergillosis. Could sick house syndrome account for the many mysterious cases of aspergillosis in parrots today? Owners of indoor birds often are shocked when they hear the diagnosis because they considered it a disease of parrots living in outdoor aviaries or in crowded warehouse conditions. This deadly and all too prevalent infection frequently is found in birds living in clean air-conditioned homes where damp conditions have allowed the growth and dispersal of invisible fungal spores. Aspergillus mold can be found growing on surfaces and walls of bathrooms and ceilings of homes with roof leaks. Many parrots that self-

mutilate and destroy their feathers may silently be fighting off subtle but health-damaging fungal infections caused by contaminated indoor air. Aspergillosis is a most difficult disease to treat. Even with antifungal medicines, months of therapy are required, with no guarantee of survival, so prevention is of paramount importance.

Not surprisingly, sinus problems in parrots have become increasingly common, just as they have in humans. Dust from air conditioning and heat ducts, as well as from moldy basements, often is circulated throughout the house. Until recently, ducts in most buildings were never cleaned. Most homeowners never have their duct system cleaned.

In warm, humid climates where many parrots are kept, sick house problems also can worsen during Summer months when the outside air is humid. Most air conditioning units contain mold-contaminated components such as insulation and blowers. Ventilation which brings in humid outside air may increase mildew and other moisture-related problems when the air-conditioner does not sufficiently dehumidify the air. In most cases, the ideal relative humidity range is between 37 and 55 percent. New homes are insulated and sealed so well that moisture builds up and cannot escape, creating the perfect breeding ground for a variety of molds.

There are many sources of indoor air pollution that are harmful to parrots and people. According to the EPA, the top ten indoor hazards are moisture, biologicals (like molds, mildew and dust mites); combustion products (including carbon monoxide); formaldehyde; radon, a radioactive gas from soil and rock beneath and around the foundation; household products and furnishings; asbestos; lead; particulates from fireplaces, woodstoves, kerosene heaters, unvented gas space heaters, tobacco smoke, dust and pollen; remodeling byproducts; and environmental tobacco smoke. Almost none of these hazards are found in the natural environment of parrots, so it is reasonable to assume that they probably are not biologically adapted to deal with them. Volatile Organic Compounds (VOC) are gases that consist of many chemicals that are released into the air from paints, solvents, adhesives, various finishes and other building materials. They often are described as the "new smell. Short-term exposure to VOCs can cause headaches, nausea and irritated eyes, nose and throat. Newly introduced VOCs, especially in carpet, can easily be detected by the odor they give off. If you open a cupboard door and detect an odor, formaldehyde which is found in particleboard and plywood, may be present.

HAZARDS TO BIRD HEALTH

Here are some of the greatest indoor pollution dangers to parrots, many of which can easily be prevented.

*Aspergillus mold which can cause the deadly disease, aspergillosis. Excessive moisture which promotes the growth of various molds in bathrooms and other areas of high moisture is an all too common problem.

*Polytetrafluorethylene (PTFE) gas released when various non-stick surfaces such as Teflon are overheated is a common respiratory toxin to birds. It can be avoided entirely by not purchasing the many products containing this non-stick treatment. With minimum exposure, the immediate removal of the bird to fresh air can save its life. With greater exposure, death usually follows quickly.

*Passive inhalation of tobacco smoke can cause chronic disease of the eyes, skin, and respiratory system of parrots. Birds that live in homes where people smoke are often plagued with coughing, sneezing, sinusitis, and conjunctivitis due to continuous irritation from smoke. Many birds with feather destruction problems resume normal preening behavior when removed from exposure to tobacco smoke.

*Disinfecting agents used to clean cages, aviaries, and food dishes should be used carefully and should be thoroughly rinsed before coming in contact with birds. Ammonia and chlorine vapors can irritate parrots' eyes, nares and respiratory tract, predisposing them to secondary bacterial and fungal infections.

*Aerosol products such as perfumes, deodorants, and cleaning agents may cause respiratory problems due to irritation of the respiratory tract by the fluorocarbons and particulates in the aerosol.

*Formaldehyde fumes have been associated with death in smaller birds. Frequently used in the seventies and eighties in particleboard, fiberboard, cabinets, countertops, paneling, and some furniture, it is no longer used in much of the newer building materials, but strong outgassing is thought to be possible for up to five years. Formaldehyde is a suspected carcinogen, so solid wood or steel cabinets should be substituted even though they may be more expensive.

*Carbon monoxide is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas produced by furnaces and other heaters. Birds in poorly ventilated, heated areas are at high risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. It robs the blood of oxygen and can be particularly harmful to animals and humans with heart ailments when inhaled at levels often found indoors.

*Combustion by-products are released whenever something burns. Indoors, this usually includes wood, natural gas, propane, oil, coal, and kerosene. When the smoke and fumes do not go up the chimney or flue as like they should, the hazardous by-products add to indoor pollution.

*Tetrachloroethylene (also known as perchloroethylene or "perc"), which has been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals is brought into homes on freshly dry-cleaned clothing.

*Paradichlorobenzene found in moth-repellent cakes or crystals, toilet disinfectants, and deodorizers is another chemical that causes cancer in animals. Studies have consistently indicated that almost all exposure to paradichlorobenzene comes from sources inside homes, not from industrial emissions or hazardous waste sites.

IMPROVING INDOOR AIR QUALITY

By making our homes and aviaries safer for parrots, we also help our families to maintain a higher level of health. Many of the following recommendations for improving indoor air quality can be implemented with minimum effort.

*Change furnace and air conditioner filters often, at least monthly. Make it a point to change all filters at the beginning of each new month.

*Run bathroom vent fans when showering to discourage mold growth.

*Clean humidifier, air conditioning, and refrigerator drain pans often. Many types of mold have been discovered growing in refrigerator drain pans. Clean all drain pans at the beginning of each new month.

*Fill humidifiers with distilled or demineralized water. Use a few drops of Grapefruit Seed Extract in the water avoid the growth of mold.

*Do not smoke indoors. (Do not allow smokers to handle your parrots. The residue on their hands is known to cause plucking and even flesh mutilation in parrots sensitive to the chemicals in cigarette smoke.)

- *Air out new rugs, drapes, furniture, and dry cleaned clothing before bringing them indoors.
- *Keep gutters clean to prevent moisture from penetrating the home.
- *Regularly clean and tune all fuel-burning appliances and fireplaces.
- *Wash bedding materials frequently in hot water to reduce dust mites.
- *Remove the plastic bags from fresh dry cleaning and air the clothing out before hanging in your closet. This will limit exposure to perchloroethylene, the solvent used in dry cleaning. Hand wash if possible. Buy clothes that don't require dry cleaning, such as washable rayon or silk.
- *Consider installing a house energy recovery ventilator system. They provide moisture control, improve indoor air quality and aid in energy recovery.
- *Build or buy a detached storage shed for hazardous items such as pesticides, paints, sealants, etc. rather than storing them in a garage attached to the house. Otherwise, store them in a sealed metal container.
- *If the garage is attached to the house, never start a car with the garage door closed or let the car idle inside the garage.
- *Lead can be found in paint and in the water supply. Ninety percent of houses built before 1940 contain lead paint. It was not banned completely until 1978, so it is only safe to assume that the newest homes are lead-free. Owners of older homes can purchase test kits for lead detection.
- *To avoid the problem of mold growing in the damp soil of houseplants, choose cactus and other succulent plants that require less water.
- *High quality room air cleaners clean only the room where they are used, but can make a positive difference in the air quality of a bedroom. Considering that we spend one third of our lives sleeping, a good room air cleaner for the bedroom is useful for people too. Several independent researchers have suggested that "Living Air" is the best brand of air cleaner but they seem to be difficult to find. HEPA filters are offered by many brands of air cleaners and are considered necessary to do an acceptable job of cleaning the air.
- *Some of the things that do not clean the air to any appreciable degree are ozone generators, negative-ion generators and house plants. These are simplistic approaches that can create as many problems as they solve.

EPA HEADQUARTERS PROBLEM

In October, 1987, the offices of the Environmental Protection Agency headquarters in Washington, DC were remodeled. Immediately, complaints of eye and nasal irritations, nausea, headaches and skin rashes began. Eventually they had to remove 27,000 square yards of carpeting. Some of those employees are now so chemically hypersensitive that they cannot return to work. Many of the workers were Ph.D. scientists who originally were skeptical that people could become hypersensitive to chemicals. The problem was believed to be a chemical called 4-phenyl-cyclohexene that was given off by the new carpeting. Nearly a hundred other chemicals were found in the air, some of which could also be at fault. People can tolerate much higher levels of exposure to toxins than parrots can, so exposure to new carpet is a serious concern of parrot owners.

CARPET--WORST INDOOR POLLUTION SOURCE

If truckloads of dust with the same concentration of toxic chemicals found in most carpets were deposited outside, these locations would be considered hazardous waste dumps. Carpets act as deep reservoirs for toxic compounds, dangerous bacteria, and allergens even if the rugs are vacuumed regularly in the normal manner. Plush and shag carpets are more of a problem than short pile carpet. The tens of millions of mold spores, dust mites, and other microorganisms that thrive in carpet can only be combated by keeping the carpet dry and clean.

Whenever possible, homeowners who keep parrots indoors should install ceramic tile, wood, or any flooring other than carpet. Cotton area rugs that can be cleaned in a washing machine are a good alternative. According to a paper in Applied Microbiology, millions of toxic microorganisms can be found in one square foot of carpet. Carpets outgas many volatile organic chemicals, such as 4-PC, a byproduct of latex used in the backing of many new carpets and that causes the "new carpet" odor. Other VOCs in carpeting are acetone, toluene, xylene, formaldehyde and benzenes. Carpet dyes, coatings for fire, stain, and mildew resistance, fungicides, and pesticides in carpet also contain VOCs. Carpets accumulate other chemical contaminants, dust and dust mites, bacteria and fungi, as well as absorbing up to twenty percent of their weight in moisture. Pesticides that break down within days outdoors may last for years in carpets, where they are protected from the degradation caused by sunlight and bacteria. Here are a few suggestions to implement if it is necessary to use carpeting in your home.

*If you must install new carpet in your home, remove all parrots and other pets to an area that does not share the same air system, preferably to a different location altogether, during the installation.

*Ask the installer to air out new carpet before installation, or it can be rolled out (perhaps in a warehouse) and allowed to outgas before being brought indoors. Ideally, we need to wait until the new carpet smell can no longer be detected, but that may be impractical as it can take as long as several months, depending on the chemicals in the carpet. Even a few days of airing out helps.

*If the carpet can be tacked down rather than glued, the problem of toxins from adhesives is avoided.

*After it is installed, keep windows open and fans running for two or three days.

*Make sure that the installer uses safe adhesives to seal the seams.

*Vacuum carpet frequently and deep clean annually.

*Use a HEPA vacuum cleaner, which has an ultrafine filter that traps tiny dust particles or a vacuum cleaner with special water filters. The cleanest system is a central vacuum with an outdoor exhaust.

Although carpet removal is the single most effective means of improving indoor air quality, parrot owners who are concerned about reducing the exposure to toxic substances of their family and birds can make many other less expensive changes. Modest alterations in one's daily choices and routines can significantly reduce indoor pollution. Armed with a better understanding of the toxic substances found in common products and structures, we can provide an indoor safe haven for our parrots as well as our families.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 03-24-2002.

Tea Tree Oil - Safety Alert

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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I'm obviously a big fan of alternative health care, herbal therapies, and natural remedies - for both myself and my birds. I started learning about these things some 25 years ago, living in the San Francisco Bay Area and visiting herbalists, reflexologists, iridologists, and various natural health practitioners. So, when my birds need treatment, I generally look first to alternative treatments. Fortunately, I also check first to ensure the safety for birds of whatever I'm considering using. It's important to remember that just because something is "natural", that doesn't always mean it's 100% safe or appropriate for birds.

Recent case in point - Valentino, my lovebird, had an "owie" on his back, very raw skin spot - and I needed to clean and treat it. Usually I use Aloe Vera and/or Cayenne tincture, but I had just been given a bottle of Tea Tree Oil for a skin ailment of my own, so thought it might be good for 'Tino. THANK GOD I checked out it's safety for birds FIRST before applying it to my little guy.

Upon research, I found that Tea Tree Oil (Melaleuca Oil) is similar in structure and action to turpentine. Often used for its antibacterial and antifungal properties in both humans and animals, it can cause toxicity if ingested. We all know anything put on our bird's skin can, and will, be ingested to some degree during preening. It can also be absorbed through the skin, causing systemic toxicity.

There are reports of deaths in birds from poisoning from Tea Tree Oil, as well as some who were able to be saved by immediate emergency treatment. Although many cases occurred from using overly high dosages, one case involved only one drop of oil applied to a bleeding blood feather. So, I decided NOT to treat my lovebird's skin injury with Tea Tree Oil. Use your own judgment, but keep this toxicity potential in mind before using it on your own birds!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 03-25-2001.

Toxic Wood and Plants

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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House plants, garden plants, wood perches and toys, berries, seeds - our birdie buddies come in contact with many forms of the plant world, so we need to be aware of what is safe and what can be toxic for our feather kids. In some cases, only certain parts of a plant are dangerous, while with others, ALL parts post a threat. Often, plants will be listed "safe" on one list and "toxic" on another.

This may be due to a situation where the fruit (ex: tomato) is fine, but stems and foliage (ex: tomato plants) are not. If you find a plant listed differently and can't determine that it's only part of the plant that is toxic, than I would advise erring on the side of caution and consider all of it toxic. You will also often see plants listed as toxic that are in dispute as to the actual toxicity in birds, but have proven toxic in other animal species. For my peace of mind, I avoid those where the jury is still out!

REMEMBER: Any wood used for perches and toys should be pesticide and chemical free. If you gather branches from the wild, scrub them with disinfectant, rinse well and dry in the sun or on a low setting in the oven to kill any molds or bugs. If you obtain wood scraps from a lumber yard, be sure the wood has not been treated with any preservatives.

The following is a list of woods and plants considered toxic. I've also included a list of safe plants so you'll have some idea of what you can have around your birds, without worrying! Keep in mind, these are only a few of the toxic and non-toxic plants out there - space doesn't allow everything!

<p>TOXIC PLANTS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Amaryllis Azalea Bird of Paradise Caladium Calla Lily Clematis Crocus Daffodil Dieffenbachia Eggplant (unripe, overripe fruit, leaves) Ficus (ornamental fig - sap) Iris Ivy Juniper Larkspur Lobelia Lupine Marijuana 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mistletoe Narcissus Oleander Peony Periwinkle Philodendron Poinsettia Poppy Potato (sprouts, leaves, green tubers) Pathos Privet Rhubarb (leaves) Sage Sweet Pea Tobacco Tomato (stems, leaves) Tulip Wisteria Yew
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SAFE PLANTS	TOXIC WOOD	SAFE WOOD
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Acacia African Daily African Violet Aloe Vera Aralia Asparagus Fern Aspidistra Baby's Breath Begonia Boston Fern Bromeliads Calendula Chamomile Chicory Coleus Comfrey Croton Dracaena Gardenia Grape Ivy Jade Plant Lilac Lily Marigold Nasturtium Norfolk Island Pine Parsley Peppermint Petunia Rose Schefflera Spearmint Swedish Ivy Violet Wandering Jew Yucca Zebra Plant	Apricot (pits, leaves, bark) Apple (seeds, leaves, bark) Avocado (pits, leaves, fruit, stems) Cedar Cherry (pits, leaves, bark) Horse Chestnut Holly (leaves, berries) Nectarine (pits, leaves, bark) Oak (acorns) Peach (pits, leaves, bark) Pear (leaves, seeds, bark) Plum (leaves, pits, bark) Prune (leaves, pits, bark) Red Maple	Ash Aspen Beech Birch Black Walnut Cottonwood Crabapple Dogwood Elm Eucalyptus Fir Madrona Magnolia Manzanita Pine Poplar Redwood Spruce Willow
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(Added by Taylor. This question came from one of our readers.)

QUESTION: I read the list of toxic woods and it listed oak (acorns). Does that mean that the oak limbs, without leaves or acorns is okay for play and climb limbs in a outside playpen for my Eclectus?

ANSWER: Actually, oak is one of those controversial woods. Acorns and buds contain tannins and the toxins gallic acid and pyrogallal. These substances can cause kidney and liver damage, as well as gastroenteritis. Toxicity varies according to the climate, time of year and location. While toxicity from oak and acorns is well documented in livestock, there is no actual data on birds. In humans, acorns usually only cause G.I. upset. Oak is sometimes seen in perches and toys, apparently without problems, but I would be careful nonetheless. If your Eclectus is a wood chewer, I would stay away from the limbs just in case! Hope this helps!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 07-22-2001.

Traveling with Pet Birds

by Carolyn Swicegood

Eclectus Land of Vos web site

www.landofvos.com

Join the world's largest Eclectus Email list here:

<http://www.landofvos.com/tec.html>

May/June 2000 WATCHBIRD - Reprinted with permission

That time of year is here again. As the days grow longer, we daydream of faraway places and we long for a change of scenery. But wait--what about the birds? How could we possibly enjoy traveling with nagging worries about our feathered friends left behind? Maybe we could ask a trusted friend to come in and care for them, but what if the birds stop eating? What if the caregiver forgets something? What if a bird becomes ill while we are away? Maybe that trip was not such a good idea after all. Perhaps we should just stay at home and save the worry and the expense of a bird sitter!

There is an enjoyable option -- bring the birds along! After all, if we have the urge to fly the coop, just imagine how exciting a trip could be for our wild friends who were meant to travel the skies daily! Take to the air or hit the road with your feathered flock and enjoy your trip as well as your birds. Here are a few travel ideas to consider.

AIRLINE FLYING

If at all possible, take your birds inside the cabin of the plane with you instead of in cargo. The cargo hold is pressurized and safe but it is probably more stressful for the birds. Most airlines allow passengers to carry on their birds in carriers that fit under the seat. Each ticket holder is entitled to carry one bird in the cabin of most airlines for an extra charge of about \$50. A family of three can take a total of three birds for about \$150 extra. Some airlines limit the number of animals per flight allowed in the passenger cabin as well as the cargo compartment. The maximum number allowed is usually five to eight animals, so reserve space for your birds early and confirm 24 hours in advance.

It can be helpful to check in before the recommended arrival time. Always book non-stop flights when possible. This minimizes handling, loud equipment sounds, stress and the possibility of other problems. For air trips over eight hours in length, schedule a flight with one stop. If the bird is traveling in cargo, instruct the carrier to give the birds water and fresh food supplied by you. Secure the food and water dishes near the door to make it easier to service and minimize the chance of escape into the airport. If the bird is traveling in the cabin with you, use the stopover to offer water and clean the floor of the carrier if you can find a safe quiet place to open the carrier.

DOCUMENTS & REGULATIONS

Most airlines require a health certificate issued within 10 days before the flight. It is important to make arrangements with the airline well in advance of the departure date. Birds should be listed for the flight at the same time as human passengers. International travel requires much more advance planning than travel within the country. Double check the regulations required for animals to enter and leave a foreign country. It is most important to determine whether regulations require the quarantining of birds in either country. Some countries require up to six months quarantine of pets entering the country.

CHOOSING A CARRIER

Purchase the carrier recommended by the airline well in advance and familiarize the bird with the carrier by taking short trips, especially if the bird seems nervous about being confined. It will be necessary for the bird to remain confined to the carrier for the duration of the flight if it rides in cargo. If your bird is traveling with you in the cabin of the plane, some flight attendants will allow

you to remove the bird from the carrier, even though regulations forbid it. Besides the standard plastic under-the-seat carrier, there are shoulder bags and other soft bags with steel frames that have been airline approved for carry-on birds. Young birds travel well in carriers without a perch. To absorb droppings, some travelers use a piece of cotton rug with non-slip backing. I prefer nubby dog bedding fabric over a piece material designed to prevent rugs from sliding on the floor. The nubby texture absorbs droppings and keeps them away from the birds' feet.

TAGGING & COVERING THE CARRIER

Carriers should be well marked and tagged with information such as flight number, destination, owner's name and address, home phone number, and the bird's name and schedule for food and water. Some owners take the extra precaution of using a permanent marker to write all the information and instructions somewhere on the carrier.

Taking along a discrete cover for the carrier will prevent prying eyes and pointing fingers both in the airport and during the flight. If you do not cover the carrier, prepare to be swamped with gawking onlookers who somehow are completely fascinated by a flying creature about to hitch a ride on an airliner! If you like to teach, now is your chance. You will have a captive audience of fellow passengers to educate on parrots and their care.

AIRSICK BIRDS--REALLY!

Believe it or not, some birds are prone to in-flight motion sickness. Before the trip, familiarize your bird with fresh ginger root by placing several slices in the carrier every time you go for test rides. Ginger is a peppery tasting treat that prevents motion sickness in most birds. Do not give birds a heavy feeding just before the flight. Place a few moist foods such as half an orange or a few juicy grapes inside the carrier.

BE CONSIDERATE

Consider the comfort of your fellow passengers. If someone sitting next to you is allergic to birds or afraid of them, offer to ask the flight attendant to change seats. Some passengers will welcome the distraction of an exotic passenger nearby. Bring along a thick, dark cover for the carrier in case the floor is drafty or your bird becomes overly exuberant while airborne. Covering the carrier can be comforting to a bird that feels insecure and fearful, especially during takeoff and landing.

AFTER THE FLIGHT

Once you have landed and carried your feathered buddy off the plane or retrieved him from cargo, you are on your way. Many hotels allow birds to stay in a room or suite with you for a small daily or weekly fee. Guide books and hotel directories are a great resource but pet policies change often so it is necessary to verify the current policy. Some hotels offer special rates for pet owners. For a fee of \$4, Super 8 will issue a card entitling the holder to 10% off the price of a room. Check for similar deals which add up to good savings over the duration of a long trip.

Some hotels allow guests with pets to stay only in rooms where smoking is allowed. This can be a problem if you or your pets have allergies. Some pet rooms are unsuitable due to soiled carpets, odors, or worn furnishings. Ask beforehand if the room is the same quality as non-pet rooms. When inquiring about keeping birds in your room, explain to the manager that the bird will be confined to a cage, therefore doing no damage to the room. If they ask about noise, explain that you use a cage cover (if your bird can indeed be quieted with a cover). When you leave, clean up the mess! Don't make it difficult for the next traveler with birds by leaving the room looking like the scene of a food fight!

TRAVEL CAGE OR CARRIER?

Teri and Larry Crosiar warn, "If you use the plastic Vari-Kennel for a bird with a strong beak, take along an extra one for a long trip. Daphne, our Eclectus, chewed her way through two of them, even though she had toys and millet sprays to busy her beak. I think I'm going to find her a good metal travel cage before we take off again. A perch can be installed in the plastic Vari-Kennel a couple of inches from the floor. This can be made with a short piece of dowel rod and two large screws. Drill the screws through the sides of the kennel into each end of the dowel. Install the perch near the floor of the carrier so that if you swerve or stop quickly your bird can simply step off the perch instead of falling."

Most birds enjoy riding perched in a travel cage while watching the world go by. They quickly learn that the vehicles passing by will not harm them, but they never fail to duck when going under an overpass. The instinctual fear of "predators from above" is alive and well!

Whatever your choice for your bird's home away from home during the trip, allow the bird to try it out and become comfortable with it before the trip. By observing your bird in the carrier or cage, you can correct any problems with the setup before you leave. A cage cover is essential both in the car and in the hotel room to block direct sun and drafts, as well as to provide security and restful sleep. Absolutely nothing can ruin a vacation trip faster than a lost member of the flock, so be sure that your birds have an adequate new wing clip to prevent escape. By planning ahead, we have made the annual trek by car or van with all our parrots from the southern tip of Florida to the mountains of North Carolina without a problem.

FOOD, WATER AND SAFETY TIPS

Reserve accommodations well in advance of your trip. Ask for a room or suite with a small refrigerator and microwave oven. If they are unavailable, take along a small crock pot to prepare food in the room. A cooler will preserve fruits and veggies brought from home and replenished as needed. Some coolers are equipped with adapters that plug into the lighter of the car and the electrical outlet of the hotel room. Here are a few helpful hints for advance planning of a car trip:

- * Always seat belt the travel cage securely before driving and secure any luggage that could fall on the cage in the event of a quick stop.
- * For the duration of the car trip, only soft toys should be hung in the cage. All toys and dishes should be secured to the cage bars or floor to avoid injuries to the bird in case of a sudden stop.
- * Pack a portable perch or a screw-on perch for the travel cage top so that the bird can have some freedom once you are settled in your home away from home.
- * Assemble a first aid kit of the most essential items such as a coagulating agent for broken blood feathers or nails. Ideally we would take everything that the birds could possibly need but in the interest of traveling light, choose emergency items carefully.
- * Locate an avian vet in the area and keep the phone number handy.
- * Bring drinking water from home. A change in water can cause upsets for sensitive birds.
- * Sheri Blackshire who travels with a Grey and an Eclectus recommends placing ice cubes in the water dish instead of water which can spill more easily.
- * Juicy foods such as grapes, pears, berries, apples, celery, mango and papaya also contain water without the problem of spillage.

- * Pet canteens with a bowl built on the side are available and save space.
- * A spray bottle of pure water is a MUST for a car trip with birds. It can be used for quick cleanups and could save the lives of overheated birds stranded due to car trouble in hot weather.
- * Pack all the bird food together--dry foods can be kept in the cooler in sealed plastic bags. Baby wipes or paper towels and a bottle of Grapefruit Seed Extract serve multiple purposes. They can be used to sterilize water and to clean bird dishes.
- * To make your own sterile handi-wipes, moisten folded paper towels in a solution of eight ounces water and ten drops of GSE.
- * If you spend your vacation in a hotel room, ask to do your own cleaning. Your GSE, spray bottle of water, and paper towels or baby wipes will do most cleaning chores and you can avoid the problem of toxic fumes from hotel cleaning solutions that could be harmful to birds.
- * Pack food toys such millet spray, almonds and other unshelled nuts, whole fruits and veggies and of course the bird's favorite toys.
- * Carry detailed emergency instructions for bird care in your wallet with your driver's license. An extra copy in the glove compartment could be helpful in the event of an accident.

DURING THE TRIP

- * Never locate your bird's travel carrier in a seat facing an airbag. The impact of an inflating airbag during a bump up can be fatal to birds.
- * Never leave birds unattended in an unlocked car when stopping for fuel or supplies. Unless you are traveling alone, take turns staying with the birds. If you are alone and have only one or two birds, take them with you in a covered picnic basket when you must leave the car briefly.
- * Minimize the time that birds are left alone in the hotel room. Secure your bird safely in the travel cage and secure the cage if possible when you leave. Use the "Do Not Disturb" sign at all times.
- * When you dine in restaurants, order bird food to take home. Unsalted corn on the cob, rice, baked potato or sweet potato, fruits and most veggies are good choices.
- * When you leave the hotel, clean up all bird debris and leave a generous tip for the cleaning staff.
- * Stick to the usual feeding and sleeping schedule of your birds whenever possible.
- * Most of all, enjoy your trip and enjoy your feathered companions too. Some birds are stimulated by family car trips to talk much more than usual. It is a great time to teach them new words, phrases and songs. Don't forget the new wing clip and enjoy traveling with your birds! Bon Voyage!

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Vet Check - Well-Bird Check Up

by [Taylor Knight](#)

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I know there are differing opinions on the subject of well-bird check ups. Some people believe in having your apparently healthy parrot checked out once a year by a qualified avian vet, while others claim that taking a health bird into a vet office exposes them to "germies" they might not otherwise be exposed to. I am not going to lecture you on either. That is your choice. I am lucky enough to have a mobile avian vet that visits my house and I do have my parrots checked out once a year. But, you do what you think is right.

If you do take your bird in for a well bird check-up, here are some things that should be included:

- **Visual check:** Looking at the ears, eyes, nose, mouth, etc. and making sure things appear as they should.
- **The touchy feely test** – feeling the bird to see if there are any lumps or other abnormalities the vet can feel.
- **Weight:** Weight should be taken, in grams, every time.
- **Grooming:** Wing and Nail trims, if needed.
- **Gram stain:** The poop test – to make sure there are no bad things in the poopie.
- **Blood Work:** Maybe. Possibly a chlamydia blood test and a complete blood panel. You don't have to have these done every time. Ask your vet their opinion. Sometimes the vet may recommend more specific tests. And, just for the record, the bird does not have to be given anesthesia or "put under" to take a simple blood sample.
- **Ask Questions:** Be sure to discuss any changes in behavior, health or diet related issues.

If your bird is not acting right, is tired a lot, lethargic, isn't eating like normal, has a nasal or eye discharge, or just sits there all "poofed" out, you need to get to an avian vet as fast as you can. I mean today – not tomorrow. Better to be safe than sorry. So, repeat after me, "If my bird looks or acts sick, I will RUN not walk to my avian veterinarian." Birds generally do not look or act sick until they are REALLY sick. They can take a turn for the worst very quickly.

Finding a vet

If you do not already have an avian vet, look in your local phone directory. Give them a call and see how many birds they treat. I know of several that advertise that they treat birds but only see a few per year.

You can also use these site to find an avian vet in your area.

The Association of Avian Veterinarians – Searchable <http://www.aav.org/vet-lookup/>

The Association of Avian Veterinarians – more complete listing

<http://www.aav.org/activemembers.html>

or

The directory at Birds n Ways

American Board of Veterinary Practitioners, Certified in Avian Practice:

<http://www.birdsnways.com/articles/abvpvets.htm>

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Vet Visits

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Parrots are prey animals. They are on the lunch menu for some other animals, like eagles, some species of hawks and falcons, snakes, etc. These predatory animals usually look for weak or sick animals; therefore, being sick means drawing the attention of a predator.

So, our birds hide their illnesses for as long as they can. And when we finally realize they are not quite okay, or even sick, they are extremely ill and a vet visit should be scheduled immediately. In such a situation, it is of the utmost importance to have a vet you know and trust.

Sometimes it is not easy to find an avian vet. There are avian-certified vets, but not very many, though many vets who are not certified for birds are very good. Then there are vets who say they treat birds but have very few "bird patients." I once took the telephone book and called every vet in the area to ask if they treated birds. Many said yes, but when I asked how many birds were seen in the practice on a weekly basis, most said one a month or every other month. For me, that indicates they haven't enough experience to deal with a serious illness.

There are all kind of vets out there. Once I took my cat to a vet who seemed to be afraid of it. Later I found out that he studied to become a vet and is doing this work because of the money he can earn and he is rather afraid of animals.

It is a good idea to take your bird for a yearly check-up or a wing or nail trim to a vet. In this way, you can meet the vet, ask questions to see how knowledgeable he or she is, and how he/she handles the bird. And the vet gets to know your bird too.

I know some vets who don't touch their bird patients, if possible. I also know vets who hold and even cuddle with them while they are checking them out. The technician only gets involved when the vet cannot both hold and do whatever else needs to be done at the same time. I like a vet who loves animals, especially my birds, and shows it when she is working on them.

When you go for a check or trim and you don't like the vet or how he handles your bird, you have time to find another one. When the bird is really sick, there is no time to do so and you have to go with the vet where you are. We all know that our birds pick up our emotions, and in such a situation the last thing our birds need is to feel our discomfort. Or, worst case scenario, you have to leave your sick bird with a vet you don't like or trust.

Don't forget that vets are not gods. There are things they don't know either. You are living on a daily basis with your bird and know it better than any vet ever could.

I had a very good bird vet tell me that feeding carrots to my birds every day would cause vitamin A poisoning. I know better and I also know that the nutritional information taught in veterinary school is very limited, so I brought her additional information on this issue. Keep in mind you must maintain responsibility for your bird and speak up when you think the vet is not right or has overlooked something. In this way, you develop a relationship that is to your bird's advantage.

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Parrot Nutrition

A Carrot for Your Parrot

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common Name: Carrots

Botanical Name: *Daucus carota ssp.sativus*

Family Name: Umbelliferae, alt:Apiaceae

Carrots belong to the same family as parsley, celery, caraway, fennel, dill and chervil.

History:

Carrots have been known for about 3,000 years. They originated in the area of Afghanistan. From Afghanistan, carrots spread over the near east to the Mediterranean area, where they still can be found growing wild. The Greeks and Romans used the carrots mainly for medical purposes. Greek physicians prescribed carrot root and juice to treat indigestion, skin ulcers, cancer and snake bites. Pliny, a Roman naturalist and writer, reported that carrots had aphrodisiac properties. Carrots were then white, purple or yellow in color.

The orange carrots as we know them today, began to be developed in the 1600's by the Dutch. The British developed them further during World War II into the high beta-carotene ones we have now. Carotenoids actually got their name from the carrots, because they were first identified in that vegetable. These pigments are potent antioxidants, protecting the plants from destruction by free radicals.

Today, carrots are a common vegetable found all over the globe. With up to 13 million tons of carrots harvested every year, they are one of the most economical and important of vegetables.

Nutrition:

The USDA rates carrots among the top 25 vegetables. Carrots provide protein, calcium, iron, and the vitamins A, C, and B. They are also a top rated source of the phytochemicals alpha carotene, p-coumaric and chlorogenic acids.

Just one large carrot per day provides about six times the Recommended Dietary Allowance of Vitamin A for humans. Cooking or grating carrots increases the nutritional value because it breaks down the tough cellular walls that encase the beta-carotene. To convert beta-carotene into Vitamin A the body needs a little amount of fat, because Vitamin A is one of the vitamins that is fat-soluble. Vitamin A is not only essential for healthy skin, eyes, bones, mucous membranes and hair (feathers), but can also help prevent infection.

Carrots are the fifth (after collard greens, kale, spinach, butter squash) best source of the carotene complex. One of them is beta-carotene, which is a vitamin A precursor and one of the several hundred plant pigments called Carotenoids. Young or "baby" carrots have more sugar, but less beta-carotene. Older and bigger carrots have more beta-carotene, though they may be a bit tougher.

According to the Nutritional Research Center, the Vitamin C, in combination with the folate contained in carrots, makes them a potent nutritional defense against respiratory illness and common colds. The best carrots are the ones that still have the green top attached. The phosphorus in the green tops is a good source of energy for the nerves.

Healing:

Research has shown that even small amounts of raw carrots can kill some food poisoning organisms such as Listeria bacteria. According to the American Institute for Cancer Research, carrots effectively block the progressive cellular damage of cancers of the larynx, esophagus, prostate, bladder, cervix and liver. In the Netherlands, a five year study was done, concluding that the cancer fighting flavonoids and antioxidants also protect the human heart by reducing the formation of oxidized LDL's, an important factor in hardening of the arteries.

The fiber in carrots is known to lower cholesterol levels in the blood. Carrots can also be used as poultice for ulcers, abscesses, cancerous sores and bad wounds. Regular consumption of raw or simmered carrots can improve the appearance of the skin and help the body to improve the absorption of calcium.

Some veterinarians say that about 70% of all pet parrots have a vitamin A deficiency. Here is a vegetable that can help us overcome this problem.

Depending on the location, carrots can grow almost the whole year but are usually available year-round in stores. They prefer sandy soil to in which to grow, but will grow almost anywhere. The ideal way to store them would be in a box with sand in a dark place (like a cellar) where the temperatures don't fluctuate. But, they can be kept for quite some time in crisper in the refrigerator.

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Basil

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Basil

Botanical Name: *Ocimum Basilicum*

Family: Labiate (mint)

Spring is here in the NorthWest and with it the West Nile virus, so I did some research how to protect myself and my pets from it.

A major issue seems to be to keep away mosquitoes, and basil is an herb that mosquitoes dislike.

Basil originates from India and is still regarded as holy by the Hindus. It is planted around Krishna's temples and a bouquet of basil is laid on the deceased's chest for protection.

Basil found its way to Egypt about 4,000 years ago, and there it was burned together with myrrh to appease the gods. Remnants of basil wreaths have been found in Egyptian tombs.

Around the 12th century, basil made its way to middle Europe and finally, in 1600, to England. For a long time, basil had both a beneficial and an evil reputation.

One side associated it with the basilisk, whose breath and look could kill, and that is where the name supposedly came from. Some believed that just smelling basil would allow a scorpion to nest in the brain. Others believed that it gave courage and strength, and drew poisons from the body.

The argument seemed to be mainly between the Greeks, who did not like it, and the Romans, who loved it. The Roman naturalist Pliny claimed that it relieves flatulence, which is supported by modern pharmacology.

For hundreds of years, basil oil was added to wash water to give it a sweet fragrance, and it is still used in some of today's perfumes.

Sweet basil is reputed to be the sweetest in flavor among basil varieties, and it is the most commonly cultivated for today's culinary market. In the US, most sweet basil is grown in California, but it is also grown commercially in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

There is a reason that sweet basil is one of American's favorite herbs. It can be added to innumerable raw and cooked dishes, like salads, soups, vegetables, chicken and beef, but tomato-based dishes especially benefit from a few leaves of sweet basil.

Basil not only enhances the flavor of a dish, at the same time it supports the digestive tract in stimulating the production of bile and gastric acid juices. Basil calms an upset stomach, is a good remedy for nausea and is said to prevent peptic ulcers and other stress-related conditions like hypertension.

Basil is a cooling herb, which means it can be used to prevent or reduce fever. The oil can be rubbed at the temples for headaches.

Basil is also known for its anti-microbial, anti-bacterial and fungicidal properties. Its leaves can be applied to itchy skin, insect bites and skin problems. Medicinally, it is mostly useful for its ability to reduce blood sugar levels. Several sources even mention basil for food poisoning and a decongested liver.

Basil is best seeded indoors. Because it is susceptible to cold weather, it should not be transplanted outdoors before night-time temperatures stay above 50 degrees. Basil loves warmth and a rich moist soil to grow well. So a place in the sun, a soil with lots of compost or well-aged manure for good nutrients and regular watering will make it grow in plentitude. It is a good companion plant for tomatoes and peppers. It helps tomatoes ward off several insects and disease, and it needs about the same conditions as peppers. Tomatoes are also plants that repel mosquitoes.

The best time to harvest basil is in the morning, when the dew is gone from the leaves but the heat of the day has not yet reached the plant. Regular harvesting increases its growth.

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Bee Pollen - A Complete Food

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant
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Recently, I spoke with Dr. Harvey Cohen about bee pollen. He has been adding it to his high quality bird, dog, cat, and horse food he produces for the last 22 years. I have compiled this short summary gathered from information written by Dr. John Christopher, Dr. Bernhard Jensen, Dr. Maurice Hansen, Dr. Naum J. Loirich, Dr. Alicia McWatters and many more.

Bee pollen is a complete food. Its benefits to humans has been known since ancient times. Studies have shown that it meets all nutritional needs of humans and most animals. More and more bird owners and breeders recognize its value. Bee pollen is the male reproductive part of every plant. It contains the DNA and RNA of the plant. According to some researchers eating food rich in genetic material, like DNA and RNA, speeds up the process of healing.

Bee pollen is a whole food supplement that contains (found by French, British and American researchers) at least 130 substances of nutritional significance. The high quality protein exceeds the amount in beef or chicken. Bee pollen is composed of about 50% carbohydrates, rich in fatty acids, almost all known minerals, amino acids, enzymes, trace elements, vitamins like B complex, A,C,D,E, beta carotene, an antibiotic potent against E.coli.

Bee Pollen Contains:

Vitamins: Vitamin A, B1 Thiamin, B2 Riboflavin, B3 Niacin, B6 Group, Vitamin B complex, Pantothenic Acid, Biotin, B12, Folic Acid, Choline, Inositol, Vitamin C, Vitamin D, Vitamin E, Vitamin K, and Rutin.

Minerals: Calcium, Phosphorus, Potassium, Sulphur, Sodium, Chlorine, Iron, Manganese, Copper, Iodine, Zinc, Silicon, Molybdenum, Boron, Titanium, Magnesium.

Enzymes: Amylase, Diastase, Saccharase, Pectase, Phosphatase, Catalase, Disphorase, Cozymase, Cytochrome, Lactic, Dehydrogenase, Succinohydrogenase, 24 Oxido-Reductases, 21 Transferases, 33 Hydrolases, 11 Lyases, 5 Isomerases, Pepsin, Trypsin.

Amino Acids: Isoleucine, Leucine, Lysine, Methionine, Thereonine, Alanine, Valine, Histidine, Arginine, Cystine, Aspartic Acid, Phenylalanine, Proline, Glutamic Acid, Glycine, Serine, Tryptophan, Tyrosine.

Others: Nucleic Acids, Flavinoids, Phenolic Acids, Terpenes, Nucleosides, Fructose, Fructose, Gibberellins, Resins, Lecityin, Xanthophyllis, Guanine, and Xanthine

The main components are: Protein 21.2 %; Carbohydrates 48.5%; Fatty Acids 9.9%; Ash 2.7%; Fiber 3.5 %; Water 14.2%

Feeding bee pollen prevents nutritional imbalance, deficiencies, accumulation of toxins in the body and helps strengthen the immune system and prevent disease. The important thing with bee pollen, like with every other herb, supplement, and food, etc., is to make sure to buy a fresh high quality product. Bee pollen is considered a complete food with its nutritional balance in protein, carbohydrates, fats and all the other nutrients it contains. It is the richest food in nature.

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Calcium - The Basics

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor

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Calcium, one of the "macro" minerals - in other words, something the body needs in major amounts. African Greys and Eclectus are prone to calcium deficiencies, females laying eggs need more calcium and an insufficient supply can lead to egg binding.

Proper feather growth depends on calcium as well. So it's much more than just the "strong bones" nutrient! It works in conjunction with phosphorus, magnesium and Vitamin D. Besides egg productivity and bone development, calcium also helps maintain the acid/base balance and regulate the balance of body fluids as well as maintaining cell membranes and muscle function. Minerals definitely work in conjunction with each other, as well as other substances in the diet.

Seed only diets are notoriously lacking in calcium, and the Vitamin D needed to absorb it. I've seen birds who were only fed seed for years gorge themselves on cuttle bone when it's first offered - their bodies are trying hard to tell them something! It's one thing to actually consume adequate calcium, and then another to absorb what's eaten. Plant foods are notoriously low in calcium, animal products offer much more. In addition, some plants contain oxalic acid which binds calcium, making it much less available.

Calcium carbonate is supplied by things like cuttle bone (from the cuttle fish), egg shells, oyster shell - other good sources of calcium include tofu, cheese, and yogurt - cottage cheese is not a good source, however. In the plant family, almonds are an excellent source, as is spinach, broccoli, charo, and kale. These veggies do contain oxalic acid, but far more calcium is supplied than what is made unavailable by the oxalic acids. Rhubarb leaves, however, contain huge amounts of oxalic acid and should not be fed to birds. If additional calcium is needed, I like "Os-Cal," a liquid available at the health food store.

The balance between calcium and the other minerals and Vitamin D3 is a delicate one, and it can be difficult to try to achieve on one's own. This is one area where I like formulated (pelleted) diets, as the minerals are generally supplied in the proper ratios. Additional feeding of the above mentioned calcium sources should ensure an adequate calcium intake for your bird. Crush eggshells into Birdie Bread and feed lots of leafy greens (also good Vitamin A sources) in addition to a pellet, seed, whole grain, and legume base. Again, variety is the spice of life and the best way to cover all the nutritional bases!

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Cayenne

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Cayenne - Capsicum

Botanical name: Capsicum frutescens

Family: Solanaceae or Nightshade

The first references to cayenne have been found on plaques in Egyptian tombs.

It has been cultivated for culinary and medical uses for centuries in the American tropics. The physician Diego Alvarez Chanca described cayenne first in 1494. He discovered cayenne when he accompanied Christopher Columbus on his second journey to the West Indies.

Cayenne is native to tropical America, but is now cultivated in tropical locations all over the world. In Mexico, Italy, China and Southeast Asia it is a common part of the cuisine.

Although hot to the taste, cayenne actually lowers body temperature by stimulating the cooling center of the hypothalamus. So, it helps the body deal with high temperatures in the summer or the humid tropics.

Cayenne supports the increase of the levels of liver enzymes, which are responsible for fat metabolism, and can help to reduce the deposits of fat caused by a high fat diet.

Cayenne is rich in the vitamins A, C, iron, potassium and calcium. It also contains vitamin G, some B complex, magnesium, phosphorus and sulfur.

Prized for thousand of years for its healing powers, recent clinical studies have been conducted on many of these old-time health applications and have validated cayenne's medical value.

Health practitioners consider cayenne one of the most important herbs and a wonderful healer. Because of its stabilizing effect for bleeding, shock and heart attack it is the number one herb for first aid.

The number of cases that cayenne can be used for is quite extensive. It has effective properties as an antioxidant, is effective on the cardiovascular system, is useful for high and low blood pressure, and is beneficial to the gastrointestinal function.

Cayenne is known to stop a heart attack, lower blood sugar in diabetics, normalize blood pressure, stop bleeding in seconds, improve circulation, and even halt the common cold.

Scientific evidence also indicates that cayenne pepper can be effective in treating allergies, indigestion, abscesses, tonsillitis, kidney problems, sore muscles, nose bleeds, psoriasis, shingles, night blindness, some kinds of cancer and in stimulating the body to rebuild stomach tissue.

Cayenne is a great stimulant and increases the efficiency of other herbs. Medical science does not know of another stimulant which is so natural, certain and has less side effects when regularly used.

Capsaicin is an ingredient in cayenne that was isolated by chemists more than hundred years ago. It is comprised of about 12% cayenne which is a compound that causes the sensory neurons to release P, a substance which works as a pain messenger to the nervous system to relief pain. The

name capsaicin is found in many drugstore ointments for arthritis and muscle pain. It can also activate the antioxidant enzyme systems and stabilize lung membrane lipids.

All the above applies for the dried raw fruit or powder. In the cooked or un-dried form, cayenne can be a serious irritation to the digestive tract and can contribute to an ulcerous condition.

Case studies:

Guy is a Red Fronted Amazon that was badly beaten by one of his cage mates. He had lots of bite wounds on his wings and neck, but the worst was his on head, which had a big open wound. And, he had gone blind. Typically, this happened late in the evening when no vet was available until the morning.

We brought him into the house, put him into a warm environment and I started to give him water with cayenne powder. Several vets had told me that most animals in such cases die of shock and not of the actual injury. My main concern was to stabilize him. That is why I kept giving him the "cayenne water". During the night I occasionally checked on him and he seemed to be stabilized. In the morning he had his eyesight back. According to the vet, the loss of the eyesight was a side effect of the shock.

The vet had to do a major surgery and Guy got several stitches on his head to close the wound. He is fully recuperated, but very shy with other birds.

A former roommate of mine had a pair of canaries. One day we found the female laying on her back with seizures. We gave her water with cayenne powder and she was back to normal within half an hour. After that, she was given the cayenne powder sprinkled over her food daily. She was doing fine, until my friend forgot and stopped giving her the cayenne. She does not remember how long after she stopped that she came home and found the canary had died.

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Diet Conversion Techniques

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor

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I love meeting birds who are stubborn eaters (and a huge number are), because I'm even MORE stubborn. Especially when it comes to nutritional health. Over the past 25 years, working with wild caught birds, rescue birds, and hand fed babies, I've gotten the chance to develop some powerful techniques and tricks to get birds to eat better. When someone in one of my nutrition classes says "I've tried everything, but she'll only eat seed, so I've given up!!" My standard response is "If I were your pediatrician, and your child would only eat french fries and Big Macs, would you tell me that was all the child wants so "Oh, well?" Probably not! Well, you have an equal responsibility to your feathered children to provide nutritious food and not give in to their finicky tastes. Birds do NOT know what's best for them, so they need your wisdom and guidance. If you're too busy to find the time to improve your bird's diet, then you probably shouldn't have a bird - it's that simple! I've said before that diet is the #1 factor in your bird's longevity, and you have direct control of what goes in his food dish, so NO EXCUSES!!

First, you must limit your bird's food choices. We're not talking about trying to starve a bird into eating something, but rather offering different things at different times. If you give your 3 year old child a plate containing broccoli, brown rice, chicken, potato chips, and chocolate cake - guess what order he'll eat them in? That's right, he'll start with the cake and chips and probably never get to the broccoli or rice. Birds are the same, so as long as seeds are in his bowl, he'll never get to the veggies, cooked grains, legumes, or pellets. So I do what I call "staging" that food. Most birds are hungriest in the morning, so that's usually when I recommend introducing the new foods. If you schedule absolutely doesn't allow for that, you can reverse the order. First thing in the A.M., I remove the seed/pellet bowl and only offer cooked foods and fresh veggies and fruit. They like it warm, so if you can't cook fresh daily, cook 3-4 days worth, then microwave the day's portion for a few seconds before serving. Watch for "hot spots" though and stir well.

Leave it in no more than 3-4 hours, as the food will "sour" and become a breeding ground for bacteria. After removing the morning meal, serve pellets for the day. About mid-afternoon (or when you get home from work) add the seed portion to the pellets. Mix it or put the seed under the pellets so he has to encounter the pellets to get to the seed. A lot of getting a bird to eat a new food has to do with familiarity, so the more the bird sees something, the more receptive he becomes.

Do not serve such a huge seed portion that the bird can gorge on seed alone, or he'll wait all day, knowing he can pig-out on seed later. Also, toss seeds/pellets leftover daily. (Yes, you'll waste a lot initially). If he didn't eat his pellets today, why would he want them tomorrow when they're stale?

Try different ways of serving veggies - raw or cooked; (sweet potatoes and winter squash should always be cooked, though, to make the carotene more available to the body), chopped, diced, bars, etc. Whatever way you're trying, give it a week or two before trying something else. I know it feels like a waste of time doing all this cooking and chopping, only to throw 95% away each day, but if you continue long enough and don't give up, eventually he will try it. Budgies, Cockatiels, and Amazons are notoriously stubborn and can often take a month or two to start even nibbling new food.

If you know a favorite food your bird likes, (for example, peas) then use that liberally to entice him to try the new foods. In other words, stir peas into the grated carrots so he has to encounter them to get to his peas. Flavorings can help. Virtually every bird likes the taste of cinnamon or

peanut butter. Small guys like anise. So cook with lots of cinnamon or anise, and stir peanut butter into the mix after cooking.

Find a food mentor. Birds are flock animals, so they look to the flock, especially the flock leader, to learn that to eat. If you have a bird that's receptive to new foods, put him in the middle of the bird room so everyone else can see him eat. My own birds are great mentors for some of my boarders who don't eat as well. No mentor bird? Then you show him! Eat the food (or pretend to) in front of him. Make yummy sounds and really gush about how great it is. Offer him some by hand or give him a dish at the dinner table or on a playstand close to it. Here's a good technique for couples – sit at opposite ends of the dining table and put the bird on a T-stand in between you. You and your spouse offer each other food and feed each other in front of the bird. Again, make yummy sounds. Initially, ignore the bird and just focus on each other (also helpful for troubled marriages!) Pretty soon, the bird will be begging to be included so go for it!

If you truly have tried EVERYTHING for a long time and still can't get anywhere, be sneaky! Puree veggies and put them in something he will eat, such as mixing pureed veggies with a dollop of peanut butter and serving on whole grain bread. Or mix pureed veggies, carrot juice, and ground up pellets into a recipe for Birdie Bread and give him some daily. Virtually all birds love Birdie Bread and there's lots of good recipes out there.

The ultimate goal that I strive for is 50% cooked whole grains/legumes and veggies/fruit, 30% natural pellets, and 20% quality seed mix and nuts. It can seem like an impossible task, but keep trying—don't give up 5 minutes before the miracle!

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Echinacea

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common Name: Purple Coneflower

Botanical Name: Echinacea purpurea, angustifolia and pallida

Family: Asteraceae or Aster

History

Echinacea has a long tradition of use by the Native Americans. They knew of the power of this plant in treating or preventing many different ailments and used it medically more than any other plant.

A group of doctors, called the Eclectics, who practiced mainly botanical medicine and were prominent from the 1830s to the 1930s were a major force in bringing Echinacea to the forefront of herbal medicine.

American medicine recognized its value and has used it since the beginning of the 20th century. The Europeans discovered it in the 1930s and have used it ever since extensively for strengthening the immune system against the flu, colds and different infections.

Nutrition

The active ingredients in Echinacea are alkylamides, chicoric acid and polysaccharides, which all act as immunomodulators. It contains vitamin A, E, and C, plus iron, iodine, copper, sulphur and potassium. The roots of the Echinacea Angustifolia and the flowers of the Echinacea Purpurea are supposed to have the most potent healing power. A combination of these two would be ideal.

Healing

Today, thousands of Europeans and Americans use echinacea preparations against colds and flu, minor infections, and a host of other major and minor ailments.

Echinacea is the best known and researched herb for stimulating the immune system. That Echinacea is well worth its century old reputation was shown in over 500 scientific studies. There are several constituents in Echinacea that cause an increase in the production and activity of white blood cells, lymphocytes, and macrophages. Due to its antibacterial and antiviral action, is it one of the best remedies for helping the body rid itself of microbial infections.

Echinacea also stimulates the lymphatic vascular system and has been shown to improve the body's resistance to infections such as colds and influenza, laryngitis, tonsillitis, and catarrhal conditions of the nose and sinus.

Echinacea facilitates the healing of infected wounds, boils, abscesses, carbuncles and other such infections. There has been also success with in the treatment of glandular fever and post-viral fatigue syndrome. Evidently whole plant preparations are helpful in allergies.

In short, Echinacea has some antibiotic properties. But its main action is in stimulating and enhancing the activities of the immune system, increasing the body's ability to resist infections, and giving it the strength to overcome the invasion of virus and bacteria. While doing that, it eliminates toxins and cellular debris and helps to purify the blood.

There are many different qualities of Echinacea on the market and we often don't know if we have a product that really has the properties to help us when we need it. Here is a little test: if you put some of your Echinacea on your tongue, it should cause a tingling, numbing sensation in your

mouth and increase the saliva. If that is not the case, the product you have was not prepared with enough herbs, with old ingredients, or it has been produced in another way that it lost its healing properties.

Case Study

The first time I used the Echinacea/garlic combination on a bird was about seven years ago with Janis, then a one year old green wing macaw. I thought that she did not look quite right. Her eyes were dull and she was not her bold little self. After hours and hours at the vet, she (the vet) finally said that the lab tests show, that the numbers of the kidneys and liver are way out of line. She assumed that it was caused by too many pellets in Janis' diet. So she suggested I give Janis an antibiotic. I was to give this antibiotic for two weeks and then come back for more blood tests to see if it helped. If it did not help, we had to try another antibiotic. I said "no, thanks" took my little girl home, and started her on a diet with lots of fresh food, garlic and Echinacea. After three day's Janis had her old cocky attitude and her shiny eyes back. I used the garlic-echinacea combination instead antibiotics often since then and have always had success with it.

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Essential Fatty Acids

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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You may be hearing more talk these days about "Essential Fatty Acids" (E.F.A.s) and our birds need for them in the diet. (That word "essential" is the giveaway, right?) So, what are they and how to we supply them?

We all hear a lot about "good" fat and "bad" fat - basically, the bad stuff comes from animal sources, is saturated, and hard on arteries and cholesterol levels, while the good stuff comes from plant sources, is unsaturated, actually GOOD for cardiovascular health and lowers cholesterol. Well, Essential Fatty Acids are the best of the good!

So, let's get technical for a minute - fats (chemically known as lipids) are the most concentrated source of energy found in the diet. I won't go into the classification of fats here, but only cover the Essential Fatty Acids that we are concerned with our parrots at the moment. Basically, fatty acids differ in saturation and chain length. "Essential" fatty acids are those not synthesized by the body, so must be supplied, therefore, by the diet. There are three - Linoleic, Linolenic, and Arachidonic (are you board yet?). Because these must be fed, they are "Essential" - for growth, for the health of nerves, arteries, blood, for visual function, and suppleness of the skin and healthy feathers. The "Queen" of these are the Omega 3 Fatty Acids (linolenic) abundant in flax seed oil and fish. Omega 6 acids (linoleic) are important for transportation and processing cholesterol and are found in corn, safflower, and soybeans. Both Omega 3 and 6 should be supplied, of which the best combined source is canola oil. Mixtures of flax seed oil with the other oils helps keep a balance of the Omegas for good health. Arachidonic acid is synthesized by linoleic acid when fed in the diet.

African Greys have been found to have a higher need for E.F.A.s than other species and I always recommend supplementing their diet with flax seed oil 3 or 4 times a week. Molting and feather plucking also increase the need, as does breeding and raising babies. Macaws also have a higher need for fat and I recommend mixed nuts 3 to 4 a day which are high in unsaturated fats and actually lower the saturated fat in the body. Vitamin E is needed for E.F.A.s to be absorbed and nuts provide the proper balance. Additional sources of E.F.A.s are many seeds and legumes (including peanuts).

It is worth noting that oils can become rancid very quickly when exposed to air, heat and light. All oils should be refrigerated after opening. Freezing or refrigerating before opening will also help extend the shelf life.

Always check nuts and seeds for freshness, and examine peanuts for aflatoxins (toss any that look moldy or otherwise suspicious).

Watch the fat intake for Amazons, Budgies, Cockatiels or any overweight birds, but be sure to include some E.F.A.s regularly for ALL birds - just use moderation if need be. Better feathering, immunity, and overall health and vitality will be the payoff for including these vital nutrients in the daily diet.

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Food For Thought - What's NOT In My Bird's Food

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant

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With so many different bird foods on the market - how do you choose which is best for your bird? We hear and read a lot about what should be in our birds food. But, we rarely hear what we don't want in it. Some of these potentially harmful things I find in almost every food on the market.

Ethoxyquin, BHA, BHT - Would you give your bird rubber stabilizer or a pesticide to eat? Of course not! But that is exactly what ethoxyquin is. Originally developed by Monsanto Industrial Chemical Company in the 1950s as a stabilizer for things like alfalfa and grasses that were to be fed to livestock. Pet food was not even considered when the permit was issued. Ethoxyquin is also used to anti-degradation agent for rubber. The FDA has ONLY approved it for use as a food additive for use in the production of paprika, chili powder and ground chili. It is not approved as preservative for human food and proven to cause liver damage and breeding problems in dogs. Is it in your bird's food? If you want to know more about ethoxyquin, go to www.parrothouse.com/ethox.html and read the "Investigative Report on Ethoxyquin" by Alicia McWatters. BHT and BHA fall in the same category.

Menadione - Another additive that stands my hair on end is Menadione, a so called source of vitamin K. The producer has a "safety sheet" on his German site. There it says that the person who handles the menadione needs to wear protective outfit, gloves, mask and glasses. If any contact with skin or the eyes occurs or it is inhaled an immediate consultation of a physician is necessary. If ingested, it could cause skin irritations (feather plucking?). The Merck Manual (www.merck.com/pubs/mmanual/section1/chapter3/3i.htm) says it is toxic, should not be given to babies and should NOT used to treat vitamin K deficiency. I could not find any dog or cat food and only a few brands of bird foods without it. The new thing is to "fortify" the seeds with vitamins and there we have the menadione again.

Artificial Vitamins - Then there are the vitamins added to pellets, seeds and other bird foods. Most of them are not vitamins, but an artificially produced part of the natural vitamin. For example: ascorbic acid is not the whole Vitamin C. It is only a part of it. There is scientific research that show the artificial vitamin parts do not have the same effect than the actual vitamin. But our packages can still show Vitamin C and mean ascorbic acid.

Sucrose - And why is there sucrose, which is refined sugar, in most pellets and a lot of other parrot food? I thought it was well known by now that sugar compromises the immune system, promotes candida, can even cause infections, diabetes and more.

Artificial Colors and Flavors - I don't even look at a products that looks like they could have artificial colors in it. If I see artificial colors or flavors on the label, the product is back in the shelf so fast it would make your head spin.

Choosing food is easy - instead of looking at what I want in my bird food, I first look at what I don't want and the selection shrinks to a small number of products. Is it safe, not safe? There is just no need to worry about such things when there are bird foods available without any of these additives. Remember, it is up to you to choose what you think is best for your bird and you must do your own research, and form your own opinions. There is a disturbing tendency to jump on the newest band wagon about almost anything, especially in the information age. Ask yourself this, "What would my bird choose?"

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The Four Food Groups

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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Remember grade school classes on food pyramids and the "4 Food Groups" for good (human) health? Well, guess what? It's basically the same for our parrots! As omnivores [just like humans], they eat from a broad range of foods, which we can lump into the same four food groups we see for people:

1. Veggies and Fruit - virtually all, except avocado which is toxic. Good source of many vitamins and minerals. Should be heavy on produce containing Beta Carotene, which the body converts into Vitamin A. Includes dark orange flesh and deep green leafy veggies, such as carrots, yams, pumpkin, winter squash, broccoli, kale, greens, apricots, mangoes, papaya, red peppers, etc. For most birds, feed more veggies than fruit (3 - 4 veggies to 1 - 2 fruits), as fruit is higher in sugar and water and less nutrient dense. Lories in particular, and Eclectus to a lesser degree need more fruit, however. This group should provide a minimum of 30% of daily diet. Raw or cooked - on the side or combined with cooked foods, this is a big and extremely important part of every parrot's daily intake (finches and canaries benefit as well!)

2. Grains and Seeds - whether served as "seeds", formulated into pellets or cooked meals, this is a group consisting of all the traditional stuff, like millet, sunflower, safflower, hemp, etc., plus whole grains like wheat, barley, oats, corn, buckwheat, rye, quinoa, etc. They tend to be high in fat, low in calcium, vitamins (especially Vitamin A), and protein. However, they do provide other important minerals, and essential fatty acids. Whole grains are also a good source of Vitamin B Complex and Vitamin E. Ground dwelling parrots, like budgies and cockatiels, can eat more seed than other species, like Eclectus or Amazons. Go heavier on cooked whole grains and sprouted seeds (more like a veggie!) than seed, per se. Forms approximately 20 - 25% of daily diet.

3. Meat/Nuts/Legumes - also called the "protein" group. Includes animal protein, like chicken, fish, lean meat, and eggs - as well as live food, like mealworms. Also includes the alternate sources, like soybeans, tofu, nuts [almonds, brazil nuts, pecans, walnuts, etc.], and legumes, such as peas, lentils, beans, and peanuts. Pellets, though they contain many grains, are also a significant protein source. This group tends to be high in fat (especially nuts) and any meats should be lean and well cooked. Only feed animal sources 1 - 2 times per week. Legumes can be included in cooked mixes, and are often a good source of iron. Macaws need more nuts, and should receive a few daily. Nuts are a good source of Vitamin E and EFA's. Protein foods should not exceed 20 - 30% of diet (Eclectus are on the high end). Fats make up 5 - 10% of total (African Greys are on the high end).

4. Dairy - a very small part, but fine as long as it's cultured, like yogurt, cottage cheese, and cheese. Birds lack the digestive enzymes to digest milk, per se, but can tolerate and enjoy the other products, in moderation. This group is also a significant source of protein, as well as calcium. Feed in moderation and only occasionally, especially cheese which can "lump up" in the crop, undigested, and cause problems if too much is fed. All products should be low salt, low fat. Organic nonfat yogurt can be mixed in with cooked mixes for added flavor and nutrition. Feed dairy only 1 - 2 times per week, only making up 5 - 10% of total. Supply additional calcium with cuttlebone, mineral blocks, and crushed egg shells.

As you can see, there is a lot of overlap in the groups, since most foods provide a variety of nutrients. The diet I advocate daily as a general rule of thumb is 50% fresh veggies, fruit, cooked whole grains, legumes, 30% natural pellets, and 20% seeds and nuts. What's important is variety and a balance of all foods, with moderation overall. The base is adjusted according to things like

age, species, molting, feather plucking, breeding, or raising young. I prefer "whole foods" and natural supplements to an overly processed, chemical approach [too many pellets, artificial vitamin formulations]. Watch fat if your bird is sedentary or prone to obesity. Supplements include things like alfalfa leaf, kelp, garlic, ginger, psyllium, fennel, dehydrated carrots, flax seed oil or meal, etc., based on individual needs.

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Garlic

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Garlic

Botanical name: *Allium sativum*

Family: Liliaceae or Lily

History

The first mention of garlic we find in scriptures from the Sumerians of Abraham's time. They were followed by the Egyptians, Hebrews, Greeks and Romans. During the building of the pyramids the Egyptians spent what would be today about 30 million US dollars on garlic to feed it to the workers who build the pyramids to keep them strong and healthy and control the spread of epidemics. It was also the treatment of choice for the nobles of Egypt.

We find it mentioned by such great Greek physicians like Dioscorides and Hippocrates. The Greek poet Homer (830 B.C) mentions garlic just in his 'Iliad' for the treatment of 147 different wounds. Pliny the Roman physician and naturalist mentions 62 diseases, which can be treated with garlic. In the Roman Empire it was given to the soldiers for strength, to the gladiators for endurance, nobilities used it in their wine as antidote against poisoning, physicians used it during surgeries as a disinfectant, it was also given to the animals to prevent gas if they ate too much grain.

The Vikings always took it with them on their lengthy voyages. From the Danish, Irish and Russians, garlic was used for colds and coughs for centuries.

Garlic is mentioned in several Old English vocabularies of plants from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries. During World War II garlic was used by the British and Russian to control infections and speed the healing of wounds.

Nutrition

Garlic is a tremendously nutritious health food and a miraculous healing plant. Incorporated in the daily diet it is one of the most beneficial and natural seasonings and flavor enhancers, there are on this planet. It enriches the diet and improves health, prevent disease and prolongs life. It fulfills, more than any other food, the requirement of Hippocrates' that "Our food should be our medicine and our medicine should be our food." Extensive studies around the world on people over the age of 100 that are in excellent health, conclude that they use garlic extensively in their daily diets.

Garlic research is taking place in almost every developed country. Areas of interest include cancer, diabetes, heart disease and stroke, antibacterial properties, anti-fungal use and much more. These studies have shown that garlic is almost miraculous at preventing a variety of disease. The studies were made with raw garlic, juice and an extract made from aged garlic.

People with low blood pressure should limit the intake of garlic to not more than one clove a day, because of its blood pressure lowering effects.

Healing

So far research and clinical observation have identified the following active factors in garlic:

Allicin is believed to be responsible for garlic's antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effect. It is also the factor that causes the typical garlic smell.

Alliin is a sulfur containing amino acid, which according to Russian studies gives garlic its antibiotic effect.

Diallyldisulphide and allylpropyldisulphide are the ingredients that give the cholesterol and lipid lowering effect to garlic.

Anti-hemolytic factor found in Kyolic, an aged garlic juice from Japan, is beneficial in anemia treatments (not found in fresh raw garlic).

Allithiamine is formed by the action of Vitamin B1 on alliin. Garlic is a source of biologically active compounds of Vitamin B1.

Selenium normalizes blood pressure, protects against infection and prevents platelet adhesion and clot formation, which gives garlic the anti-atherosclerotic properties.

There are also anti-arthritis, sugar regulating, antioxidant and anti-coagulant factors found in garlic.

Garlic has altogether 35 sulfur containing compounds, plus ultra violet radiation (Gurwitch rays), which have a rejuvenating effect on all body functions.

Japanese studies have shown that Kyolic, an extract from aged garlic, is effective in protecting the body from the toxic effects of metal poisoning.

The fungus *Aspergillus flavus* found in such foods as rice, grains, corn, beans and sweet potatoes can cause aflatoxins. This fungus is known to cause cell mutations that eventually lead to cancer. The components ajoene and diallyl sulfide found in raw garlic and Kyolic neutralize the fungus and prevent it from binding to the cell DNA matter.

Some scientific literature testifies that the high amount of sulfur protein found in garlic protects the liver from the damage of poisoning of industrial chemicals.

Garlic is the only antibiotic that can actually kill infecting bacteria and at the same time protect the body from the poisons that are causing the infection. Even the forefather of antibiotic medicine, Louis Pasteur, acknowledged garlic to be as effective as penicillin and late studies showed similar activity to a more modern antibiotic, chloramphenicol.

Another once common, and apparently returning disease, tuberculosis was treated with garlic very successfully as the invading organism *Mycobacterium tuberculosis* is sensitive to several of the sulfur components found in garlic. The vapor from freshly cut garlic can kill bacteria at a distance of 20 cms!

Cultivation

Garlic likes moist, sandy soil, but can also be grown in sandy, loam or clay. It likes sunny places and should be kept free of weeds. When planted in February or March, the bulbs should be ready for harvest in August. In cold and wet areas it will take about a month longer.

Feeding suggestions for parrots:

Some birds like to chew on the whole clove. For smaller birds it has to be cut in little pieces. It can be puréed and put into cooked food. The powder from capsules can be spread over cooked and fresh food or soaked and spouted seeds. There is also a liquid Kyolic which can be used in water or directly in the birds beak.

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Healthy Diet for Your Parrot

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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Is your bird a seed only eater? Did you know in that wild seeds form only a small portion of the natural diet? While seeds are an important part of a pet parrot's daily diet they should not comprise all of it.

Parrots are opportunistic omnivores, which in plain English means they eat whatever they encounter in their day ("opportunistic") and, like us, eat from all the food groups – veggies & fruits, grain, and animal protein ("omnivores").

The seed based diets that have traditionally been fed to pet birds are not representative of that parrots eat in the wild. Little is actually known about **exactly** what comprises their daily diet, but their natural diet does include a variety of things like seeds, nuts, fruits, shoots, buds, corms, and invertebrates (insects, worms, and larvae). Wild parrots have even been observed eating dead fish that wash up from lakes and streams. Because some of the plant material they eat also contains toxins, parrots in South America flock to natural mineral beds regularly to feed on the clay and minerals available in order to detoxify their systems.

We **do** know that a seed only diet generally cuts your pet's potential lifespan in half, as well as leading to deficiencies in vitamins, especially vitamin A, minerals, especially calcium and protein. They also tend to be too high in fat.

While formulated diets (aka pellets) are now becoming widely used, they also do not comprise a complete diet and can lead to health problems if used exclusively, especially with the kidneys and liver. Formulated diets were originally based on research done in the poultry industry, where the focus is on rapid growth and maximum size, not longevity. While they've come a long way, and like seeds, form an important part of a complete diet, they can not do it alone. What's important for your bird's health and happiness is variety, balance, and moderation. Veggies, whole grains, and some fruit should form the basis of a well fed bird's daily diet.

A parrot's "job" in the wild is to spend the day searching for food, then working to access it. Nuts are a prime example, as getting to the nut meat involves removing not only the hard shell, but the fibrous outer husk as well. It's important to give your pet a "job" and make her have to work a little for her goodies as well. Having to peel veggies and open nuts helps offset boredom. (Just be sure the veggies are organic and not contaminated with pesticides.)

Patience, creativity and common sense will work wonders in improving your parrot's diet and overall health. The rewards are well worth the effort, resulting in a well feathered, bright-eyed, playful companion who can share your life for as long as possible.

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Healthy Veggies

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Veggies, veggies, veggies - feed your bird lots of veggies!!! You probably keep hearing that everywhere these days! Now that people are becoming more enlightened about diet and nutritional needs, there is a growing awareness of the need to provide adequate veggies daily for our companion birds. Unfortunately, too often people aren't told what veggies to feed, or how to feed them. Although all are good, some are much more nutrient dense than others.

The diet I advocate is 50% whole grains, legumes, veggies and fruit - and at least half of that should be the veggies. Stay away from lettuce - it's mostly water and low in vitamins and minerals. The one exception is Romaine - occasionally feeding dark green Romaine leaves is fine. When evaluating veggies, look for deep color - the darker the green or deeper the orange of the flesh, the more Beta Carotene available. And, of course, Beta Carotene is what the body converts into Vitamin A, which is one of the main nutrients lacking in the average bird's diet. Not only parrots can benefit from daily veggies, but softbills as well. Finches and canaries fed daily greens and other veggies show a remarkable increase in overall health and longevity. The only veggie proven toxic to birds is avocado which should never be fed. Although there's some controversy about onions, due to the N-propyl disulfide they contain, small amounts of raw or cooked onions are fine for birds.

Veggies can be fed raw or lightly steamed, depending basically on your bird's preference. Water soluble vitamins, such as B and C, are reduced by cooking, however. On the other hand, pumpkin, winter squash and sweet potatoes are better served baked, as cooking makes more Vitamin A available. Carrots also benefit from light cooking. Greens are best served raw, while broccoli can be fed raw or lightly steamed.

Here's a partial list of healthy veggies you can include in your bird's daily diet: carrots, broccoli, snow peas, green beans, kale, Swiss chard, cucumbers, asparagus, corn, pumpkin, acorn squash, zucchini, bell peppers, jalapeno peppers, beets, garlic, potatoes, lima beans, spinach, turnips, rutabaga, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, bean sprouts, alfalfa sprouts, tomatoes, celery, peas, parsley - the list goes on and on.

Generally, veggies provide lots of vitamins, such as Vitamin A and C, and minerals like calcium magnesium, and potassium. They provide good "occupational therapy" and help keep parrots entertained. They are easily digested and help reduce stress in birds. Veggies provide some protein as well. Including daily servings of several different veggies in your bird's diet will go a long way in improving his health and building his immune system. Better feathering and more vibrant floors will be your reward, as well as having a happier, more contented companion.

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How Natural is "Natural?"

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Within the last 10 years or so, more and more people are looking for natural foods. In the beginning it was easy, because this trend was not a money-maker. As the market has grown, one needs to start looking at how natural some of this natural stuff really is.

As soon as food is no longer in its natural state and has been processed in the lightest way, one can be nearly certain they contain additives I'd rather not have in my food or that of my birds. These additives are used to preserve, thicken, color, sweeten, enhance or modify the flavor. Most of them are synthetic, and more and more people are developing sensitivities to them.

Research studies on animals show that sodium benzoate, sulfites and sulfur dioxide, for example, cause allergies, arrhythmia, itching, migraines and hyperactivity. MSG (monosodium glutamate), artificial food colorings and flavorings can cause allergic reactions, brain and retinal (eye) damage.

BHA and BHT both can provoke skin and respiratory problems, lowering the absorption of vitamin K. I don't even want to go into the colorings, which can cause, between a battalion of others, allergic reactions, thyroid tumors and hormonal changes. I could go on here for pages.

So we are reading more the labels of what we want to buy and are seeking 'natural' ingredients. This is where it becomes confusing, because there are also natural and modified natural and synthesized natural or biotechnological-derived ingredients and additives. I think I know what natural means, but what does "modified, synthesized, biotechnological natural additives" mean?

Let's take the added flavors in a lot of foods as an example. Natural flavor more often than not means it is a flavor synthesized in a food science lab. Natural does not mean it is natural, it just means it tastes natural. If you want real vanilla and not synthetic flavor, you have to look for a label that says vanilla extract, instead of natural vanilla flavor.

Ascorbic acid is often declared as vitamin C. Why then is rosehips added to the ascorbic acid? Because it is a synthetically-produced part of vitamin C, so it is not natural and it is not the whole vitamin. Tests have shown that ascorbic acid helps but does not completely heal scurvy, which requires natural vitamin C in the form of oranges, for example.

Soy bean products are considered natural healthy foods, although they are so processed that there is really nothing natural left. In this case, that's good, because soy beans in their natural state contain large quantities of natural toxins or "anti-nutrients". So why do we want to eat something which has to be processed to death before it is safe to be eaten?

A real natural food is sucrose. We don't want sugar in our birds' food, right? But there is sucrose, even organic sucrose, in many birds' foods. Oh yes, it is natural. It's ordinary table sugar, obtained from the "juice" of sugarcane, sugar beet or the sap of the sugar maple.

All of this is sometimes very frustrating. We have a responsibility not to just believe what we read, but to become informed customers. Three years ago, I did not know that vitamin K1 is very good for many things and vitamin K3 is very toxic. Sometimes it is a nuisance, but it is also good to know what we eat and give our beloved birds.

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Milk Thistle

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Milk Thistle

Botanical name: *Silybum marianum*

Family name: Asteraceae

Milk thistle originates from the Mediterranean Sea region, basically northern Africa and southern Europe. Dating back more than 2000 years, it was first recorded in AD 23 as a plant that was excellent for healing liver damage. Ancient Greek texts refer to the medicinal uses of milk thistle as a liver protectant, and the Romans used it to restore liver function. Early Christian tradition dedicated milk thistle to Mary, calling it Marian thistle and it is still called by this name in some languages. In the last century, milk thistle was used to treat varicose veins, menstrual problems, liver, spleen and kidney ailments.

Today milk thistle is native and grows wild in the Mediterranean area, throughout Europe, North America and Australia. For medical purposes, seeds from the dried flowers are used.

One of the most active ingredients found in milk thistle is the silymarin complex, which is a composition of the flavonolignans silibinin, silybin, silychristin and silydianin. The silymarin complex puts up an amazing protective "shield" against a variety of liver-damaging substances and effects. Silymarin has been the subject of more than 300 scientific studies, with the results of most published in Europe. The Germans were the first to discover that some of the flavonolignans of the silymarin complex are beneficial in treating liver disease. Studies have shown that milk thistle has positive effects in treating nearly every known form of liver disease, including cirrhosis, hepatitis, necroses, and liver damage due to drug and alcohol abuse. The effects of environmental toxins, alcohol, drugs and chemotherapy can be countered with milk thistle.

Silymarin is part of the cell membrane that increases resistance against harmful influences by altering the membrane structure and thus blocking the absorption of toxins. It also promotes the growth of new liver cells and helps with the digestion of fats.

Silybin is a proven antidote to poisoning by the Deathcap mushroom (*Amanita phalloides*). Clinical trials have proven silybin to be effective in treating chronic liver diseases by stimulating some of the RNA to activate the regeneration capacity of liver cells. Its main function is to protect, restore, rejuvenate and rebuild the cells of the liver.

Milk thistle not only prevents and stops liver damage, it can even reverse the effect of alcohol, recreational drugs, pesticides, some poisons, or hepatitis by stimulating the production of new liver cells to replace the old, damaged ones. These days it is very easy to overload the liver, because our environment is filled with harmful chemical and other harmful substances. Supplementing the birds and our food with milk thistle every so often helps the liver to deal with this load. It is also important to use it during and after a course of antibiotics to help the liver restore its function.

From <http://health-pages.com/mt/index.html> A favorite national pastime in Germany is mushroom collecting, a practice with inherent risks, such as *Amanita phalloides* - the Death Cap mushroom. Consuming the Death Cap mushroom results in severe, usually deadly, liver damage - in fact, those who survive Death Cap poisoning have been so badly damaged that they most often require liver transplants to survive.

Miraculously, silymarin binds to the liver cells preventing the mushroom poisons from also binding, blocking their poisonous effect. The silymarin is also able to directly neutralize the poison itself, making it effective even though it has been taken after the mushroom poison has been ingested. Milk thistle extract, for this very reason, is kept on hand in German hospitals where it is administered on an emergency basis for treating otherwise fatal Death Cap poisonings.

Case studies:

When I met "Tiger," a two-year-old Senegal, I thought he was a mutant. His back was almost black because the feathers were more black than green. His diet was mostly seeds and table foods. The owners loved their bird, did not eat a very healthy diet themselves and did not know better. I suggested cutting back on seeds, adding fresh vegetables and fruits to his daily diet and giving him table food only when it was steamed vegetables without salt, butter, etc. In addition, I recommended giving him milk thistle daily. The owners did what I suggested and Tiger had more green feathers on his back every time I saw him. After six months, he looked like a Senegal again.

Fancy is a Quaker that had an overgrown beak. It was almost visible how fast the beak was growing. He was given some drops of milk thistle every day. To every bodies surprise his beak looked normal again after only about three weeks.

If you have further questions regarding the use of Milk Thistle, please e-mail Gudrun at gudrun@totallyorganics.com.

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Peppermint

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant
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Giving a fresh taste to salads, peppermint also acts to stimulate the nerves, brings oxygen in the blood stream, helps strengthen the bowel, is a sedative on the stomach, soothing to the system and lots more. It contains vitamin A and C and magnesium, potassium, niacin, copper, iodine, silicon, iron and sulphur.

Most birds love it chopped up in their cooked food or sprinkled over their dried food. Some need some time to develop a taste for it, but so do we!?

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Plantain

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Known as the MOTHER OF HERBS in old Anglo-Saxon. I call it my miracle herb. Plantain was brought to the Americas by the settlers. It should not be confused with the cooking banana called plantain in middle and south America.

When I have a bite from a bird or another serious injury and I put a plantain leaf simmered for 10 min on the wound, the pain disappears within minutes. Plantain contains tannin, which has the ability to draw tissues together (ask me why I don't have a big scar from a bird bite on my nose).

After finding out more about it, I started using it internally and it proved to be an even more powerful healer for the inside. Besides the fact that it is loaded with trace minerals, it is known to neutralizes stomach acid and poisons, stops hemorrhaging, heals chronic lung problems and lots more. I use it often in combination with other herbs for different problems. For example, the leafs made into a tea with Slippery Elm Bark Powder for all kinds of problems with the crop and the digestive tract.

Plantain grows in almost every yard and can be given freely to your birds as food as long as the area is not sprayed with any chemicals.

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Sea Buckthorn

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant
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Common name: Sea Buckthorn
Botanical name: Hippophae Rhamnoides
Family name: Elaeagnaceae

When I was researching herb information for this article, I ran into one which has not much recorded history, although it has been used for a minimum of 1,200 years. As usual, the Greeks were the first ones to note its medical use. They fed the leaves to their horses, whose coats turned very shiny, and the horses gained remarkable weight. This is how Sea Buckthorn got its Latin name. 'Hippo' stands for horse and 'phaos' means to shine.

The berries and their usage were also mentioned in China 1,200 years ago, and in Tibetan medical texts around 1,000 years ago. From there, Sea Buckthorn spread over Russia and the Ukraine into Europe, finally reaching the British Isles.

In the Far East, Sea Buckthorn has been used as a popular remedy for skin irritation, sunburn, wounds, inflammation, gastric problems, coughs, and mucous membrane disorders.

What caught my interest was the recent extensive research in many different countries that has been done on it. These modern scientific studies confirm all the claims made for thousands of years and much more.

In the 1940s, Russian scientists began to research the active ingredients of the leaves and berries of Sea Buckthorn. In the many following studies, not only have all the curative properties been confirmed, but it was found that Sea Buckthorn berries are one of the most nutritious foods on earth. Looking at the contents is almost like reading a super food label.

The berries contain 10 different vitamins, 24 trace elements, 18 amino acids, are rich in proteins and many bioactive substances. The vitamin C content is one of the highest, after rosehips, cayenne pepper and red sweet peppers, found on the planet. They are also on the top of the list for vitamin E, beta carotene and flavonoids content.

Because of its nutritional value, China planted in the beginning of the 1980s 300,000 ha of sea buckthorn. Today it has 150 factories which produce about 200 different sea buckthorn products.

Among its many other benefits, medical researchers found the effect of Sea Buckthorn on the skin, restoration of the mucous system and the digestive system the strongest. The high concentration of some rare fatty acids and carotenoids are thought to be the cause of the healing effect Sea Buckthorn has on such skin problems as burns, dermatitis and eczema.

Hospitals in Russia and China are using it for eczema, bed sores, burns and radiation injuries. Sea Buckthorn was used in Chernobyl after the reactor accident in 1986.

A German study concentrated on the vitamin Bs in Sea Buckthorn. Previously, it had been assumed that no plant contains a significant amount of vitamin B12, but this study found that Sea Buckthorn not only contains all the B vitamins, its vitamin B12 content is as high as in liver.

The clinical study shows that a lack of vitamin B12 causes such problems as skin disorders, anemia, digestive disorders, nerve damage and dysfunction of the mucous membranes.

Other researchers found some antibiotic, anti-inflammatory and analgesic properties in Sea Buckthorn.

Sea Buckthorn is a dioecious hardy plant, which means a male and a female shrub is needed to produce fruits. They thrive in moist soils, but grow also in poor soil, can tolerate cold and extreme conditions. The female plants should be pruned to provide sunlight and make picking the berries easier.

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Seeds With Vitamins Added vs Sprouted Seeds

by Gudrun Maybaum, Avian Nutrition and Herb Consultant

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It is becoming more common to find vitamin-fortified seeds for parrots, and I find it hard to understand why manufacturers do that.

I know that some pellet producers use vitamins E and C as preservatives, but I fail to get the seed connection.

We know that our birds need far more than a few vitamins in their diet, and it is my opinion that adding artificial vitamins does harm rather than good. Some of these vitamins are outlawed for human consumption in a number of countries.

For example, users of menadione are required by the manufacturers to wear protective clothing, glasses and masks when handling it. In case of any contact with skin, eyes or inhaling it, workers are advised to immediately consult a physician. Sounds like menadione is not something I want to give my birds to eat.

Even if artificial vitamins have some health-giving properties, they are but a part of the nutrition scale that is needed for the overall health of birds (and humans).

Birds that eat no fresh, raw food cannot get the necessary nutrients from some artificial vitamins.

But there are ways to incorporate nutrition into a seed eater's diet. An easy way is to soak or sprout your own seeds, which is, by the way, a very good method to find out how dead or alive the seeds you feed to your bird are. If they don't sprout, throw them away. Don't even feed them to your bird dry.

Recently I read about different parrot species, like the African Gray, that follow larger animals. They follow elephants and pick in their droppings. Scientists found that the birds eat the germinated seeds they find in these droppings, which have begun sprouting within the elephants' digestive system.

Sprouted seeds have a high nutritional content. On a sprouted-seed diet, my birds eat much less than on a dry-seed diet. They also waste much less.

Seeds are little miracles. Slumbering within them are all the nutrients necessary for a plant to live. Through sprouting, we awaken this dormant treasure. After about 48 hours of sprouting, most seeds are at the peak of their nutritional value. They are loaded with vitamins, minerals, enzymes, chlorophyll, amino acids, fatty acids and more - all of which is offered in a perfect combination only Mother Nature provides. In this form, they are also easy for the body to utilize.

Soaking and/or sprouting a variety of seeds and legumes give birds nutrition that pellets, dry seeds and supplements just cannot provide. Processing always involves some kind of heating or cooking, and heat not only destroys most vitamins, enzymes and fatty acids but changes minerals in such a way that they are difficult for the bird's body to utilize.

Another advantage to sprouting is that it is easy to add dried green foods to the soaked or sprouted seeds, because it will stick on them and be eaten by the bird.

I know people who are afraid of sprouting because of mold and bacteria. I add apple cider vinegar or citrus seed extract to my soaking water to prevent bacteria and mold. And I often feed the seeds after a night of just soaking to my birds. Some of my birds like them better when they are just soaked, some when they are sprouted.

So instead of cooking grains and legumes for my birds, which kills a lot of nutrients, I recommend sprouting them to provide one of the freshest and healthiest foods life has to offer. It also takes much less time than cooking, anyway!

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Slippery Elm Bark Powder

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Can reestablish harmony in inflamed intestines within hours to a day. Put in water or juice becomes a mucilage, a slippery and very soothing substance with a high nutritional value.

It coats, protects and rejuvenates the areas that it reaches from irritations such as inflammation and infections. At the same time it absorbs impurities and toxins and helps them to pass harmlessly out of the body, while nourishing the whole body and assisting the activity of the adrenal glands.

I have given Slippery Elm with Aloe Vera for different cases of poisoning, with Plantain tea for crop infections, on open wounds with Plantain and White Willow Tincture. It worked every time very fast.

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Soaking and Sprouting Seeds Made Easy

by Gudrun Maybaum

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There is this rumor that sprouting is difficult and dangerous. And that is true, if it is not done correctly. Well, actually, a lot of things are dangerous if not done right. I actually was, for a long time, a bit careful about telling and teaching people how to sprout. It is true that if sprouted or soaked seeds are left too long in the water or not rinsed regularly they go bad, can develop fungus, bacteria and such. But which fresh or cooked food, that is not loaded with preservatives, does not do the same? It is just a matter of doing it right and having good clean seeds. Doing it right is actually easy and faster than cooking for our fids.

Dried seeds are like little looked treasure chests. Slumbering within them are all the nutrients necessary for a plant to live. Through sprouting, we awaken this dormant treasure. After about 48 hours of sprouting, most seeds are at the peak of their nutritional value. They are loaded with vitamins, minerals, enzymes, chlorophyll, amino acids, fatty acids and more - all of which is offered in a perfect combination only Mother Nature provides. In this form, they are also easy for the body to utilize. Soaking and/or sprouting a variety of seeds and legumes give birds nutrition that pellets, dry seeds and supplements just cannot provide.

Soaked and sprouted seeds are so loaded with nutrients, that every bird should have them in its diet. So, I was all excited, when the Organic Soak and Sprout Mixes became available. I thought, "Now that is so easy, everybody can do that."

Taylor, my partner in crime at Your Parrot Place, does not cook. The most cooking I have seen Taylor do was to place a pizza from Papa Murphy's in the oven. But she surprised me in researching sprouting devices and finding one that is called EasySprout. She ordered it and I tried it (I thought). I have been sprouting many years and put my "professional" sprouting equipment away because this is so easy to use. But my real surprise came, when I came to Taylor's house and low and behold there was a "EasySprout" with sprouting seeds in it. It was not the overnight seed mix. She had taken the sprouting mix and was doing the real sprouting. She showed me the box of the EasySprout and said, "Look it is explained in pictures on the back of the box, step by step. You just can't do something wrong." Well, there is always somebody who will figure out a way to do it wrong. But she is right, with the Organic Soak and Sprout Mixes and the EasySprout almost everybody can do it.

Considering that most of the seeds our birds would eat in the wild would be germinated, how rich in nutrition the soaked and sprouted seeds are and how easy it is to prepare them, we should at least a few times a week add some of them to their menu.

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Jeremy's Beak Treats Story (Diabetic Macaw)

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Jeremy is a 15 year old female blue and gold macaw. The story started when we realized that she was eating and drinking ferociously, had an absolutely liquid stool and was losing weight at a very rapid pace.

Our adventure began. The first veterinarian told us she is hypothyroid. She appeared everything but hypo to me. So we did not give her what we were told.

After a 5 month odyssey in which I could stabilize her a little we got her to Dr. Barno at Rock Creek Veterinary Hospital. By then Jeremy's glucose was down 200 points (but she was still about 500 over normal) and her weight up 100 grams, but she was very weak and the feathers on her back were black and green instead of blue. Dr. Barno suggested insulin and a high fiber pellet diet to stabilize her. Insulin was out of question because of the trauma for Jeremy of getting a shot twice a day and knowing about the damage the insulin does to the body.

I did not like the brands of the pellets he suggested either. (I am still amazed about Dr. Barno's patience with me) He gave me the idea by suggesting high fiber pellets. If she needs lots of fiber, I thought, I can make her a food that is loaded with it. And so I did.

Her glucose dropped, she gained weight and as long as she gets this food she is stable. She is still diabetic and green, but her old spirit and strength are back.

Jeremy's Diabetic Beak Treats Mix

- 1 oz of fresh organic finely chopped vegetables
- 1 teaspoon of psyllium husk powder
- ½ teaspoon of slippery elm bark powder
- 1 teaspoon of organic peanut butter
- a few drops of aloe vera gel
- a few drops of flax seed oil

Mix well and serve!

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Variety and Moderation

by Gudrun Maybaum

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There are a lot of opinions, sometimes fanatic, about what one should eat. With humans, that means macrobiotic, or vegetarian, or fruitism, or our ancestors' diet, etc. With our birds, it is pellets or not, seeds or not. Though most of us agree on one thing: fresh vegetables and fruits are good for humans and birds.

Now let's look into that one. For example, broccoli is a vegetable with one of the highest nutritional contents known. Even cooked, it has more vitamin C than oranges and almost as much beta carotene as carrots. Research shows it kills bacteria, protects against toxins and possesses many more very valuable qualities. This list goes on and on. So, why don't we eat and feed our birds just broccoli every day? Because broccoli, like spinach, kale and some other green vegetables, contains a component that, eaten daily and without balancing with other foods, leads to hypothyroidism.

Or let's take celery. It supports the kidneys and urinary system, and helps with high blood pressure, gout, arthritis and rheumatism. But it is high in plant nitrates, which can be neutralized by adding vitamin C-rich foods, e.g. orange juice, in the same meal. Another example is peas, which have almost the same nutrients as liver. They are rich in protein, iron, zinc, carotenes, folic acid and other B vitamins. But peas, like all legumes, are high in purines, which can exacerbate gout attacks in people and birds with this disease. Spinach and rhubarb contain oxalates, which among other effects inhibit calcium absorption. We can keep going like this for pages.

Almost all vegetables, fruits, herbs and spices have health promoting, even healing, properties when consumed in moderation. But many of them also have built-in properties that are for protective or other purposes, which when consumed too often or in large amounts can make them harmful. Good does not necessarily mean more is better. The key is variety and moderation.

We don't have to offer a great variety on a daily basis, when we have only one or a few birds. We can offer one to two kinds of vegetables and fruits and change them daily or every few days. Some birds are ground feeders (like budgies and cockatiels) and they normally eat more seeds in their natural environment. While it is often hard to convince this kind to eat some fruit or vegetables, patience will get us there. Other birds (like Macaws and Amazons) seldom feed at ground level since they live mostly in the forest canopy and don't have many seeds available. Fruits, bark and greens are their natural diet.

We know that if we offer a variety in one bowl our birds eat the same stuff every day and throw out most of the rest. The best way to make sure they eat a variety is to give them one or two kinds at a time. A good way to do that is to feed them fresh vegetables/fruits in the morning, some soaked or sprouted seeds later on and pellets (depending on the species) in the evening. Like us humans, birds like variety too. Mine even get tired of seeds, so when once or twice a week I bring a dried fruit/vegetable mix or nuts they all go "hmmm" and then I don't hear them for a long time, because they dig into their dishes.

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Winter Squash + Winter Squash for the Kitchen Impaired

Winter Squash

by Gudrun Maybaum

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Common name: Winter Squash

Botanical name: Cucurbitae

Family name: Cucurbitaceae

A vegetable that looks beautiful, is rich in flavor, has a high nutrient content, a long storage capability, variety, and versatility.

Squash originated in central America and was already cultivated by native Americans when the first settlers arrived in this country. They used squash roasted on the open fire or dried as food, and dried and wove it into mats.

The Cherokees made a pumpkin seed tea for edema, gout and kidney stones. Squash saved a lot of settlers from starvation in the early days of the new world and was therefore heartily embraced by them. They learned to love the multipurpose fruit and carried it eastward in the mid-1800s. The most famous squash, the pumpkin, became a traditional Thanksgiving food. Early pilgrims sliced off the top of the pumpkin, removed the seeds, filled it with milk, spices and honey and baked it in hot ashes; this was the forefather of today's pumpkin pie.

Though Dr. W.H. Graves wrote in "Medicinal Value of Natural Foods" (published in 1936) that winter squash is "indicated in cases of diarrhea, piles, colitis and stomach and bowel ulcers," it was just recently that we started to discover the nourishing and healing properties of squash.

The Tokyo National Cancer Institute rates winter squash at the top of the vegetable list as a factor in populations with low cancer rates. Deep orange squashes, especially, are cited as a defense against esophageal, stomach, lung, bladder, laryngeal and prostate cancer.

According to the National Cancer Institute, squash is one of the top three foods for prevention and control of lung cancer. In a study, smokers who ate 2½ servings of squash a day reduced the risk of lung cancer greatly. Also, the regular consumption of squash and other orange vegetables provides protection from second-hand smoke.

Winter squash provides not only a high amount of fiber and carbohydrates, it is rich in alpha and beta carotene, vitamins C, E, and B6, potassium, calcium, phosphorus, zinc and magnesium. Besides the high amount of beta carotene as a cancer-fighting ingredient, squash also contains a respectable amount of vitamin C. This combination makes it an effective blocker of free radical scavengers.

Its amounts of potassium and magnesium, combined with the insoluble fiber, make squash a great food to improve cardiovascular health, lower cholesterol and prevent high blood pressure, strokes and heart attacks.

The seeds are not only a great-tasting snack but rich in essential fatty acids and protease trypsin inhibitors, which prevent the activation of viruses in the digestive tract. They also help to expel tape and roundworms, are helpful in controlling urinary and bladder problems and constipation. In some African countries, the seeds are used as a laxative.

To store winter squash, buy firm, not waxed, heavy feeling and unblemished ones with the stem intact, and store in a cool dry place. They can last up to two months. At room temperature, squash lasts about three weeks.

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Winter Squash for the Kitchen Impaired

by Taylor Knight

www.yourparrotplace.com

I've seen them in the store, I know they are good for me and the birds, but what do I do with it when I buy it? Since I had no idea, I went surfing the Internet for answers and a crash course on identifying and cooking winter squash. For those that are more visual, or like me who do not have a clue - check out The Cook's Thesaurus at <http://www.foodsubs.com/Squash.html> it has pictures of winter squash for identification.

I am sure there a lot of ways to prepare squash, but being severely kitchen impaired, I like the most common method that I found; baking. To me, cutting the squash, taking out the seeds, putting it in a baking pan with some water and throwing it in the oven for a bit sounded pretty easy. You don't even have to peel them first, however, you do need a good, solid knife to cut the suckers! You can peel it after it is cooked, if you want to. One tip I gathered was that if you, for some reason, cook or microwave a whole squash, be sure to poke holes in it with a fork so it won't explode! The other tidbit I found was that one pound of winter squash will yield about two cups of cooked pieces. Just a guideline for you!

Baking a squash: All types of squash can be baked. Butternut and acorn can be cut in half, seeds removed, and placed cut side down in a baking pan filled with 1 inch of water. All other squashes can be cut into individual serving portions and baked as well. Bake the squashes at 350 degrees for approximately 45 minutes more or less. It's done when it's tender.

Oh - go ahead and try it! Go pick out one of those weird looking things at the store - of course, organic would be nice. If you are unsure how to choose a good one, just ask the produce person. What the heck! I have to say, I have never touched a winter squash, but I am always looking for new and healthy things to feed my birds so I am going to give it shot - join me!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 02-17-2003.

White Willow

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The first one that mentioned White Willow as a fever and pain remedy was the Greek physician Dioscorides in the first century A.D.

Over the centuries the list of its uses expanded. In 1830 researchers isolated salicin and its derivative salicylic acid from the White Willow and that was the prototype of aspirin. But taking White Willow instead is more mild on the stomach and a natural remedy.

It is used for reducing fever, chills, headaches, rheumatism and is a valued nerve sedative. Its strong antiseptic abilities help fight infections in wounds, ulcerations, and eczema. I use it whenever there are injuries for its anti-inflammatory effects.

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Parrot Behavior

Acclimating New Birds

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor

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Now that my services have expanded into the "matchmaking" business, It dawned on me that we need to talk about the transition of a bird moving to a new home, whether a hand fed baby just adopted to a new home or an older bird going to a second home. This is a stressful time for any bird, but you can help lessen the strife and make the move easier for both your new bird and the rest of the family.

Good planning ahead of time is essential. A pet parrot should NEVER be an impulse buy. Adopting a companion parrot is just that - ADOPTING a new family member - they're not used cars to be traded in when you get bored! They are living, feeling, sensitive beings who should always be considered PERMANENT additions to the family. I'll never forget the first local bird expo I went to after moving to the Northwest. It was winter - cold and rainy, and I saw a person after person exiting the expo, each with a tiny baby African Grey tucked under their coats. There was a vendor inside with lots of cute baby Grays and a cheap price - apparently, many folks couldn't resist. Since no one seemed to have brought a carrier, it didn't seem to me that these were "planned" purchases, but rather spur of the moment purchases. I wonder how many went home to a nice cage, all set up with new toys and the proper diet? Not many, I'll bet. It's a deadly combo - cute, cheap, and baby! I'll bet not too many folks had done their homework either, studying up on African Greys and bird care in general.

The other common scenario is the "petshop rescue" - the pitiful bird at some pet store that knows nothing about birds - there he is, in a tiny cage, eating sunflower seeds, no toys, tucked in between the hamsters and the snakes, while the resident shop cat climbs freely through the store. So, on a whim, you take him home.

So, whether it's the irresistible baby, the sad ill cared for rescue, or an actual well thought out carefully chosen new addition - there he is, coming in your front door, hoping to spend the rest of his life with you, his ever loving devoted family!! So how do we transition from scared outsider to contented feathered child?

First, be prepared. Have the cage, toys, and food all set up prior to his arrival so he can slide right in and not have to stand by while everyone scrambles around, frantically searching for bird stuff. Normally, we advise putting a bird's cage in the busiest part of the house, where he can be the center of attention. But new birds need some space, quiet and privacy during the settling in process, so find him a comfortable safe corner where he can observe, but at a distance. Of course, he should have made a trip to the vet first thing and quarantining him for at least one month away from any other birds is always recommended. So this may not be his permanent location, but rather serve as a "pit-stop" in the beginning. You may want to partially cover his cage, draping a towel over the back and one side to help him feel safe. If possible, have some of his previous diet to mix in with the new (wonderful) cuisine you'll be serving.

Find out as much as possible about, not only his diet, but preference in toys, play time, bed time, and daily routine. Keeping some consistency helps for a smoother transitional time. Radical changes don't agree with many parrots, so go slow. Introduce him to every family member, but avoid anyone doing too much "hands on" stuff in the beginning. Rather, spend time just sitting by him, talking to him and offering some treats by hand. Don't force him or expect instant love.

Work on building trust with "step-ups". Play "The Towel Game" to have interactive fun, as well as aiding future needs for handling by a vet or groomer.

Put your new guy on a regular schedule. Feed him lots of fresh veggies and nice warm cooked grains and legumes. Warm food is "comfort food" and helps strengthen the bond when fed by hand. Share some family dinner with him, preferably on a stand by the dining table. Watch TV together and preen his head feathers for him while you hang out on the couch. Include him in lots of family activities to help him feel a part of the flock. If everyone is gone to work or school during the day, leave a radio or TV on and make sure he's got plenty of interesting toys that provide both chewing exercise and mental stimulation. Talk to him before leaving, tell him he's okay and reassure him that you'll be back. When you do return give him a warm hello and a big hug. If you do have other birds, try to maintain the flock order. It won't help him relax if the other birds are resentful of all the attention the new guy gets. Always address your primary bird first - first one out, first one kissed, first one fed, etc. Don't allow the birds to get together until you're sure everyone gets along. First time together, it's helpful if it's on a neutral new stand that no one is territorial about. If you expect the two to ultimately share a cage, remember that will take time and patience - you don't want the new guy intimidated by an overbearing dominant "resident" who thinks he runs the place.

An important point to remember - don't make the mistake of totally doting on the bird at first, then ignoring him after the novelty wears off. He'll definitely need extra attention in the beginning, but try to maintain a balance from the start, to avoid rebound problems down the road. So be prepared, go slow, build trust, and have fun getting to know each other. This is the beginning of a beautiful lifelong friendship.

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Behavioral Tips

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

- * Establish trust first and foremost.
- * Use nurturing guidance, not dominance.
- * NEVER strike, flick the beak or throw your bird to the floor.
- * ALWAYS praise appropriate positive behaviors, "good step up!" as opposed to punishing negative ones.
- * Learn your birds over stimulation signals-tail fanning, feather puffing, eye flashing.
- * Remember, birds have short attention spans and like small children, do not comprehend "cause and effect" well.
- * Use a "neutral room" when necessary.
- * Use "step up" and "step down/off" with every interaction including coming in and out of the cage.
- * Be sure all family members interact with the bird, and use CONSISTENCY.
- * Parrots are "drama queens" - don't use drama rewards!
- * Avoid "quick fixes" - yelling, cage covering, spraying with water, they don't address underlying issues. Learn what's causing the behavior.
- * Recognize that biting starts as a fear response-creating and enforcing fear does not work.
- * Lower your energy before approaching your bird.
- * Appropriate time outs mean cage time with no interaction- do not banish your bird to the basement.
- * Play "the towel game" with your bird often.

Educate yourself about birds and their behaviors. Use patience and understanding. Don't always expect 100% from your bird, we all have bad days!

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Birdie Body Language

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Most parrot people are aware of some of the basic body language our companions use to communicate with us. But it's usually the more negative ones! However, our buddies use a multitude of moves to express lots of emotions, both positive and negative. So, let's look at a few:

EXCITEMENT/AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

Although most of these activities are associated with aggressive/defensive attitudes in our birds, they can also simply signify any excitement, good or bad - so you have to know your bird, and observe closely to differentiate between aggressive postures that mean "Stay away!" and those that simply mean "I'm over-excited!" even in a good way. (Of course, even with those you need to be careful, as an over-stimulated bird can still act out by biting.)

Eye pinning: The pupils dilate and constrict rapidly, back and forth, indicating excitement and interest. Definitely means you need to pay attention and look out.

Feather Puffing: The bird fluffs his feathers out all over, but especially the head and neck, and with Cockatoos, the crest is erect. In the wild, birds use this to appear larger, and thus be more intimidating to foes.

Tail Fanning: Especially in Amazons, the bird fans his whole tail out (like a mini-horizontal peacock), again, to appear large and "scary."

Blushing: Bare-faced birds like Macaws, allow you to visually observe the facial redness that accompanies excitement. (Actually, ALL parrots so this - we just can't see it through the feathers! Some birds blush a light pink, others (Like my Amber), go a deep red. I find babies blush more than adults, as they experience new things in the world.

Head Bowing: The bird, while puffed up, eye-pinning, tail fanning, and blushing, also lowers his head, stretching out his neck. Often accompanied by a "growling" sort of sound, or with African Greys and Cockatiels, it's more of a "hissing" sound.

Stretching/Wing Spreading: The bird raises up on tip toes, feathers and crest erect, neck stretched, wings eagle - spread - again, he's trying to look large and threatening. Often, a highly agitated bird will sway back and forth. "Flash" colors (Bright color accents under wings, crest or tail) are highly visible during this type of posturing - it's hard to miss, as this type of display is QUITE obvious!

Although aggression behaviors and excitement behaviors are similar, the good observer with a trained eye can readily tell the difference. Work on developing your observation skills, so you'll know how to best proceed. Of course, a bird coming at you, head-lowered, with an open beak, is hard for ANYONE to misinterpret!

SOLICITOUS BEHAVIORS

These include all the more passive ways a parrot asks for attention. If we ignore these, they can lead to more outright demands, such as screaming, or neurotic behaviors that become obsessive, almost ritualistic, habits such as constant flipping or circling in the cage, or toe-tapping, beak wiping, and odd looking head movements. The basic solicitous behaviors include the following:

Food Begging: Recently weaned babies often cry and "baby bob" repeatedly. They sit low on the perch, heads turned up, slightly quivering their wings, with heads bobbing rapidly. This needs to be addressed! Often, newly weaned babies revert after moving to their new home. It's a good idea to continue regular body weight checks, as anything over a 10% loss is cause for concern. I don't believe in time-table weaning, and do not feel it is inappropriate to continue, or re-start, hand feeding of young birds. Ask for guidance on how to best handle it.

Wing Quivering: The bird sits low with wings gently quivering, head out, and stretched and softly chirps to you. Some may "bob," even as adults. This is more common in females. It simply means "Pick me up! Love me!" I find it quite endearing and nothing to be alarmed about.

Leaning Forward/Looking up at you with Big Eyes: This is also a very sweet way birdies ask for some loving. They simply lean toward you and give you big, soft, goo-goo eyes! Pretty fool-proof for most birds!

Feather Puffing: Nothing like the feather puffing of aggression/over-excitement, which is stiff and rigid, this is a "soft" raising of the feathers, again, especially on the head and neck and means "Please scratch me and preen my pin feathers!" They need out help to reach those difficult spots, and it's a glorious way to strengthen your bond by preening his "pins" for him!

HAPPINESS BEHAVIORS

These are my favorites! They are also the most subtle and most often missed signals that our parrots give us. Learn to recognize them and you'll enjoy a whole new level of richness in your communications.

Tail Wagging: Often in one on one interactions, you'll see your bird give his tail a quick "fan" and a vigorous side-to-side shake. This means "I'm content, I'm enjoying myself and feeling quite relaxed!" It's always a happy sight!

Happy-Wing Tai Chi: You walk in the room, or up to your parrot, he spreads out one wing, in a big stretch, often accompanied by a full extension to the back of the leg on the same side (very graceful, martial-arts-looking). I love this one! Often, they do it at the most inopportune time, like when you're in a big hurry to put him up and get out for the day. But, this is the parrot equivalent of a big hug! It means "I'm so happy to see you! How 'ya doing?!" Don't ever rush him when he's being sooo courteous and pleasant!

"Happy Beak": It's late, he's eaten, he's played, he's cuddled, he's almost ready for bed - and you hear a funny grinding rasping sound coming from your bird. This is a total contentment, relaxed, happy behavior. I actually met someone once who professed to "hate" that sound! To me, it's music to my ears - it means my kids have had a great day and are ready to go night-night for sweet dreams!

Regurgitation: You're loving on your buddy when all of a sudden, he starts to bob, then deposits a warm gob of partially digested food onto you! Well, you've just been paid the highest compliment your parrot can pay you!! This is how parrots say "I love you madly, for ever and ever - you're mine!!" Please, don't act grossed out, or make faces, or laugh, or run away. Simply say "I love you, too!" and give him a rub!

There's lots more behaviors and postures our companion birds use to express their moods, needs, and feelings to us. When you start to pay attention to your friend's many ways in which he communicates with you, you'll surely discover some special and unique ones that will go a log

way in enabling the two of you to get along better, strengthen your bond, and provide insight into his own unique personality!

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Birdie "PMS" - Parrot Molting Syndrome

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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It's a fact of life - all our bird friends go through "P.M.S." several times a year! I am talking about "Parrot Molting Syndrome" for lack of a better term! It means emotional and physical changes, which can result in behavioral disturbances. When my 4-year-old Blue and Gold Macaw, Amber, goes into a molt you would swear she was "P.M.S.ing!" All of a sudden she's moody and irritable and cranky. Why? It takes a tremendous toll on the body to replace every single feather! New pin feathers coming in are itchy, if rubbed the wrong way, can be painful. Nutritionally, the body needs more nutrients during this time, especially fatty acids and minerals, particularly calcium. So, it's a time of transition, which can be eased with your help.

Let's look at the dynamics of molting and feather production. Roughly 10% - 20% of body weight is feather. The creation of which requires certain nutrients. The majority of birds in our homes suffer from some degree of malnutrition - it's still the leading cause of death in companion birds - and you may not even be aware of it! The essential amino acids lysine and methionine are especially important, as are choline and riboflavin. Long periods between molts, failure to produce new feathers, and feather weaknesses and abnormalities can all be indicative of nutritional deficiencies. Some birds seem to be in a state of continual molt, while others go through an obvious molt once or twice a year. Most birds grow heavier plumage during the cold winter than they do in summer. Softbills exposed to too many hours of artificial light will go into an extra or prolonged molt. Covering the cage at night may be helpful. Parrots generally molt year round rather than seasonally, although you'll notice it more in late summer.

Heavy molts DO affect personality! You may see a decrease in playing or talking, in addition to the grouchiness. Your bird may seek out more of your attention, hoping you'll help preen the incoming pin feathers. More frequent bathing is also helpful during molting. Expect to see a lot more dander and "floaties" in the air, in addition to lots of fallen feathers.

Almost 90% of a feather is composed of protein, so molting is the time to increase protein foods in the diet. Shredded chicken, hard cooked egg whites, tofu, cottage cheese and yogurt are good additions, along with legumes, whole grains, and nuts. The fatty acids in the grains and nuts are also needed for healthy skin and feathers. I usually supplement extra flax seed oil during molts. Be sure quality pellets are available daily as well as lots of veggies, like broccoli, carrots, yams, pumpkin, corn, and swiss chard.

If wing clipping during a molt, be aware of blood feathers on the wings. Clipping a feather with a live blood supply can cause persistent bleeding, requiring the feather to be pulled in order to stop the bleeding. If you bird's wings are clipped mid-molt, be aware that a touch-up trim later may be necessary to keep your bird from being too flighted.

Just remember that molting is a natural phase all birds go through, in order to replace old worn out feathers with shiny new ones! Expect some irritability and crankiness during this time - it's normal. Help out by preening pin feathers, giving frequent baths and boosting their nutrition.

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The Birds and the Bees for Adults (Parrots, that is!)

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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The days are getting longer, and if you have a sexually mature parrot, there may be some major sexual stuff going on - and you might not even know it! Recently, I reran an article I did on "Spring Fever" - my term for the hormonal influences on young, sexually immature parrots at this time of year. There are some similarities, but also some major differences between young birds and those that have reached sexual maturity (approximately age 2 to 7 years, depending on species). A lot of people believe sexual behavior in adult parrots means they now need to be put in a breeding situation - not true! While there are a FEW birds who truly are not happy as pets and desperately want a mate and babies, they are very much in the minority. For most birds, it's simply a few months of mother Nature's influence, which then passes, revealing your loving companion once again. While some birds do become aggressive at this time, the majority do not. In a true breeding situation, with a bonded pair and a nest box, you will of course, see aggressive, territorial behavior, but generally not so much in single birds in our homes. Some birdies exhibit "selective aggressiveness," depending on the situation and environment.

Basically, sexual behavior starts when the number of hours of daylight begin to lengthen. It's helpful to follow the natural light cycle at this time, getting them up with the sun, and going to bed when it sets. Lots of birds become super cuddly when hormonal, wanting to snuggle more and literally lay in your lap. Touching gets "touchy", since a lot of your usual petting may now be sexually stimulating. Avoid stroking under the wings, under the tail, over the tail (or tugging on it), hands down their full body, or pressure on the back. All of this can be too stimulating, causing frustration. It's like lots of foreplay, with no culmination to follow! While sexual urges are natural, and fairly common in a lot of adult birds, it is not something to encourage. By the same token, don't discourage or reprimand - simply ignore it, and try to avoid instigating it! Often, we're not aware of our role in the whole process, and unlike "spring fever" in adolescent birds, mature sexuality is often much more subtle, so that we may not even be aware that our birds are experiencing it.

In many birds, they're either a bit more affectionate or a bit more grouchy, but not much else is obvious. Some birds exhibit no changes at all. If you do intend to get a mate and embark on the adventure of breeding parrots, please don't start too early! Many people mistake "spring fever" in immature birds as a sign of readiness for breeding, but like all kids, they're simply playacting. Breeding too young puts tremendous stress on Mom - instead of putting energy into her own body's development, it all goes into laying eggs and raising babies. You also tend to get weaker, smaller babies with less vitality.

Another trigger during this phase is anything that looks inviting for nesting - boxes, drawers, cupboards, bags, etc. - cozy protected little nooks and crannies. Avoid having those things around, and definitely don't offer a nest box! Some people do, as a place for birdies to hide, sleep or hang out, but it will make things worse. With some kids, "Happy Huts" will do the same thing - you may want to remove it for awhile.

Be careful! Watch your bird for over stimulation signals - eye pinning, tail fanning, feather puffing, blushing, posturing. You may need to change your approach in handling at this time. Use "step up/down" commands consistently, and avoid having your bird higher than your head and shoulders. You may want to use a hand held perch for bringing your bird out of his cage or off his playstand. Biting can definitely be a problem now. Make use of a "neutral room" when needed, to regain or maintain your position as flock leader.

Other factors affecting sexual behavior include humidity and temperature, as well as lighting and hours of daylight. Normally, nature pushes birds to reproduce right around the time that plants are flourishing, producing lush foliage, seed, flowers, and fruit. This ensures adequate food being available to feed the new hungry mouths!

You may get lucky, and have a parrot who slides right through "breeding season" without batting an eye. Not everyone acts out when the hormones surge! Just be prepared, keep alert, and use good judgment if problems arise. I don't advise doing major behavioral work in the spring if your bird does react negatively, although this is usually when I get a ton of calls begging for help!! Sadly, it also seems to be the time when many birds are put up for sale, as the owners are either unaware or unwilling to deal with this very natural, normal event. If you do run into problems now, though, it's still advisable to work on behavior after things return to normal. Improving your techniques and building a stronger bond, based on trust and guidance, may help you and your parrot deal better with potential problems next year! Hang in there meanwhile, and don't entice your birdie with provocative behavior. Instead, buy some new toys, feed him more fresh veggies and healthy stuff, and enjoy the promise of new life that accompanies the beautiful season of spring!

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Biting Birds

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor
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Of the "Big 3" behavior problems (screaming, plucking, and biting) biting is probably the one most feared and most caused by the bird's owner. All behavior problems have one thing in common - a bird who is not connecting appropriately with it's family and receiving the proper guidance. It's often another displacement behavior, reinforced by improper handling techniques.

Biting most often starts as a fear response. Birds are prey animals, not predators, and use their beaks for defense rarely, almost as a last resort in their natural setting in the wild. Like the other behavioral problems, inadvertent reinforcement quickly turns nips into a biting habit. Birds learn to bite in order to be left alone, returned to their cage or to their favorite person. A Senegal I know like to socialize with everyone he meets, then promptly shifts from being cute and cuddly to flesh-ripping, blood-drawing biting. His dad always steps in immediately to rescue the victim, so the bird has learned that biting is the fastest way to get back to his dad when he is out meeting new people.

Birds are very empathetic and readily pick up on our emotions. If you approach a bird with fear and the certain feeling you're going to get nailed, I guarantee you will!! It becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. Take a deep breath and approach the bird calmly and confidently, without hesitation. Birds always reach for everything beak first, and before stepping up they test the stability of the surface they're stepping onto. People who reach for a bird, then flinch and pull away once he approaches with his beak are asking to get bit. Like all interaction with parrots, trust is a major component in dealing with biting.

If I'm handling an aggressive bird or one I'm unsure of, I usually use a hand held perch before offering my flesh! You can also distract the bird by holding a small object in the other hand, or offering a wood block to chew on. Be sure you're not confusing "beaking" with biting. Baby birds, especially go through a "beaking" stage while learning how to use their beaks. This is the time to remind him "Gentle!" and let him know what's acceptable. Pushing your hand into the bird rather than pulling away will usually cause the bird to break his grip, although doing so goes against natural human behavior! "Wobbling" your hand prior to a bite can sometimes distract the bird and prevent the bite, but does no good once the bite is happening. Maintaining good eye contact is helpful, as the bird will then look at you, not at the "target" he's aiming for.

When you get bit, NEVER, strike the bird or throw him to the floor!! Aggression begets more aggression and increases fear, which intensified the desire to bite (Remember, it's often a FEAR response). Dropping or throwing the bird completely destroys trust. I know of Amazons who've never regained trust after being dropped once. Pointing and shaking your finger in your bird's face will usually invite a bite as well. Don't make your bird angry!

Watching for signals can avoid some bites. If you bird starts eye flashing, tail fanning, puffing feathers, or with Macaws, blushing, he may be becoming over-stimulated. Birds on shoulders are often more apt to bite, due to territoriality and dominance. When Amber's being aggressive or clamps down on my finger, I often hold her down low, close to my legs (again, not dropping her to the floor just to a more submissive spot), give her the "evil eye" (stern look) and say "Gently - No Bite!" Avoid prolonged "drama scenes" - it can reinforce the bird by providing a reward - it's fun to watch humans jump up and down, shake their hand, and go "Owww!!!" It's another case where you want to (almost) ignore the behavior. Do address it to let the bird know what's not acceptable, but as calmly and briefly as possible.

If the bird continues to bite, and is not calming down, you may want to return him to his cage or stand, but only after some de-escalation of behavior. If you immediately put him in "time out" you can teach him that's the way to be left alone, so let some time pass first, while providing guidance.

A note on biting of the "significant human" - it's not uncommon for an agitated bird to bite it's human "mate" when feeling frightened or overwhelmed - it seems puzzling, but if you look at natural behavior in the wild, you'll feel less hurt by your best friend's seemingly irrational response. If a bonded pair of birds is hanging out in the jungle and danger is near, the normal reaction is to fly away. If, however, your stubborn mate doesn't budge and flee the threat a parrot will peck or bite his mate trying to get him to fly off to safety. Amber took up biting me at times about a year ago when we were out in public. It was summer and we were going to all the music events at Waterfront Park, with lots of people and activity. Amber loves this, but gets uncomfortable around to many kids in the 6-8 year old age range. We were at one "oldies" concert that was full of kids, all of whom wanted to look at, talk to, and pet her. She was fine for awhile, then started to get burned out and overwhelmed. I tried to find a quiet spot for us to catch our breath when a drunk lady insisted on bringing her four kids up for hands-on interaction. I asked her to back off - that Amber was "on beak" she persisted and Amber laid my index finger wide open. She was merely trying to provoke me to get us both out of dodge - NOW! It finally dawned on me what was happening with Amber's biting episodes which helped solve the problem.

If your bird is going through a bitey stage, work with him regularly on trust building exercises. Be sure he's on a perch lower than your head - often waist high works best. So some "step-ups," "laddering" exercises and the towel game with lots of praise and positive reinforcement. Work for short periods so he doesn't get tired and cranky. If need be, use a neutral room at first to balance the odds. Sometimes, going back to square one is necessary to get back on track. Analyze the situation - is it hormonal? Is it late and the bird is tired? Has there been a major change around the house? Be patient and watch for warning signs. There's no point in working with a bird who's obviously in a bad mood or over-stimulated. Wait until the timing is better and he's settled down.

Clients are often surprised that I don't just walk up to their bird the first time I meet him, stick my hand in the cage and step him up. I respect a bird's territory and want to allow both of us a chance to get acquainted first. Just because I make a living handling birds doesn't mean I'm fond of getting bitten!! Quite the contrary! So go slow, build trust, give praise and ask for professional help if need be. We don't need to shed blood to live with parrots!

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Bonding

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Bonding - that all important first step so essential to a parrot/human relationship. For a successful bond to be made, it is vital to have a trust base. Without trust, there can simply can not be a bond!

Contrary to popular myth, it is NOT essential to hand feed a baby parrot in order for it to bond successfully with you. It IS important for a bird to have been hand fed, by a positive-based nurturer, who has fostered trust and provided guidance from an early age. Parrots, however, are capable of forming many bonds throughout their lifetimes. The better the socialization and nurturing guidance provided from the beginning, the easier it is for a parrot to form new bonds.

Just like humans, parrots form different bonds with different people (and birds) in their lives. Your bird may have a primary bond with you, where you provide the bulk of the feeding, cleaning, and one on one interaction. Then there may be a different bond with your spouse, who perhaps provides special treats and occasional "hangouts" together. Your children may have yet another bond in providing silliness and special games. Then there are various degrees of bonding with other birds in the household, or even the family dog. All of these bonds are special and unique relationships. It is my belief that the more chances for a parrot to have numerous positive relationships, the healthier your bird is. Should something happen where you and your bird have to part company for some reason, a bird that has been encouraged to have multiple healthy relationships throughout it's life will adapt much more successfully and make new bonds much more smoothly than one who has been kept in a "one person" mode. Parrots are by nature highly social and sociable, critters and it's your duty as a caregiver, to foster trusting birds.

So, how do we do this? First off, if you really want to maintain a strong primary bond with your bird, don't get him a buddy! Especially another bird of the same species, where a true "pair-bond" will most likely form. Even in cross-species "buddy bonds" birds can become territorial and aggressive toward their humans during hormonal times.

Secondly, although we love and indulge our parrots, don't "spoil" them in the sense that you are not providing guidance. Like young children, parrots want and need "rules" and guidelines for living. Ignore most negative behaviors, and strongly reinforce the positive ones. Use "step up/down," play "the towel game," give lots of positive reinforcement every time ("Good step up!" "Good bird!" "I like that!") Don't succumb to "quick fix" techniques, don't lose your temper and don't personalize perceived "mean" behavior from your bird. Gain an understanding of basic parrot behavior, practice positive reinforcement, and reinforce trust. Then your bonds will be strong and healthy ones.

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Domination Behavior in Parrots True or False?

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

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"Every so often someone must say: Now is the time to stop and see what we know. Without such pauses, epistemology--the process knowing--is a bargain basement, shoppers jousting and shouting as they grab at a garment that fits and one that, momentarily, is in style." The Tangled Wing by Melvin Konner

Ever since I became involved in keeping parrots, attempting to give advice about proper environments and building relationships, I have assiduously stuck to the old tenet that permitting them the "high spot" would be detrimental to their eventual behavior patterns and consequently to the evolving relationship. For some reason all the behavioral experts, books published, articles written were emphatic about "parrot domination behavior": How it would affect the relationship between caregiver and parrot and how it must be curbed. Innocently and convinced of this "truth" and in the absence of more concrete information I joined the crowd. (Although in defiance of this "law of nature" I always allow my birds on my shoulder.) At that time it just seemed to make sense. Well, all of us were wrong!

It seems that the behaviorist who sometimes inadvertently deals with entirely human interpretations and conclusions in this particular case is eager to assume something that could not be further from the parrots mind. (I am wondering what else we are wrong about.) I have no idea, how this myth was created, but there it was and it made sense, in a human kind of way. It is probable that we mistook aggressive behavior for the attempt to dominate--and about that there is no doubt. These are still wild birds and individual territories, breeding sites, hormonal urges and apparently even flock loyalty may be the underlying cause. Other reasons for aggressive behavior are surely fear, distrust or outright dislike for a person or another parrot.

The intricate and survival driven flock behavior patterns of these intelligent and sensitive birds is constantly being studied and new conclusions have to be drawn consistent with the results of very serious research by avian biologists. One thing seems to be certain--there are no "flock leaders" and there is no consistent dominating behavior by members of parrot flocks. Observing flock composition, life style and size, this theory has lost its validity. It does not make sense anymore. There will always be the tendency to seek height, especially when a threat is perceived or to roost for the night. The reason is obvious: relative security.

It appears that these flocks operate as a homogenous entity, each bird dependent on the other for its survival. That is why body language plays such a vital part and why our parrots are so observant and intuitive. A perceived threat from the outside, the temporary aggressive behavior pattern by individual flock members are transmitted in that manner and are immediately recognized and respected as signs of warning. We must get used to the idea that these intelligent and intuitive creatures cannot be compared to any other pet animal we are likely to encounter. Their reaction to outside stimuli are driven by instinct AND reasoning. A parrot does nothing without a reason--even if it is often beyond our intuitive and emphatic abilities to understand.

The absence of inappropriate behavior induced by the need to dominate however, does not eliminate the many other potential reasons--eliminating one does not eliminate the others. It may make it a little easier to understand our feathered friends--it does not make our life with them any less potentially complicated.

It remains to be said that many a parrot caregiver has been bitten by Mr. Wonderful while perching on their shoulder. The fact that it was not dominance induced did not make it any less painful. The problem with parrots on the shoulder really becomes one of control and warning.

Body language is extremely difficult to detect by peripheral vision and the bite happens very quickly. So, the word is still: "please, not on the shoulder," unless you really know your bird and are willing to take a chance.

Furthermore, the old adage that the "high perch" may lead to domination behavior is still partly valid--if one substitutes the word "aggressive" for "domination." Now it makes perfect "bird sense": "The higher I can sit, the more secure I feel and consequently I have the emotional freedom to be aggressive. If I land on the floor for some reason or if I am taken into an unfamiliar room or situation, it is my first objective to feel secure again. I have my priorities and as a prey bird, my first priority is security! After that, I do have some other issues which have to do with mating, eating and allopreening or teaching a teenager some flock manners!

Once we have established relationships of trust with our birds, the feeling of being secure comes along with that and the "high perch" largely loses its importance to the bird. Now he/she feels secure on all levels, this, however does not eliminate the potential for isolated cases of aggressive behavior--but then there is always the body language which tells us: "Please leave me alone, I have a headache!"

There is a very, very important conclusion that we should draw. Since there are no flock leaders in the wild, there can be no flock leaders anywhere. Consequently any attempt to pattern our relationship with our birds in that manner is bound to create stress, friction and ultimately the loss of trust. Sally Blanchard put it well and succinctly: "We must see ourselves as benevolent and patient teachers as opposed to being "in charge." That is an entirely human concept and clearly does not apply here. (At this point I am wondering what happens in the mind of a parrot in a human flock which is "ruled" by a very dominant human.) There is another, equally important lesson here: we ain't as smart as we think we are!

I thank James J. Murphy, avian biologist for providing the inspiration and direction with his article "Aggression in Parrots, "Flock Leaders" and the Above Eye-Height Position Revisited."

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Drama Rewards

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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Oh boy, do parrots love drama! They should all sit on the committee to pick Academy Awards winners, but since they can't, they do it in our living room instead! Being highly empathic, they quickly pick up our moods (good or bad) and reflect them back to us in their behaviors. Even if you've only been living with your parrot for a short time, you've probably noticed his dramatic tendencies to react immediately to your mood in interactions with him. Unfortunately, this can be the beginning of many of the common behavioral problems (biting, screaming, plucking, etc.) that we inadvertently reinforce into the bad habits that we so desperately want to avoid.

Of course, this love of drama can work for good as well. My Blue and Gold, Amber, is a TOTAL drama queen, who loves to be the center of attention, and adores having an audience. One of her favorite things is to hang by beak and feet from her high-wire then when I say "Amber, no hands!", she let's go of the bar with both hands, hanging for a few seconds only by her beak. We respond by clapping, laughing and enthusiastically praising her talent!! Because of our dramatic praise, Amber absolutely loves this trick, and learned it almost immediately. Why? Again, the parrot love of drama! One of the reasons that Amber so adores Joseph is because he's very animated and enthusiastic in his interactions with her - in other words, he provides tons of (positive) drama! Unfortunately, though, we humans have a tendency to reserve our enthusiasm mostly for the "bad" stuff, so birds learn to work for these (negative) drama rewards.

I recently wrote an article on "quick fixes" and why they don't work. Most quick fixes are based entirely on drama rewards - yelling at the bird, squirting with water, banging on the cage, etc. Birds love attention, so in a dysfunctional relationship, they'll take negative attention over no attention at all (much like abused human children.) This begins patterning the behavioral problem.

So, how should you respond to problem behaviors to avoid the drama? First and foremost, DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY! We love our parrots so much, and them us, that we tend to really personalize bad behavior, but it really isn't designed to hurt us - our companions are not devious plotters of revenge! As much as possible, ignore negative behaviors than enthusiastically reinforce the positive ones. If a bird bites you, a quick "No!" and "evil eye" are sufficient. It's important to let him know his biting is unacceptable, but crying, shaking your finger in his face, and going on and on about his "badness" only provides more and more drama, thus rewarding the behavior. With screaming, running to the cage, yelling "SHUT UP!" at the top of your lungs, is perceived as an invitation to squawk together! The scenario of going over to a plucking bird to lecture him on why he shouldn't self-mutilate, as you point to and count each feather on the floor of the cage, also provides validation of the behavior. If you came and pay attention to me every time I remove a feather, believe me, I'm going to keep pulling out those feathers.

I have a situation with a young macaw who had fallen, damaging his keel bone. He was in a lot of pain, so I would hold him close, pet him and coo lots of "poor baby" stuff to him. Being uncoordinated, he fell again soon after and I immediately ran over, and scooped him up, cuddled and kissed him. It wasn't long before this guy was falling regularly, because he so loved the attention I was giving him for it - another drama reward gone bad!

So, the key lies in us trying to be smarter than our parrots! Lower your energy, take a deep breath, and keep your wits about you. Avoid long, loud dramatic responses - either ignore or briefly reprimand depending on the behavior. Save that enthusiasm for rewarding the "good" behaviors instead!

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Inappropriate Behavior

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

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THE CONCEPT: "Inappropriate behavior" is any behavior that disrupts the relationship or makes it difficult to positively interact with the bird. Some examples are: General biting, biting selected family members, refusing to do as it is told, screaming, plucking.

This article, by virtue of the rather wide subject perimeters addressed and the sheer variety of instances, situations, personal perceptions, environments, bird species and severity of behavior patterns, has to be in very general terms. Approaches to the solutions of behavior problems must be tailored to the individual caregivers and birds involved. Much has been written about correcting inappropriate behavior. It is one of the misconceptions that anything written on this subject deserves our consideration. That is not the case. Some of the material currently available was generated years ago and since more and more about parrot behavior is learned every day, some of the old "wisdoms" clearly are counter productive and don't apply anymore. Recent books and articles authored by such experts as Sally Blanchard, Pam Clark, Sam Foster, Jane Hallander, Bonnie Munro-Doane, Bobbi Brinker provide thoughtful insight and excellent advice. It is very strongly suggested that the serious reader avail him/herself of this information.

"My bird's behavior is inappropriate. What do I do?" An important, sometimes desperate often asked question. What do we consider inappropriate behavior is important, even more important is the "why?" Keep in mind that inappropriate behavior is never the bird's fault. Also please remember that frequently pet bird behavior patterns have established themselves because they are usually "taught" by the caregiver, sometimes inadvertently.

There are two different "inappropriate" behavior patterns that can manifest themselves: The evolved pattern and the sudden pattern.

My "baby has always been so sweet, all of a sudden it is biting or frantic or panicky. It won't come out of the cage, it doesn't want to go into the cage, its plucking its feathers," are only a few examples. There can be different reasons for sudden behavior changes, most times they have to do with radical changes in the environment. Sometimes there are medical or hormonal reasons. In all cases we must determine underlying causes and we must remember that corrective action requires immense patience, respect and understanding. The old adage of "showing him who is boss" has been largely proven to be wrong. Sally Blanchard advocates a benevolent teacher relationship. Kindness, patience and gentle "coaching" will accomplish infinitely more than confrontations or even the absolutely counterproductive concept of punishment in any form.

Please note that the single most important and ONLY tool for modifying our bird's behaviors is POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT.

DEFINITIONS:

Positive Reinforcements are rewards given for desired behavior only. These rewards can consist of favored treats or exuberant praise. (I prefer the praise. It reinforces the communication between my birds and myself; it tells the bird WHY it is supposed to do what I want him/her to do. A treat, in my opinion may accomplish the same goal but sends the wrong message.) There ARE exceptions, however. For instance: if you have a bird that has a problem stepping on your hand. You may want to get it used to take a treat out of your hand first. After that has been accomplished, you still offer him the treat, but make him step over one hand to get to the hand holding the treat. After awhile he'll step on your hand without the help of a treat. It is VERY

important that in all cases praise is given, as well. It is also important that the entire exercise is accompanied by soft and gentle "up" commands.

Most of all: Feel comfortable and relaxed dealing with your bird and the bird will feel comfortable and relaxed with you. (Sally Blanchard)

Negative reinforcements are "rewards" given for undesirable behavior. While the word "reward" carries a certain meaning for us humans, the bird has a different perspective. This includes raised voices, banishment to the cage, a loud "NO," the "earthquake" reaction with a biter--anything that demonstrates displeasure, anger, disagreement. Negative reinforcement will encourage inappropriate behavior, not eliminate it. It will also damage the trust which must be established between bird and care giver. Without trust, there is no behavior modification. The ONLY reaction to unwanted behavior should be ignoring it. There is a cardinal rule: NEVER punish a parrot!! More on this subject in one of Sally Blanchard's outstanding articles: Pet Bird Report: Punishment

In summary permit me to emphasize that educating wild animals like a parrot is the responsibility we assume when we decide to add him/her to our family. It requires an understanding of his/her nature, it also requires patience, love and, most of all--respect. Respect for a creature so unique and so special that we, as humans who think that we are at the top of the evolutionary "pyramid," very often have a problem imagining the intellectual and perceptive qualities of a parrot.

EXAMPLE: Dixie is a 3 year old sulphur crested cockatoo DNA sexed male. He is an absolute sweetheart and his family adores him. He gets held, preened and he LOVES to be caressed under his wings. All of a sudden he starts attacking and biting his beloved mom. What has happened? Dixie is overcome by hormonal impulses--he acts out of instinct and his mom soon realized there is really nothing she could do. She stopped caressing him under the wings because that arouses him and she did not give him the chance to attack or bite her--she left him largely alone to come off his hormonal "high" on his own. He did. It took about 3 weeks and now Dixie is an absolute sweetheart again. It is relatively easy to diagnose hormonal biting if we know our birds and learn to recognize their body language. Hormonal biting is quite common and can be expected from Cockatoos, Amazons, Greys, Conures. The "cure" is easy and requires the mindset not to take the biting personally and to give the bird space and time.

LESSON #1: Learn the "body language" of your bird
LESSON #2: Don't give a biting bird the opportunity.
LESSON #3: DON'T take a bite personally
LESSON #4: PATIENCE

There are many reasons for sudden behavioral changes when something in the immediate environment of the bird radically changes. This is especially true with African Greys.

EXAMPLE: Rosie, a female DNA sexed Congo African Grey is about 3 years old. She seems to be a well adjusted bird and although she is rather poorly socialized, she loves her mom, steps up like a good girl and tolerates the rest of the household. Her cage is in the living room against a wall with a "view" towards the rest of the house. One evening, all hell breaks loose. Mom comes home, her heart filled with love and Rosie wants nothing to do with her or anyone else. She absolutely refuses to leave the cage, cowers on the topmost perch and, when approached displays behavior that one could charitably call panicky. What to do? Mom is heartbroken and wonders what happened to her Rosie. What happened to Rosie was a change in her environment, negligible to us but very serious for her. Mom had bought a new life sized marble statue of Hermes. It had been delivered and Hermes was now standing next to the couch and in Rosie's field of vision--Rosie felt threatened. Her world had changed and she was not used to sudden

changes and could not cope with them. Once Hermes was removed and put in a place, where Rosie could not see him and after some loving conversations and patience, Rosie could be convinced that the threatening apparition was now history. In order to return Hermes to his place next to the couch, Mom now introduced him in stages, very slowly, over a period of weeks. Now Rosie can't wait to go visit him and poop on his head.

There are some lessons to be learned here:

Lesson # 1: Never, never consider inappropriate behavior to be the parrot's fault, because it is not.

Lesson # 2: Never take any unpleasant behavior patterns personally even if your bird has a fit because you bought a strange hat and insist on wearing it indoors. It's not you, it's the hat, (and probably the bird's objection to your lousy manners)

Lesson # 3: Try to find the reasons for this behavior and then deal with them first.

Lesson # 4: Never punish the bird, don't lock him in the cage until he "cools" off, don't get into his "face."

Lesson # 5: Be patient. Behavior modification takes time, lots of time.

It is not always that easy.

EXAMPLE: Ulysses is a 4 year old Congo African Grey, sex unknown. He is a valued member of the family and has the run of the house. He is fully flighted. He has a wonderful 6 foot tall play gym in the living room and another one on top of the cage. His family loves him and believes that they give him the best life possible. There is just this little problem: Ulysses does not want to go into his cage when he is supposed to and he won't come out when Mom or Dad ask him to.

As a matter of fact, he rarely does what he is asked to do and pretty much makes his own decisions. He bites his flock members out of the "blue" and has even had a very firm beak hold on Dad's ear. Dad was deeply hurt, in more ways than one, and now is convinced that Ulysses doesn't love him anymore. This is a prime example of inadvertently "taught" inappropriate behavior. A lot of teaching has not taken place, Mom and Dad did not prepare themselves for the new arrival, consequently they had absolutely no idea how to guide and help him grow to be the affectionate and wonderful family member he can be. Commendably they did not give up on Ulysses, they asked for help. It was determined that Ulysses needed to be "reigned in" a little. He got his wings clipped to limit his mobility. The gym on his cage was taken down to reduce his "perching" height and the 6' tall gym in the living room was replaced by one 4' tall. Ulysses was also taught the limits of his "theatre of operations"--he was allowed on the cage, on the gym in the living room and was not permitted on the shoulders of Mom and Dad, the furniture or to roam around the house on his own. Ulysses is very smart and although he did not like the new rules, with lots of gentle positive reinforcement, plenty of praise and the occasional nutriberry he learned what was expected of him. He is much happier and more secure now. To complete the behavior modification effort, Ulysses also learned the step-up command. He and Mom and Dad had lots of fun with it and he has become a new birdie with the whole family being happier and wiser. At this point it is important to note that the entire endeavor took the better part of six months--all agree it was worth it. There are a number of lessons learned in this example:

Lesson # 1: Our love for our birds is not necessarily expressed in "human" ways. Permissiveness is not a sign of love--it's a sign of ignorance and weakness.

Lesson # 2: Our birds need to be given firm "territorial" perimeters. Contrary to some perceptions, the "run of the house" syndrome can very well lead to confusion and frustration.

Lesson # 3: Our birds with their instinctive flock behavior need a sense of security regarding their "place" in life. A loving and gently firm nurturing environment which provides limits gives them a feeling of security they need.

Lesson # 4: Use positive reinforcement to teach your bird. Positive reinforcement works.

EXAMPLE: Bud is an 8 year old B&G Macaw. His "parents" are desperate. He is plucking his feathers and mutilating himself. They have no idea what to do, so they asked for help. They were advised to take the bird to a good avian vet for a comprehensive examination to include checks for heavy metal poisoning, nutritional deficiencies and known bird diseases IMMEDIATELY. It also turns out that Mom used to have the bird prior to her marriage--they spent a lot of time together. Then the new hubby took some of that time and the bird was admittedly neglected. His present diet consisted of a parrot mix with a very heavy sunflower content. Here the advice, in addition to the visit to the vet is to adjust his diet to include a healthy pellet and fresh fruit/veggie mix and to provide Bud with an emotional support structure of regular attention consisting of the interaction to which he was used. This is not to say that Bud should have exclusivity. It is meant to say that he deserves and requires interaction with his flock. He requires to be a part of the family and a commitment to satisfy his emotional needs.

Lesson #1: Our birds are almost exclusively flock birds. As flock birds they have the emotional and instinctive need to be a part of the flock. They are ENTITLED to it.

Lesson #2: If they are deprived of the feeling of "flock cohesiveness" they will become insecure, frustrated and unhappy. We are their flock!

Lesson #3: A plucking or self mutilating bird should see a qualified avian vet.

Lesson #4: There are no short cuts where the bird's dietary requirements are concerned.

Plucking is one of the most serious concerns for care givers of parrots. It is presently assumed that at least 75% of all plucking incidents are based on medical or dietary causes. In order to aid those with plucking birds, a comprehensive and well written website (www.featherpicking.com) with Pam Clark as one of the primary contributors has been established. Anyone with a plucking bird is encouraged to visit there.

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One Person Bird

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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We've all encountered it, maybe you even live with one - the one person bird. This is a bird who is overly bonded to one person and either shuns, or outright attacks everyone else. Stereotypes say it's typical of African Greys or Cockatoos or ----- (fill in the blanks), but actually it shouldn't be typical of any species, and you can see it in any bird, if he hasn't been properly socialized and nurtured. It's another problem behavior that we create and inadvertently (or sometimes deliberately) reinforce. Why? Human ego!! We think it's cute when our birdie buddy bites our mate, or chases our mother-in-law around on the floor. We think it proves what a good bird parent we are - that our bird loves us SO much that he only wants to be with us.

Sadly, what happens is you drastically narrow your bird's world when he can't be sociable with other people (or birds), and is dependent only on you. What happens, though, when you're not around? One of the main reasons birds come to my adoption program is because of these "love triangles." When you allow this situation to escalate, often you either get a divorce or give up your bird! You also add stress to your bird's life. He's afraid of the vet, the groomer, the bird sitter - so every exam, wing clip, or boarding trip becomes a major ordeal, creating unnecessary stress for your bird, and you. He doesn't want anyone else to feed him, step him up, or play with him. His world grows ever smaller and smaller.

It starts in the nursery. When I was handfeeding babies, all the birds played together (supervised, of course) on one big playstand, so they learned to interact with one another. The handfeeding was done alternately by two or three of us. I handed babies to everyone who wanted to peek thru the windows into the nursery, so they could meet lots of people. When someone adopted a baby, I told them to hand the baby to everyone who came into their home, and make sure all family members spent time with the youngster daily. This early start on good socialization is vital in having an emotionally healthy bird. Continuing the process of meeting new people and going new places throughout the bird's life ensures a stable, well rounded birdie.

I hear stories from clients about breeders and pet shops telling people to isolate their new baby from everyone until he's more mature and has established a bond with them first. Birds are capable of forming many bonds, throughout their lives. I handfed Amber from 2 ½ months old, and we have a very close bond - we're "mates"!! But throughout Amber's life I've introduced her to many people and birds, and she goes out "socially" quite often (you'll always see her at the Portland Blues Festival). So when Joseph came into my life almost 2 years ago, Amber readily accepted him, and they now have their own very special bond. Almost anyone can come into my house and step Amber up, or at least pet her. She gets protective at times, but she usually doesn't feel too threatened in most situations by new people (except when she's hormonal!)

What can you do if you already have a one person bird? Try to gradually broaden his world by introducing him to new people and taking him out for rides other than to the vet or groomer. If you have a problem within your own family, have the "disliked" person work with the bird slowly, and preferably away from the cage and from you, in a neutral room. He can start by just sitting by the bird, talking softly and offering treats by hand. Having this person do the feeding and the letting out of the cage can sometimes help. Do not laugh or in any way encourage the bird's negative behavior. Don't "rescue" - if you run to retrieve the bird every time he bites your husband, you're teaching him that husband-biting is the way to get back to you! Play games - pass the bird around the room to each family member, share treats together, or play ball or peekaboo. Try to include the bird in family activities by having the cage or playstand in a central area. Be sure all members interact consistently, and work on building trust. Working with the bird away from home can help as it eliminates territoriality.

Don't let your ego get in the way of your bird's social adjustment. We want our birds to love us as much as we love them, but nothing's sadder than a bird who's whole world only involves the two of you - it's unfair and unkind in the long run, no matter how cute and flattering it seems in the beginning.

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Parrot Sensitivity to Emotion

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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Parrots are highly empathic - simply put, they feel our emotions. Some might call this statement a classic case of anthropomorphism, but I guarantee you, they're people who don't live with birds, as all of us who do have no doubts about our companions capacity for empathy! This is an important factor in dealing with all aspects of sharing your home with a parrot, as it directly affects behavior and is a common undercurrent in behavioral problems. If you feel anger towards a bird, he's going to pick up on it.

In many cases where I'm called in to do a behavioral consultation, I find the underlying problems usually begin with that's going on with the humans in the household. I often tell people they need to lower their energy before picking up a high strung or agitated bird. It's also why some people are "macaw people, " some "Amazon people" and some "Cockatoo people" - some human personalities just mix better with certain bird personalities - all because of the bird's ability to pick up on and reflect our moods. I often find feather pluckers are living in high stress homes and like small children, the constant yelling and emotional outbursts cause the bird to self-mutilate, just as it can cause a young child to withdraw inside himself.

I remember the first time I watched "Paulie" - although it's meant to be an amusing family film, I found parts of it so incredibly sad that I openly wept as I watched it. Amber, my Blue and Gold Macaw, climbed down off her playstand, waddled over and climbed up my chair, into my lap. She touched the tears rolling down my face with her tongue, then gently rubbed her cheek up and down my cheek. I know she was trying to comfort me. Another time, in Arizona, I was laying on my bed deeply depressed, when a cockatiel I'd hand-fed "Peaches," came over, turned his head sideways to look at me, then laid his little head on the pillow right next to mine. I was so touched.

It's ironic that this topic was on my writing schedule at this time, as I've been dealing with some bad news the past two weeks about my Dad in Arizona. He fell and became paralyzed and was taken to the hospital, where it turned out he has cancer that's spread from his spine throughout his body. So the past two weeks, I've been very tense, and worried and upset - and very short tempered. Amber has been a complete brat during these same two weeks - screaming, being nippy, and not wanting to step up off her playstand. Outwardly, it would be easy to get agitated and wonder why Amber is picking NOW to be so out of sorts, but I know she's simply reacting to my own roller coaster emotions. Clients often tell me their bird started biting "for no reason" - I always look more closely at what's going on with the humans at these times and I usually find the answer. I used to be a psychotherapist and I'll tell you, those skills come in handy as a bird behaviorist!

So, if your bird suddenly starts behaving differently, look at your own emotions and consider what problems may be going on in the household. Then, take a deep breath, have some patience and understanding, and sit down for a nice calming cuddle session with your buddy!

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Plucking

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

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My baby is plucking! One of the most disturbing and troubling problems with pet parrots! We love our feathered kids, we want them happy and healthy. When we see them pluck, we are concerned, frustrated and confused. In order to stop them from either pulling their feathers or biting them off, you must get to the root of the problem. It is wise to proceed by process of elimination.

There are two causes for this behavioral problem:

- Medical (including diet)
- Psychological

An immediate vet visit for a full examination including a blood chemistry panel must be the first action taken. Make sure the bird gets a proper diet.

This dissertation is not meant to identify specific medical or dietary problems. That type of information is readily available, not least from an experienced avian veterinarian.

Potential medical and dietary causes are the relatively easy part; in essence, here we deal in tangibles. Then there are the intangibles. We must realize that the condition in all probability is caused by distress, by some kind of emotional trauma. We must understand that our feathered kids are emotionally and psychologically more complicated than any other pet we are likely to encounter. While some of the outstanding behaviorists are beginning to get some insight, all of us, some more than others, are still largely in the dark. We are left coming to conclusions based largely on their behavior and our reactions. While we visit a psychiatrist or psychologist if we acknowledge our own problems, the bird has no such recourse. What is more, any communication is entirely limited to our observations leading to subjective conclusions. Our feathered kids are simply acting out while we are obliged to watch, most of the time helplessly. The situation becomes complicated by our inability to fathom the depth of the bird's problem. We know it is smart, sensitive and perceptive; much more than most animals, but we really don't have a way to work ourselves into it's emotional environment and psyche. So again, the process of elimination becomes our only, albeit very limited ally.

At the very least we should consider some obvious causes, such as, the location of the cage, the amount of sleep he or she gets, the humidity of their environment, any changes that have been brought about, even in our own lives. Has the time we devote to them changed? In frequency? In intensity? In quality? Do we have trouble with the kids? Have we changed the color of our favorite shirt? Have we decided to change contact lenses for glasses, or vice versa? Has grandma moved in or grandpa moved out? Did we add another animal to our family flock? Has our baby figured out that plucking will get our attention? Jealousy, while a very human trait, is very much a part of their emotional makeup, as well. These are merely a few of the potential causes which we can intellectually identify. How many others are there only comprehensible to the bird?

We must acknowledge that we are very much on alien turf. We are sharing our life with a species whose perceptual scope may be far out of the realm of our understanding. As an evolved species, literally coming from another world, our feathered babies are uniquely equipped for their habitat and "lifestyle." Is it a wonder that they sometimes find ours distressing?

It is interesting to note that feather pluckers are found among birds raised in captivity a lot more often than among those caught in the wild. And that despite the fact that stress levels among birds taken from their natural habitat and placed in captivity of any kind must be enormous. The

inevitable question then is: What do those birds have that ours don't? The answer most likely has to do with the difference in rearing, an interrupted natural, emotional development and a resulting sense of insecurity. When we remember that our feathered kids are only a few generations away from their natural "lifestyle" and that all their evolved instincts and perceptions are still fully intact, it is entirely possible that they may be ill prepared for this life and all of it's consequences. They are stuck with a bunch of humans and their so very human imperfections. Furthermore, they cannot remove themselves from a disturbing environment for which we sometimes seem to be unable to prepare them.

This is not to say that they are "unhappy." While happy with all its implications is a very human condition, it may mean something totally different to our feathered kids. Maybe for them happiness is a grape, or a cuddle, or Mozart's Clarinet Quartett played by Benny Goodman. Maybe their sense of happiness is as fleeting as their attention span and maybe it is as visceral as that of a 4-year-old. Maybe it is interchangeable with being content, being left alone, not being left alone, a place on mommy's shoulder--or simply a sense of security or trust on their terms.

Putting a collar on a plucking bird should only be as a last resort, mostly in the case of serious self mutilation and after lengthy consultations with a qualified avian vet AND a behaviorist. While some vote for collars, many others do not. No one can imagine the emotional impact of a collar on an already stressed bird. Collars, in most cases, represent an attempt at a "quick fix" and "quick fixes" have no place in our relationships with our feathered babies, regardless of the rationale. The same applies to drugs.

The best we can do is to keep loving them, plucking or not!

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Quick Fixes and Why They Don't Work

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor

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Over the years, many different theories have evolved regarding parrot behavior and many different techniques have been tried in an effort to change some of those behaviors. The first behavioral trials involved techniques proven successful in dog training. Now, we've come to a place where techniques similar to those used with young children are often employed. The problem is, parrots are not dogs, and they're not human children - they're parrots, unique unto themselves. Our psittacine companions are highly intelligent, extremely empathetic and empathic and very sensitive emotionally. They do not comprehend cause and effect logic well.

Though most birds living with humans now are domestically bred hand raised babies, at heart they're still wild animals, with a lot of wild instincts guiding them. Problems arise when these very smart, very loving wild animals come to live in the artificial environment of a cage in our homes. Proper guidance in early stages is vital in helping birds learn to adapt to this world we've created for them, and lack of nurturing often leads to problems down the road. Screaming, biting, feather plucking, and "running wild" in the home are some of the most frequently seen problems that arise. These can be frustrating things for even the most loving and tolerant bird parent. 25 years ago, when I got my first bird, I was told to deal with problems by covering the cage, banging on it, screaming loudly at the bird, or squirting her with a spray bottle. I tried these things a few times (Hey, I didn't know any better at the time), but quickly realized nothing was happening as far as effecting behavioral change. What I did notice was an Amazon parrot who seemed confused or got extremely angry when I tried those things - dubbed "Quick Fixes." Amazingly, these methods are still recommended by some breeders and behaviorists.

I have a few clients who still stubbornly cling to these methods, insisting they have no alternative, but my question is - "If these techniques work so well, why do you have to keep repeating them?!" Quick fixes can sometimes appear to work by temporarily distracting the bird, but the solution doesn't last long. Often, the problem becomes worse as the bird becomes more angry and confused. Why don't they work? All interaction with companion parrots is based on trust. Trust is the only thing that's proven effective in human/parrot interaction.

The problem with quick fixes is many of them destroy the trust we work so hard to build. They're based more on fear and intimidation tactics, which can totally wipe out the bond of trust. Yelling at a bird is perceived as an invitation to scream back - who can be loudest? Covering the cage is confusing - "Is It bedtime?" "What's going on?" Banging on the cage makes them fearful and angry. A cage is a bird's territory and sanctuary. Parrots are prey animals, not predators, so an "attack" on their territory is an attack on them. Squirting with water is also confusing - "Is it bath time?" and can cause birds to develop a fear of bathing. I know birds who've been squirted as discipline who run as fast as they can to get away and hide when they see a squirt bottle. Effective behavioral change in parrots is accomplished much more effectively with positive reinforcement of "good" behaviors and ignoring negative ones. Punishment doesn't work well, due to the lack of understanding the cause and effect. The problem with quick fixes is that the cause of the problem is not being addressed, so no permanent change is possible, and as I mentioned earlier, it may exacerbate the problems even more. Just remember, aggression begets more aggression.

So, forget the quick fixes and learn to recognize that's causing the problem, so you can effectively change the behavior with positive reinforcement and guidance.

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Spring Fever

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

It's that time of year again--flowers are blooming, robins are nesting, bees are buzzing--and your sweet companion baby bird is suddenly moody and unpredictable. "Oh no, What do I do? My baby is turning mean!" Luckily it's not a sign of a "good bird gone bad," or an indication that you messed up as a bird parent--it's simply the raging hormones of adolescence. (Remember your own hormone filled youth?)

It starts around March and often lasts until June, when things tend to even out again. The good news is that once your "teenager" reaches sexual maturity the problem generally resolves itself. Sexual maturity occurs between approximately 2 to 7 years in hookbills, depending on species.

There's a lot of myths about this tumultuous stage. A couple of my favorites--"You must discipline him-show him who's boss or you'll have problems later?" or the ever popular "You must get a mate!" What you really need to do is understand that this is part of normal development--be patient, supportive, and understanding. Now is definitely the time to ignore much of the negative behaviors and give lots of praise for the positive ones. Don't overreact to the occasional nip or loud squawking--this will only create more problems down the road. It's best at this time to avoid sexually stimulating interaction, such as petting under the wings or tail. Recognize signs of your bird getting upset or over stimulated and let your buddy be by himself when he starts getting over-amped. Now is not the time to work on learning a new trick!

Recognizing "spring fever" for what it is--simply, a transitional hormonal phase young birds go through in adolescence--will greatly ease their stress, as well as yours during this time of year.

A note on egg laying: Some single sexually mature hens will lay eggs and want to "mother" them. (Hey--they are infertile--there's no documented immaculate conception in birds! Also, if it lays an egg, it's a girl! I still get calls insisting "my male bird just laid an egg!") Leave eggs in the cage 3-4 weeks and let "mom" do her thing, removing them only leads to continued egg laying, which can cause serious calcium depletion. Feed her plenty of calcium rich food, like kale, broccoli, and cheese. She'll ultimately get board with them and then they can be removed and everyone's happy!

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Stimulation

by Gudrun Maybaum

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We all do whatever it takes to have a healthy, happy bird. We buy the best food, clean, cook, read books about the right diet, cages, play stands, etc. And while those are all very important to a birds well-being, another factor is stimulation.

In nature, a bird would be stimulated from the time he wakes up until he goes to sleep. There is always something to do: looking for food and water, eating, drinking, playing, preening, pruning trees, etc.

At our homes, we try to give our birds a peaceful and trusting life. To add the stimulation a bird would have in nature, a family member would have to carry it around all its waking time, which we know is not practical.

Another possibility is for the bird to live with other birds, which provides companionship and a playmate. Often though, those birds that grow up in human company only don't want to interact with other birds.

How can we blend the necessary daily stimulation into our peaceful home environment, especially if our birds don't interact with each other? Even if they do, they still need something else to do. A busy bird is a happy bird. So, we can carry the bird around all the time or let it chew up our houses and furniture.

But a much better way is to provide different toys, particularly those that can be chewed up and destroyed easily. Often simple colored chew blocks are enough, but color is important. Of the chew blocks I provide for my birds, the natural-colored ones are usually left over.

Most birds have a color preference. My congo grey likes orange wood, my cockatoo goes first for the green and purple wood. They also need some toys that give them something to figure out and some just for the fun of making noise. The toys that are not so easy to destroy become boring after a while, so they need to be changed. Normally, if they are given back after a period of time, they are interesting again. So try exchanging them every once in a while.

Toys should not only be in the cage, but at different places like the stand or play gym. I have seen cages that were so packed with toys the bird would not even go in the cage anymore because it could hardly move around. The owner of this bird told me, "My bird does not play with its toys." More does not always mean better.

When you buy toys for your bird, look for things that could hurt it. While there are no 100% secure toys, we can avoid the more obvious dangers like non-stainless steel parts, which could lead to metal poisoning. Or parts (like open chains) the beak or toe can get caught in. I prefer sisal to cotton because it breaks easier, when it gets wrapped around a toe or leg, which some birds have developed into an art.

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The Towel Game

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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If you do much reading of bird magazines, or listen to behaviorists and trainers, you've probably heard reference to something called "The Towel Game." It sounds fairly self-explanatory and simple, even a little silly - but what exactly does it mean, and why is it so important? Whether I'm instructing a parent of a new baby, consulting with a client on a behavioral problem, or placing an adoption bird in a new home, it's something I constantly recommend to folks. Why? Because this simple exercise, done regularly, is one of the most powerful tools in dealing with companion parrots; second only to "The Step Up" in establishing trust and bonding with your bird.

As a groomer, I find that the majority of birds, upon first encounter, are quite fearful of towels. Why? As Sally Blanchard says, "There are NO predator towels in the wild!!" This is totally a human created fear. When birds are examined by the vet, or handled by the groomer, they are generally held in a towel to ease the process. Unfortunately, many birds are handled roughly when toweled. In addition, most birds only see towels for these "scary" procedures, so they quickly associate toweling with un-fun things being done to them! On the other hand, birds who've been raised from an early age playing "The Towel Game," rarely get stressed from a vet exam or grooming session (Provided, of course, that the handler uses gentle techniques!) The bottom line is, playing The Towel Game with ALL companion parrots provides interactive play fun for the two of you, increases your bond, and leads to a relatively stress-free experience whenever your bird is toweled by the vet or groomer.

So, what exactly is The Towel Game? Let's look first at natural parrot behavior. Remember, parrots are prey animals, not predators - that means they have a natural fear of being "swooped" down on from above and behind. I prefer to towel birds from the front - it's much less threatening, and you can always readjust the bird once inside the towel. Also, keep in mind that all interactions with parrots need to be both fun and trust-building. As much as possible, avoid anything that threatens the trust bond. Therefore, the easiest, least threatening way to play with a towel is to simply spread it out on the floor or bed, and bring your birdie over first to play ON it. Spread out some toys - play together, and have fun. Gradually, start picking up ends of the towel and play "peek-a-boo" - I've never met a birdie yet who doesn't love "peek-a-boo" games!

As you continue, start flipping ends of the towel up OVER the bird - ultimately, the bird should be totally comfortable with being entirely wrapped in the towel. Keep sessions short, give lots of verbal praise (and a few favorite treats!), and make sessions fun! I have many nervous or bitey clients who totally relax when I hold them gently in a towel and stroke the "special" spots on their faces and heads! Gentle toweling has never failed me yet with these birds.

I am always puzzled by clients who bring a bird for boarding, but don't want me to do a wing or nail trim, out of fear that the bird will then somehow "resent" me while he's boarding! I try to explain to them that gently toweling and grooming techniques have quite the opposite effect! Not only do the birds hold no resentments, but they're often asking for a kiss and cuddle right after their grooming! Why? Because, I make every effort to make the toweling/grooming experience as gentle and non-threatening as possible. I also hold them in the towel, before and after, talking gently to them and petting them.

Regular play sessions involving towel cuddling and "peek-a-boo" can work absolute wonders in increasing your bird's trust and comfort level when it comes time to be toweled for exams and grooming. But, in addition, I don't think there's too many games more fun than mutual "peek-a-boo" or more endearing than a birdie totally wrapped with only his face exposed, with eyes closed, and cooing softly for your attention!

So, whether your parrot is a baby or a "second-hand rose." Make The Towel Game a regular part of your play sessions - you'll both feel happier and more secure in future interactions.

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Toweling

by Bill Kiesselbach, Avian Enthusiast

E-mail: bill@incentiveman.com Reprinted with permission.

A WELL-TOWELED BIRD IS A HAPPY BIRD!

Every caregiver of a parrot, large or small must be prepared for the occasion when the bird needs to be restrained. It may be to get him out of the cage quickly, it may be for reinforcement during training, to clip wings, toenails or to grind the beak. In all cases the only way to restrain a bird without trauma or injury is to towel him. The vet does it all the time.

Toweling is relatively easy and won't affect your relationship with your bird. The secret is not to let him see your hands (That is another reason not to use gloves: they look too much like hands).

How to go about it:

Toweling is most effectively accomplished in a confined area. If it is in a room, try to do it in a corner. If it is done in the cage, you may need to remove perches and toys first. A darkened room helps because it will momentarily "inactivate" the bird. If a bird is very docile, you may do it directly from your hand.

The size of the towel should depend on the size of the bird--larger is not necessarily better because you'll lose control of the towel or lose the bird in it... Once the bird is in position, drape the towel over him and get control of his head, preferably along the jaws with your thumb and index finger. Use your right hand if you are right handed and your left if you are left handed. Once you have his head, slide one side of the towel underneath him and wrap him in it so the wings are pinioned against his body. Holding on to his head you can now make sure that his head is clear so that he can breathe and has the opportunity to bite the towel. Remember, the towel is the culprit and neither you nor your hands.

If you are restraining a larger bird, a good way to totally control him is the "three finger hold." You use your index finger, your thumb and your middle finger by putting your index finger over the top of his head, while the thumb and middle finger are positioned along his jaws on either side.

It is VERY important to remember not to exert pressure on the chest by grabbing the bird gently around the wings. Pressure on the chest can impede the breathing and inflict serious injury. Usually the towel represents a sufficient cushion.

A tip: toweling gets easier with practice. The time to do that is when you can do it playfully and not in an emergency situation. After the bath wrapping the bird in a towel is a way, or playing hide and seek on the couch with a towel is another. After a while the towel becomes a "friend" and not a "foe."

It is important to be decisive and quick about it. You should not have to chase the bird or get yourself into the position to keep retrying to towel him. The longer it takes, the more traumatic and difficult it gets. Also, he who hesitates gets bitten (Garry A. Gallerstein, D.V.M.)! When you get ready to release the bird, release the head last--even the tamest bird will bite when frightened.

As in everything you do with your bird be confident, gentle and affectionate. Nothing will make your bird more nervous than your very own nervousness. You'll be amazed how much easier it is when you are sure of yourself.

I had to towel Dixie the sulphur crested 'Too twice a day for a month and a half to medicate him. After a while, he would come out of his cage and sit down on the floor waiting for the towel. I am not sure that he absolutely loved it, but he did not fear it and he did not associate it directly with me. Sweetum the CAG, on the other hand hates the towel. When he is pouty and refuses to come out of the cage for our daily interaction session, all I have to do is show him the towel and he'll be out of the cage like a flash. After that interlude, he'll step up like an angel, inside the cage and out--literally for weeks, until the next time... It is important to mention, that he never holds the toweling against me.

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Trick Training Companion Parrots

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

Tricks performed by cute little birdies - who can resist!? Although I've always admired and enjoyed them, I never aspired to teach my birds tricks - it seemed somehow demeaning or something (Oh, I sound like such a snob!) But, despite MY lack of interest, I noticed something over the years - my parrots would teach themselves tricks!!! I never prompted them or gave cues - they just did them when they felt the urge, and both the bird, myself, and anyone else observing seemed to derive great pleasure from the stunts! Amber, my Blue and Gold Macaw, did her first impromptu "performance" at 1 year of age, shortly after our move to the Northwest. I was introducing her to a group of folks, and she was hanging upside down by her feet (as she is fond of doing), when she tilted her head all the way back and said "Hello!" Everyone, including me, was surprised and laughed, and clapped with enthusiasm!

Then there was "Peaches," the cockatiel, who love to whistle, being a good little boy 'tiel. Well, one day, I was singing "The Mexican Hat Dance" (Something I have never done before or since!) and Peaches thought it was cool! He took the tune, added his own twists and every morning stood at full attention, wings out, neck stretched, on his tiptoes - and did a full rendition of what became known as "The Peaches Song."

I never really gave tricks any thought, though, until the past year or so when my other half, Joseph, (aka "Mr. Bird Lady!) took a keen interest in trick training after seeing a performance at a bird expo. Before we got together two and a half years ago, Joseph, was a reptile guy, spending his time with 6 foot boa constrictors and 2 foot lizards. He had never experienced birds until meeting me, and quickly became smitten with Amber and the rest of the bird kids. He has been a great student, proving to be a keen observer and showing wonderful insight into bird behavior in general. His playful nature appealed to our parrots, and he brought out their playful sides, with them seemingly anxious to please him. He was excited to meet noted trick trainer, Tani Robar, and spoke to her at length about bird training. We purchased one of her videos and began studying up on trick training. As a behaviorist, I use a variety of techniques in behavioral rehabilitation, including diversions with things a parrot enjoys - such as tricks! I began using trick training more and more in treating problem behaviors, finding quick success with certain birds. I found it particularly helpful for young birds, just starting to act out in inappropriate ways, as opposed to other birds already grounded in years of behavioral problems.

Whether you want to use trick training to deal with problem behaviors (such as screaming, biting, plucking, etc.) or just for fun, there are some basic guidelines to keep in mind:

- It must be TOTALLY fun for both the bird and the human!!
- It needs to be looked at NOT as another task to be done, but rather turning it from a "job" into a "joy!"
- Tricks need to fall within a bird's basic abilities and aptitudes, in other words, don't expect to teach "play dead" to a bird who's absolutely terrified of being upside down!
- Use a combination of verbal commands and physical cues when teaching the trick. Birds are very visual and do well with having you demonstrate and guide them physically in the beginning. The verbal command reinforces the physical / visual cue.
- Reward compliance with both a small food treat (something special, like a pine nut or ¼ a peanut, or pumpkin seed) and unbridled, enthusiastic verbal praise! Our parrots enjoy special treats, of course, but even more so, they love to please us and make us smile!

- Training sessions need to be in a neutral area, away from cages, playstands, and other birds or distractions.
- Practice sessions for short periods - doing three 5 minute sessions per day goes a lot further than one 15 minute session.
- NEVER reprimand or criticize! This is all about FUN! Just be patient and keep guiding gently.
- ALWAYS end sessions on an up note, after compliance of a favorite trick, never give up and stop because the bird can't do the trick. Instead, pick one he CAN do to wind up with.

Trick training can be a great way to strengthen the bond between you and your parrot. So, observe your bird's normal antics (and self-taught tricks) and pick something to turn into a trick on cue. I promise you'll both have a lot of fun performing together - and you may just find a decrease in problem behaviors along the way!

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Recipes

All Natural Air Freshener

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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If you like your house to smell nice, but don't want to use potentially toxic commercial air freshener sprays, here's a natural alternative that smells great & is totally bird safe. (Remember, scented candles, potpourri, incense & essential oils can all be potentially toxic to birds, as well).

Fill a small saucepan ½ full with water. Toss in a cinnamon stick, a Tb of cloves, tsp of rosemary, & slice of orange and/or lime (with peel).

Bring to a boil, then simmer uncovered for ½ hour or so. You can get creative by adding fresh grated ginger, fresh spearmint or peppermint leaves, or some nutmeg and allspice for variation. Your house will smell great & your birds will be safe! It's especially nice around the holidays. You can put it in a spray bottle & spritz the air, or leave the pan on the stove & add a little water, then re-simmer over the next few days to continue keeping your house sweet!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 04-01-2001.

Amber's Favorite Pasta Breakfast

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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2 cups assorted dry whole grain pasta (rigatoni, shells, elbows, spaghetti, etc)
½ cup brown rice
½ cup oatmeal (not instant)
½ cup popcorn (unpopped - soaked overnight)
½ cup pearl barley
½ cup lentils
½ cup split peas
4 - 6 sticks cinnamon
1 cup chopped unsulphured dried fruit (papaya, pineapple, raisins, apricots)
1 cup chopped nuts (walnuts, almonds, brazil nuts, pecans)
2 - 3 Tb organic peanut butter

Put popcorn, lentils & split peas in large pot, cover with 2 inches water, bring to boil, cover & simmer 1 hour. Add all other ingredients (except fruit, nuts & pasta), cover with water as needed, bring to boil, then cover & simmer 1 hour. Stir occasionally. Add in pasta, fruit & nuts, bring to boil, cover & simmer 20 minutes or until water is absorbed. Stir in peanut butter & serve!

Makes a HUGE batch, so freeze 3 days worth in containers, defrost & microwave 1 - 2 minutes before serving. Stir well & watch for hot spots.

High in fat with all the nuts & peanut butter, so good for macaws (& African Greys). Don't serve too often to Amazons or other "tubbies". Can add in ½ package frozen veggies last 5 min. of cooking time, if desired, or serve with fresh veggies.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 06-24-2001.

Beanie Breakfast

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

1 cup pinto beans
1 cup navy beans
(soak both overnight)

½ cup diced onions
4 cloves garlic, chopped
3 - 4 carrots, diced

Water to cover 1 - 2 inches

Bring to boil, cover & simmer approx. 2 hours, or until tender (almost)

Add in:

1 cup organic 7 grain cereal, uncooked
½ cup brown rice, uncooked
½ cup whole flax seeds
2 cinnamon sticks
½ tsp anise seeds

Water to cover ½ - 1 inch

Bring to boil again, cover & simmer another 30 - 40 minutes, or until water is absorbed. Mash together, add in enough organic flakes (oat, wheat, barley) to make crumbly. Store 3-4 days worth in fridge, freeze remainder in 3 - 4 day portions. To serve, microwave 1 minute, stir & check for hot spots. Add in any powdered supplements prior to serving. Add to chopped fresh veggies/fruit and enjoy!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 02-11-2001.

Birdie Granola

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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6 cups rolled oats
2 cups rice bran
1 cup sesame seeds
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup hulled sunflower seeds
1 cup hulled pumpkin seeds
1 cup chopped unsulfured dried apricots
½ cup olive oil
½ cup pure maple syrup
2 tsp. powdered cinnamon

Mix oil, syrup, & cinnamon. Pour into dry ingredients. Mix well, 'till evenly coated. Spread onto large cookie sheet or shallow baking pan. Bake at 250 degrees for approximately 90 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes.

Store in airtight containers. Keeps quite awhile, though you may want to cut recipe in ½ for just a few birds. Makes a great snack, but high in fat & sugar, so don't overdo it!! If you're lucky, your birdies may even share with you! For variation, try other chopped nuts & dried fruits (almonds, filberts, peanuts, pecans, raisins, papaya, cranberries, banana chips, apple, etc.) Use natural, preferably organic ingredients. Enjoy!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 06-17-2001.

Cream of Wheat Birdie Bars

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

- Mix Cream of Wheat per instructions, adding powdered cinnamon, but NO sugar!
- Once cereal is cooked, add in crushed nuts, raisins, crushed banana chips, trial mix, etc.
- Add in desired supplements - I usually use protein powder and "Carrot Essence" (Organic dehydrated carrot powder.)
- Add organic flake mix (barley, wheat and oats) to provide additional texture and nutrition.
- Spread evenly in a small square pan, about 1-1/2 to 2" thick. Cover and refrigerate 1/2 hour to 1 hour until it gels firmly.
- Slice into cubes and serve!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 12-17-2000.

Feathered Friends Fruit Bread

By Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

2 cups whole wheat flour
2 cups rolled oats
4 tsp baking powder
1 cup raisins, currants, dried cranberries (mixed)
2 eggs (with shells, washed and crushed)
1 ¼ cup milk
6 TBL olive oil

Preheat oven to 375. Grease 2 pans (8 or 9 inch layers, square pans or loaf pans). Stir dry ingredients together. Beat eggs and milk, then beat in oil. Stir into dry mixture and pour into pans. Bake 20 minutes. Cool, crumble into chunks and serve! Refrigerate leftovers up to 1 week.

Be creative: add chopped nuts (walnuts, pecans, almonds, brazil nuts, etc), approx. 1 cup to above recipe.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 01-28-2001.

Juliet's Veggie-Cornbread Muffins

From Wendy - One of our subscribers! She makes these for special treats for her Macaw. Thanks, Wendy!

1 pkg cornbread mix
1 can low salt creamed corn
2 eggs (shells optional)
1 cup frozen mixed vegetables, thawed.

Line muffin tins with paper liners. Mix all ingredients together. If you use the egg shells, be sure to crunch them up very well.

Spoon mixture into muffin tins. Bake as directed on the cornbread mix package, or until done.

Juliet loves her muffins for part of her dinner. They freeze well.

Enjoy

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 08-05-2001.

Juliet's Capellini Cakes

3 Tablespoons Italian Bread Crumbs
8 Ounces Cooked, Cooled Capellini Pasta
2 Tablespoons Olive Oil
2 Large Garlic Cloves, Minced Or Chopped
1/2 Cup Frozen Vegetables (Use Your Bird's Favorite)
3 Eggs
3 Tablespoons Grated Romano Cheese
1/2-1 Cup Tomato Sauce

Preheat oven 300 Degrees. Fill muffin tins with paper muffin cups. Dust bottoms with bread crumbs. Saute garlic in olive oil and add To Capellini along with frozen vegetables and toss well.

In a mixing bowl, beat eggs about 1 Minute and add cheese, then mix with pasta. Fill muffin cups with mixture and bake 30 Minutes. Spoon the tomato sauce over each muffin, return to oven for 10 Minutes. Cool on rack. Freeze unused muffins for future use.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 07-22-2001.

Macaw Morning Muffins

From Wendy - One of our subscribers! She makes these for special treats for her Macaw. Thanks, Wendy!

3/4 Cup Unsweetened Applesauce
2 1/4 Cups Whole Wheat Flour
1 Tablespoon Cinnamon
2 Teaspoons Baking Soda
1/2 Cup Shredded Coconut
1/2 Cup Raisins
2 Cups Grated Carrots
1 Med To Large Apple, Cored and Grated Plus Peel
8 Ounces Crushed Unsweetened Canned Pineapple, Drained
1/2 Cup Walnuts Or Pecans
3 Eggs
1/2 Cup Canola Oil
1 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract

Sift or mix together Flour, Cinnamon, Baking Soda In Large Bowl. Add Coconut, Raisins, Carrots, Apple, Pineapple and Nuts and Stir To Combine.

In separate bowl, whisk Eggs with oil, Applesauce, and Vanilla. Pour this into dry Ingredients and Blend Well. May Use Hands.

Spoon Batter into Cupcake tins lined with paper muffin cups. Fill each cup to the brim. Bake in a Preheated 350 Degree oven 35 Minutes or until a toothpick or cake tester inserted into center of a muffin comes out clean.

Cool muffins in pan 10 Minutes, then turn out and finish cooling on a rack. Freeze Muffins and thaw as needed.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 07-22-2001.

Ozzy's Eclectus Bread

(High in Protein, Vitamin C, and Calcium)

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Counselor

Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

- 1 1/2 cups Organic Whole Corn Meal
- 1 1/2 cups Organic Whole Wheat Flour
- 1 Tb. Baking Powder
- 1/2 cup Protein Powder (unflavored)
- 1 1/2 cups Whole Grain Dry Cereal (Flakes, O's, etc.)
- 3 Eggs with Crushed Shells
- 1 1/2 Tb. Canola Oil
- 3/4 cup Milk (more or less depending on consistency)
- 1 Baked Yam/Sweet Potato - Mashed
- 2 Raw Carrots, Finely Grated (unpeeled if organic, peeled if not.)
- 2 Tb. Organic Peanut Butter
- 1/2 cup Crushed Walnut Pieces
- 1/3 bag Frozen Corn

Mix dry ingredients well; add in eggs, shells, oil, milk, peanut butter, nuts and veggies and stir well. Dump into greased (with canola oil) loaf pan and bake at 350 degrees for approximately 40 minutes or until fork comes out clean.

Makes a very heavy, dense, moist bread. Store in container in refrigerator up to five days). Big guys like hunks, little guys like it crumbled. Enjoy!

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 11-06-2000.

Parrot Pesto Pasta

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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2 - 4 oz. Whole grain spiral pasta
½ - 1 TB flax seed oil
½ - 1 TB olive oil
1 - 2 sprigs fresh basil, chopped
1 - 2 cloves fresh garlic, chopped
1 ripe tomato, diced
½ carrot, grated
1 - 2 TB low fat & low salt cheese, grated

Boil pasta in water until done, but still firm - "al dente". Drain pasta. Mix flax seed oil, olive oil, basil, & garlic and pour over hot pasta, mixing well. Add tomato & carrot. Top with grated cheese. Pasta should be warm, but not too hot [no crop burns!] Serve, and watch your birdies inhale! Amber loves pasta in many forms, but this is one of her favorites, by far! Leftovers can be briefly warmed up & served the next day. You can vary amounts depending on number of birds, and your birds' taste preferences. Good source of essential fatty acids, Vitamin A, & protein.

This article originally appeared in the Your Parrot Place Newsletter 04-29-2001.

Peanut Butter Bird Muffins

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
Phone: (503) 771-BIRD

½ cup organic peanut butter
¼ cup canola oil
1 TB molasses (unsulfured)
2 eggs, with crushed shells
1 cup soy milk
3 cups rolled oats
½ cup whole wheat flour
1 tsp. baking soda
1 tsp. baking powder

Stir together peanut butter, oil, & molasses.

Mix in eggs & soy milk.

In separate bowl, combine oats, flour, baking soda, & baking powder.

Add dry ingredients to peanut butter mixture & stir well.

Spoon into oiled muffin tin.

Bake at 350 degrees (preheated oven) 15 - 20 minutes, or until toothpick comes out clean.

Makes 12 regular muffins, or 24 mini muffins. (I prefer the minis) Fun treat for all birds! Crumble for little guys, give hunks to big birds.

Store in airtight containers, in fridge preferably. If you only have 1 or 2 small birds, you may want to cut recipe in ½. High in protein, and REALLY tasty!!

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Pellet Balls

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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2 cups Harrison's Pellets, ground up
1 cup Harrison's Mash
2 TB Bee Pollen
2 TB Hemp seed
2 TB Kelp powder
2 - 4 jars organic baby food (like carrot or sweet potato)
4 whole eggs, with shells washed and crushed
+ organic apple juice, enough to make a pasty mix.

Mix all ingredients together. You may need to keep adding juice so mix doesn't dry out. Scoop a bit into your hands and form into balls, about 1 -2 inches thick. Powdering hands with cornmeal will keep mix from sticking to your hands. Place on lightly greased cookie sheet and bake at 325 for 20 - 30 minutes. Makes about 120 - 160 balls. Keep a few days worth in fridge and freeze the rest.

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Parrot Diseases

Aspergillus and Aspergillosis

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant

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You've probably heard of Aspergillus and Aspergillosis, but may not be clear on what these terms mean. First, "Aspergillus" is the name of a common fungus that is naturally present in the environment. For most birds (and people) it causes no problems, but if too many aspergillus organisms are around and your bird has a poor immune system, then the illness "Aspergillosis" sets in. It is often fatal, causing severe respiratory problems. It can be transmitted from birds to humans and vice versa.

Aspergillus spores can be airborne, and are often abundant in corn cob litter. In a damp environment, like we have here in the Northwest, the problem is even worse. I always advise against using this type of litter since it is such a breeding ground for all types of fungus, molds, and bacteria.

Once Aspergillosis has taken hold, the lungs and air sacs fill with large white masses, causing serious breathing problems and further sapping the bird's energy and immunity. The bird will wheeze, or you'll hear a clicking sound and often see tail bobbing when the bird's at rest. Sometimes there is discharge or crustiness around the nostrils. A low grade infection can show as itchiness, frayed feathers, peeling beak or black feather edging on the wings. There is a blood test for Aspergillosis and it should be part of your bird's annual checkup.

Treatment is tough - the fungus is hard to kill and because of the weak immune system, there's often secondary infections as well. Birds on poor diets and living in unsanitary conditions are much more prone to this disease. In dealing with the disease, it's important to improve the diet, feeding lots of fresh veggies, fruit and using whole food supplements.

Cleanliness also needs to be a top priority, with daily cage cleaning and scrubbing of food and water dishes, as well as perches and toys. Birds on antibiotics for bacterial infections are much more susceptible to Aspergillosis, as well as other fungal and yeast infections. I advise supplying probiotics to birds who are on antibiotics, as well as feeding yogurt and acidophilus. In addition, feed foods rich in Beta Carotene, as Vitamin A is important for good health of the respiratory tract and skin. Yams, carrots, broccoli, red peppers and apricots are all great, as are supplements like wheat grass and spirulina. Boosting your bird's immune system by supplying a diverse, broad spectrum diet, ensuring adequate rest and daily exercise, and keeping your bird's cage and supplies scrupulously clean will all help prevent this widespread fungus from grabbing hold in your bird. Don't forget the importance of regular "well bird" checkups every year, to catch any disease as early as possible, for the best success in treatment. Treating Aspergillosis with antifungal medications needs to be done under direction of an avian vet - it's not something to try and cure on your own!

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The Four P's - Part 1 Overview

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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This is the first of a five part series on deadly diseases affecting parrots. I'm referring to them as the four P's - Psittacosis, Polyoma, P.D.D. and P.B.F.D. - as all begin with "P" and are often confused and misunderstood.

This first part will be a general overview of the diseases; the next four parts will be an in-depth look at each one individually. I'll examine the causes, symptoms, diagnosis, prevention and possible treatments. Although healthy, well-fed, clean parrots, who aren't exposed to other birds, rarely contract any diseases, birds can already be infected when you acquire them, or can be exposed while at the vet, pet shop, bird sitters, bird club meetings, etc. Parrots, by nature, are masters at hiding any illness - it's necessary for survival in the wild, where an ill bird brings dangerous attention to the whole flock, thus putting everyone at risk for predator attack. This trait remains with parrots in our living rooms, which requires our becoming educated about diseases, and ever observant of our birds' behavior and appearance. With parrots, having a "wait and see" approach to health care can have deadly results, as well as putting others at risk.

All of the P's seem to be known by multiple names, which often causes confusion. In addition, the two often referred to by their acronyms - P.D.D. and P.B.F.D. - are frequently mixed up and interchanged, although the two diseases are vastly different.

Our first "P" - "Psittacosis," is also known as "Chlamydiosis," due to it's causative agent, an intercellular bacteria called "Chlamydia Psittaci." In non-parrot bird species, it's called "Ornithosis." Years ago, the disease was called simply, "Parrot Fever." It is one of the very few diseases transmittable between parrots and humans. Often carried by budgies, all parrots can become infected, though it's rare in lovebirds. It's a big concern with imported birds, which are routinely given the antibiotic, Chlortetracycline, prophylactically while in quarantine. Dirty aviaries with poor hygiene practices are a common source of infection.

The next "P" - "Polyoma," is an extremely infectious viral disease, primarily affecting baby parrots, although it is sometimes contracted by adults - particularly those on inadequate diets, with poor immune systems. Although all hookbill species are susceptible, caiques of all ages are more prone to this illness than other parrots. There is a vaccination available to protect your bird from this serious disease. When purchasing a new parrot, ask the shop or breeder if the bird has been vaccinated. (The more reputable ones are now doing so.)

The third "P" - "P.D.D.," is sometimes referred to as "P.P.D.D." or "P.P.D.S." All these initials stand for Psittacine Proventricular Dilation (Disorder, Disease, or Syndrome). It also used to be known as "Macaw Wasting Disease," as it was first observed in Macaws, who would lose weight rapidly, despite voracious eating, and literally starve to death. (I used to describe it to people as "birdie AIDS" due to this similarity to HIV disease in humans.) Despite this reference to macaws, all parrots are capable of contracting this deadly virus. It's not discussed as often as some of the other parrot diseases, but since it's a cruel and insidious killer, it's one you need to be aware of.

The last "P" - "P.B.F.D.," is often confused with P.D.D., but affects the bird's body entirely differently. P.B.F.D. stands for "Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease," probably the one name that's quite self explanatory! (Sometimes described as P.B.F.S. - "Psittacine Beak and Feather Syndrome.) First called "Cockatoo Syndrome," due to its prevalence in Cockatoos (especially Moluccans), it is now known to infect a variety of diverse hookbill species. Viral in origin, it affects parrots of all ages. Some birds will show no signs of illness, but are carriers of the disease - yet

another reason for annual vet check-ups, despite birds appearing "healthy" to the eye. Fortunately, there is a test for this virus that can (and should) be done during your "New Bird" or "Well Bird" exam.

So, four deadly diseases, all starting with "P," plus a whole bunch of other names and initials and confusion over "Syndromes," "Disorders" and "Diseases" - but the bottom line, no matter what name these four diseases go by, all can be fatal. Sometimes these illnesses kill quickly, other times they take years to slowly rob a parrot of his health and vitality. In other cases, infection may be mild, or there may be no signs of illness, but the bird is a deadly carrier. Better understanding of the bacteria and reliable tests for early diagnosis, as well as vaccines for some. Unfortunately, not much is yet available in the way of treatment for the viruses, though catching the bacterial Psittacosis early can sometimes result in a full cure (Birds can still remain infectious to others, however.) Early diagnosis of the three viral diseases can help prevent secondary infections and increase the overall quality of life, as well as the length possibly.

In the upcoming four parts, I'll delve more deeply into each disease, to give the full picture on what these diseases entail, and what you can do to prevent or identify diseases.

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Psittacosis (The Four P's – Part 2)

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"Psittacosis," Chlamydiosis," "Ornithosis," "Parrot Fever" - four names all meaning the same thing - a nasty bacterial infection, affecting all birds, including parrots, and also humans. It's tales of "Parrot Fever" years ago that gave some folks the idea that parrots were "dirty," dangerous pets! Actually, the parasite responsible for this disease is found in over 100 bird species, besides parrots. First attracting attention in the 1930's, psittacosis reached epidemic proportions in both Europe and America and created a general panic regarding importation of parrots. Initially, extremely strict regulations were enacted to prevent the spread of this disease (of huge concern primarily because of it's ability to infect humans, not just birds).

Due to mandatory 30 day quarantine periods and the routine use of chlortetracycline for all quarantined birds, psittacosis has been almost wiped out. Why "almost?" Due to the popularity of smuggling parrots for profit, as well as occasional lapses in proper quarantine practices, there are still some infected birds around. Often associated with a lack of cleanliness, the same low standard aviaries that deal with smuggled birds, also practice poor husbandry, thus allowing the disease to proliferate and spread. Because psittacosis can affect humans, any cases must be reported to public health officials. Confirmed diagnosis means mandatory quarantining and treatment with antibiotics (chlortetracycline). If caught early, it can be highly treatable. Occasionally, some untreated birds recover spontaneously, but remain carriers and continue to spread the disease.

Symptoms are similar to many other diseases, including weight loss, diarrhea, poor appetite, lethargy, and sleepiness. Droppings tend to be pasty and light green. Often the birds looks like it has a cold, with watery eyes and a runny nose. Breathing can be labored. There is a fecal test which can check for presence of the pathogen, a unique intercellular bacteria, called "Chlamydia Psittaci." Untreated, the disease is most often fatal.

The best prevention includes buying from reputable, clean sources, and going for an immediate vet exam as soon as you purchase a new bird. Quarantine new birds for 30 - 60 days, away from all other birds (not just physical contact, but optimally, air space as well). A varied, well balanced diet, including lots of fresh veggies, some fruit, sprouts, whole grains, legumes, natural pellets and some seed helps build a strong immune system. And, of course, scrupulous hygiene. Wash hands often and avoid contact with other birds. Don't let strangers handle your bird without disinfecting hands first. In humans, Psittacosis can be serious and life threatening. It starts like a cold or the flu, progressing to respiratory infection and fever. If caught early and treated with antibiotics, it can be curable (as in birds.)

While Psittacosis should no longer be the threat it once was, and responds well to antibiotics and supportive therapy then caught early, lack of attention to any sick bird can mean unnecessary suffering and death for your parrot. Keep your bird healthy and happy, practice good husbandry and go for regular "Well Bird" check-ups, as well as immediate vet trips if a bird looks or acts out of sorts.

There is no vaccine to prevent this once common disease, but good sense, good care, and attention to detail can go a long way. Avoid sickly, "bargain basement" birdies - they're not worth the risk. Don't let Psittacosis get your bird - or you!

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Polyoma (The Four P's – Part 3)

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Unlike Psittacosis, which is bacterial in origin, the next three "P's" are viral - and one of the primary bad news viruses is Polyoma!

First, let's look more closely at viruses in general. Unlike all pathogens, viruses can replicate ONLY inside a "host," such as an infected bird. Viruses are generally very "species-specific" in other words, Human viruses cannot infect birds, and vice versa. Next, viruses fall into two categories: "enveloped," and "nonenveloped." Nonenveloped viruses are much hardier and can live longer outside the body than enveloped ones. Polyomavirus is a nonenveloped virus, which means it resists many disinfectants, as well as freezing and exposure to high heat. It has been found to be made inactive by exposure to chlorine bleach or 70% isopropyl alcohol, however. This means that practicing good husbandry and thoroughly disinfecting your nursery and equipment will help prevent spread of disease - even the viruses! (I'll discuss this more in depth in a future article.) Polyomavirus is not only hardy and tough to kill, but also highly contagious and most often fatal - not a disease to be taken lightly!

Generally affecting baby parrots, it is of great concern to breeders and bird shops. Adult birds sometimes become infected, often as a secondary infection to another viral disease, such as Pbfd. Caiques of any age are more prone to contracting Polyoma, although it can affect hookbills of many species. When adults do become infected, it is rarely fatal, although they many show mild signs of sickness. It's most apt to strike adults in poor health already, who have impaired immunity.

Polyomavirus - and many other avian viruses - were only identified in the 1980's. Major work was done throughout the 80's and 90's on further understanding the virus - how it replicates and spreads, how to best identify it, and how to prevent and treat it. Dr. Branson Ritchie is one of the main avian researchers working on this disease. I found there to be a lot of conflicting info on many aspects of this virus, as well as some disagreement among the researchers!

Like Psittacosis, Polyoma can be identified through both fecal and blood tests. Fecal tests for Polyomavirus are reliable, though, only when birds are actively shedding the virus. It's a good idea to test birds twice, since the virus will not show up all the time.

As far as how the virus is spread, most often babies are infected by parent regurgitation. It can also be airborne, spreading to other birds who inhale the virus from the dander of birds who have the infection. (All birds spread major dander in the air when they preen, and then shake out their feathers. Using a quality air filter helps reduce the dander.)

Symptoms sometimes include feather abnormalities, but often not. Of course, deformed feathers can also indicated many other problems and diseases, such as P.B.F.D. In the "old days," Polyomavirus was associated with "Budgie Fledgling Disease," but we now know that many large hookbills are equally susceptible to this virus. Budgies do tend to show different symptoms, however, such as poor coordination and abdominal distention. Other parrot chicks sometimes appear depressed, have poor appetites, slow emptying of the crop, as well as frequent regurgitation. Often, the chick dies within 48 hours. At times, no symptoms appear at all. With adults, death may also come quickly, often with NO warning symptoms.

Unfortunately, there is no treatment currently available, although there is a vaccine to prevent infection and it's an excellent idea to vaccinate youngsters. There is some debate within the

research community on just how effective this vaccine is. Researchers at the University of Georgia's Psittacine Disease Research Group are working on a new "high-tech" Polyoma vaccine. Great progress is being made on further understanding this virus, and researchers have come far in identifying the incubation period, as well as how long infected birds can continue to shed the virus. Improved diagnostic tests are now considerably more reliable than just a few short years ago, as far as accurately identifying the virus in the blood. The next decade promises lots of positive progress in dealing with this deadly disease - stay tuned! And don't forget to support avian research!

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Proventricular Dilation Disorder or Disease (The Four P's – Part 4) **P.D.D./P.P.D., a.k.a. Psittacine Proventricular Dilation Disease or Syndrome** **a.k.a. Macaw Wasting Disease**

by Marilu Anderson, Bird Nutrition and Behavior Consultant
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(Note: This is the 4th in a 5 part series on avian diseases - Part 1 was an overview of Psittacosis, Polyoma, PPD, and Pbfd. For those who may have missed Part 1, I'm doing some repetition of facts as a review on each disease in the follow-up articles.)

Talk about confusing! This ominous sounding acronym can't even agree on which letters to use!! I first knew it as P.D.D. - Proventricular Dilation Disorder (or Disease), then saw it often listed as "P.P.D." - Psittacine Proventricular Dilation - sometimes adding a "D" for Disorder or Disease" or an "S" (Syndrome). Whatever the letters, this is one scary illness, causing extreme suffering and often, death. (For the sake of simplicity, I'll use "P.P.D." for this article.) This is one that really makes me queasy, as there is neither a valid diagnostic test that can be done (on a live bird), a vaccination to prevent it, or a treatment for it. Furthermore, it seems to constantly change and evolve, eluding researchers in their efforts to identify and understand it.

First identified in the 1970's, it was known as "Macaw Wasting Disease," as the imported Blue and Gold Macaws first observed with it would literally waste away and die, no matter how much food they consumed. Although it reminds me of A.I.D.S. in its ability to degenerate the body, it is in no way related to H.I.V. It is not transmittable to humans, although it had been found in all hookbills, as well as canaries, finches, geese, and some other bird species.

This disease involves the proventriculus, which is a bird's glandular stomach, although it is primarily a nervous system infection rather than a gastrointestinal one. P.P.D. is an enveloped virus, meaning it doesn't survive well outside the body, yet it's still one tough enemy!! I find there's little mention of this disease in many parrot resources, probably due to the fact that this virus is so elusive and poorly understood. It appears to NOT be readily transmittable, yet many birds can remain unaffected carriers of years. The usual incubation period for clinical symptoms to appear seems to be from 3 - 6 months, although some researchers feel it can take years for the disease to manifest. Besides the incredible work being done by Dr. Branson Ritchie, others, like Dr. Jack Gaskin, of the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, continue to work tirelessly on the difficult virus. Dr. Gaskin states that "problems involve the inability to researchers to consistently recover the virus, propagate it, and then consistently reproduce disease with it."

In trying to identify and diagnose P.P.D. in live birds, evaluation of the crop or ventriculus may or may not detect the virus. Electron microscope exam of feces may show viral particles, but is not a reliable test, as well. The only truly accurate test for the virus happens after death, during necropsy. Exam of brain material from dead birds is the most reliable diagnostic tool (sad to say).

As far as symptoms, birds often pass undigested seeds in their droppings. In addition, birds may regurgitate or vomit. Weight loss is often noticeable (another good reason to weigh birds on a gram scale regularly). Dilation of the G.I. tract may cause abdominal swelling. Some birds will start having seizures or show muscular weakness, often leading to paralysis. It usually starts with the legs, progressing to the wings. Infected babies may be difficult to wean, or revert back to "baby begging." You may notice slowness of the crop and often see secondary problems, such as bacterial or yeast infections in the crop. Radiographic exam may show an enlarged proventriculus. Birds may both eat and drink far more than normal. Droppings are often large and malodorous. If

the crop is biopsied, it's important to include a large blood vessel, containing a nerve ganglion in order to see the characteristic P.P.D. lesions. Crop biopsies are generally not considered an effective diagnostic tool in always diagnosing P.P.D.

Because of the lack of adequate diagnostic tests, P.P.D. can also be hard to prevent. A healthy - looking bird can be a carrier for months. Like most diseases, scrupulous hygiene and optimum nutrition and care go a long way in prevention. It appears that some birds are resistant to this infection and can somehow fight off the virus. Infected birds need total isolation and quarantine, supportive care for secondary infections and the highest quality diet possible, abundant in calories, proteins, and vitamins. The good news is that this virus does NOT appear to be highly transmittable from bird to bird. Remember, this virus behaves differently than others and is not very predictable. Monitor all bird's droppings daily and weight on a weekly (or at least monthly) basis to catch any signs early. Please stay informed on this frightening disease, and give generously to the die-hard researchers struggling to understand and combat this horrible virus!

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Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease - P.B.F.D. (The Four P's – Part 5)

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This is the final episode of my five part series on some of the serious diseases threatening our parrot friends. Last, but certainly not least, is "P.B.F.D." - "Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease." Like the first three, there's a lot of confusion and misunderstanding about this deadly virus. First known as "Cockatoo Syndrome," due to it's prevalence in Moluccans and Umbrellas, it affects many other species as well - Cockatiels, Lovebirds, Eclectus, African Greys, Amazons, Pionus, Macaws, Rosellas, Budgies, Ringnecks - virtually ALL hookbills!! It is also know as "Feather-Loss Syndrome," "Beak Necrosis," and "White Cockatoo Disease," among other names. Although I often refer to P.P.D. as "Birdie Aids" due to the wasting P.P.D. causes, P.B.F.D. is ALSO like a "Birdie Aids" as it causes serious depression of the immune system. This loss of immunity makes infected birds highly susceptible to even minor infections that come along, causing further problems. These secondary infections include TB, Lymphoma, and a host of bacterial illnesses. All of these are treatable, although the P.B.F.D. itself is not - so the bird needs supportive treatment and care.

P.B.F.D. is caused by a highly infectious circodna virus, which tends to remain stable in the environment for a long time. Using a bleach solution to wipe down walls and floors (as well as cages and accessories) will kill the virus. It's impossible to disinfect carpets, so it's advisable not to have carpeting in nurseries and retail bird shops. This virus, along with the others, (and the bacteria causing Psittacosis) can remain viable in carpet for long periods. Hepa filters are also helpful in preventing the virus from being spread through the air.

The virus is transmitted via feces, feather dust, crop fluid, and passed through the egg. The incubation period from infection to showing symptoms can vary widely, depending on the species, age, and overall health of the bird. Obviously, babies and those in poor condition become sick much more quickly. It's possible for infected birds to show no symptoms, but be carriers for months. Normally, abnormal feathers will be your first clue.

Remember, nutritional deficits and Polyomavirus can also cause feather abnormalities, so see your avian vet at FIRST sign of problems.

Affecting parrot of all ages, young birds tend to have all feathers affected at once, while older birds may show signs over the course of several molts. Besides feather symptoms, beaks and toenails can crack and grow rapidly. Birds may experience problems inside the roof of the mouth, affecting the ability to eat.

First seen as a loss of powder (in Cockatoos) and "dingyness" of feathers, you'll also find retention of feather sheaths and clubbed feathers. Often, these birds look like pluckers. Next you'll see loss of pigment in nails and beak, overgrowth of the upper mandible, and more rapid growth of the beak and nails. Birds become irritable and sullen, and touching causes pain. Pale spots appear in feathers and beak edges start to rot off. In the end, the bird has lots of bald patches, pieces of beak and toenails break off very easily and the bird becomes totally offish or neurotic in behavior.

There is no cure for P.B.F.D. Bird may die quickly, or live for years, depending on overall vitality and immune strength. Tests can confirm this disease even before symptoms show. Dr. Branson Ritchie at University of Georgia has developed two blood tests - one detects antibodies to the P.B.F.D. virus, the other, identifies birds who have the virus circulating in the blood. Biopsy of

infected feathers (with follicles) can confirm diagnosis. Further testing needs to be done to identify secondary infection, so they can be properly treated.

Although P.B.F.D. is incurable, improving the immune system and treating secondary infections can allow the bird both improved quality and quantity of life. Care must be taken to keep sick birds warm, since feather loss can lead to chilling. Many people feel depression is common in P.B.F.D. infected birds, as the feather and beak problems distort their appearance and affect body image. Give lots of positive reinforcement and love to your sick bird! Tell him he's beautiful!

Researchers in both America and Europe (especially Germany) are working diligently on P.B.F.D., as well as the other avian viruses. An experimental vaccine for P.B.F.D. is being tested. If caught early, many birds can live for years with proper diet medication, vet support, and special attention.

Practice fastidious husbandry, give your birds the nutritious diet, safe toys, guidance and love that they need. See your avian vet at least annually (sooner if problems arise) and have them tested! Support research groups trying to battle these diseases. Maybe some day, all our parrot friends will live in a disease free world!

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West Nile Virus

by Gudrun Maybaum

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West Nile virus is well known on many continents, where people developed antibodies, and sickness or death seldom result. However, it was not known to the American continent until 3 years ago. In 1999, when New York's crows were dying by the flocks, one was finally discovered on the ground of the Bronx Zoo and examined.

From there, West Nile made a devastating journey over almost the entire Northern continent, infected thousands of people and killed at least 241. The number of dead animals it left in its path is immense.

Viruses normally are rather host-specific. Unfortunately, it is not so with the West Nile virus. So far, at least 36 mosquito species that carry it have been counted. These mosquitoes transmit it to a wide variety of species -- human, mammal, birds and reptiles -- which is very unusual for a virus.

Around 200 species of birds, reptiles and mammals were affected by it in 2002 alone. West Nile not only killed an alarming array of wildlife, but many different species in zoos and even pets. We read about an unknown number of squirrels, chipmunks, mountain goats, reindeer, rabbits, bats, hawk, eagles, owls, pelicans, doves, gulls, herons, kingfishers, swans, sparrows, turkeys, woodpeckers, seals, flamingos and many, many more. Researchers actually found 140 species of birds sick or dead from the West Nile virus. Even Florida's alligator farms lost more than 200 reptiles. When we look into our homes, there were 14,000 sick horses last summer, and an unknown number of dogs, cats and birds.

Researchers have found that mosquitoes are not the only carriers of West Nile; raptors can get it due to eating infected prey. Some birds spread it through their droppings and some pass it to their chicks while they are still in the egg.

All of this is not only scary, but alarming. We can protect ourselves by wearing mosquito repellent, but what can we do about our beloved pets?

Let's start indoors. Make sure all the screens on the windows and doors have no holes, so that no mosquitoes can get through. Have plants like sweet basil in every room. The best defense is to not even let them come close. Plant basil, tansy, garlic, tomatoes, catnip and eucalyptus around the house and outdoor flights of your birds.

Mosquitoes don't like garlic, so feeding your pets (dog, cats, birds) some garlic every day is a good idea. If they don't eat it, just put a few pieces of fresh garlic in their bowls. Even if they don't eat it, the smell will keep the mosquitoes away.

There is a repellent called garlic barrier, which is basically liquid garlic mixed with water and is to be sprayed all over the garden. You can make it yourself or here is the link to order it: <http://www.garlicbarrier.com/MosquitoBarrier.html>

Citronella oil and neem oil are very effective in repelling mosquitoes. For yourself, mix some coconut oil with a drop of the neem as a natural repellent applied to your skin. Citronella candles are also very effective, though I would not use them inside because they could harm your birds' respiratory system.

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