



# FACTSHEET

## Common/Important Conditions of Cage & Aviary Birds

### Nutritional Deficiencies

Malnutrition is considered the most common cause of disease in captive birds. In pet birds (mostly parrots, parakeets and finches) the diseases caused by chronic malnutrition can be vast, including the following:

- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Obesity or emaciation
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Respiratory disease
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Changes in skin and feather quality, as well as changes to the beak and nail production

Most issues are evident when a bird is on a strictly seed-based diet. These diets are not only deficient in vital vitamins and minerals, but are high in fat and highly calorific. Please contact us if you wish to discuss your bird's nutrition in detail.

### Psittacine Beak & Feather Disease ('PBFD')

PBFD is a viral disease caused by a circovirus, and is passed on primarily through direct contact with infected birds. There are a number of parrot species believed to be more susceptible to PBFD, but no species should be considered safe from infection.

There are two main forms of PBFD; divided into acute (usually younger stock) and chronic infection. In birds suffering an acute infection, rapid suppression of the immune system leads to secondary infections, which are often fatal. In the chronic form, the bird may appear unaffected for many years (but importantly can still pass on the virus) but will eventually succumb to secondary complications.

Treatment is difficult, especially in those birds suffering acute disease. Treatment of the secondary complications and supportive veterinary care may be advisable for more chronically affected birds.

For more information on PBFD, see: <http://www.avianbiotech.com/diseases/pbfd.htm>

### Psitticosis

Caused by the bacterium *Chlamydophila psittaci*, psitticosis is a zoonotic disease, meaning it can be transmitted to humans, and as such is an important disease to consider with not only those birds demonstrating the correct symptoms, but any birds kept indoors, due to the fact that many birds may show no signs of illness for a number of years, despite being infected and able to pass on the bacterium. The signs seen in people suffering from psitticosis are flu-like, including headaches, sneezing, coughing, fever and chest pains. In extreme cases involving elderly or immunosuppressed owners, the disease can prove fatal. As such, it is important to get any new parrots that may come into close proximity with people (i.e. kept indoors) to be screened by your vet for the disease, as it is treatable with a prolonged course of specific antibiotics.

## Behaviour

Parrot behaviour is a vast topic, and one fraught with complications and challenges not only the vet and owner, but also the bird in question.

The majority of behavioural difficulties arise with the 'smarter' parrots (mostly the Cockatoos, Macaws and Greys), who have been hand-reared from hatching and are kept as a solitary bird. The parallels drawn between hand-rearing parrots and the behavioural difficulties observed in later life of so many birds have become so strong that in July 2014, the Netherlands became the first country to ban the hand-rearing of parrot species (see the link below for more information).

<http://www.cageandaviarybirds.co.uk/news/latest-news/1040-parrot-hand-rearing-ban-for-the-netherlands.html>

Feather plucking is by far the most common way in which behavioural problems in parrots manifest themselves. This can range from very mild, occasional plucking to the extreme; where a vicious cycle of excessive feather plucking leads to dramatic feather loss, skin damage and overall an alarming indication of the bird's welfare status. It must be noted, however, that in some birds that get into the 'habit' of plucking, may not always necessarily be able to reverse the urge, even once the initial concern has been addressed and corrected.

There are many causes or triggers that may be linked to the initiation of feather plucking, and it must be remembered that the potential medical causes should not be overlooked before jumping in to behavioural correction techniques.

Some of the medical causes of feather loss/destruction to be considered before behaviour are:

- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Nutrition
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Heavy metal toxicity (zinc/lead)
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Parasites
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Infectious disease
- <sup>35</sup>/<sub>17</sub> Systemic disease

## Beak & Nail Overgrowths

A common issue in pet birds, whether caged or in aviaries, yet one that can be very dangerous and distressing for both bird and owner if not performed correctly. Correct perching provision, along with adequate chewable items (e.g. twigs from which the bark can be stripped) are the first and most important provision in terms of minimising the frequency that any bird must have their nails trimmed or beak burred. It also minimises the risk of any birds developing 'bumblefoot' lesions on the feet (see 'Bumblefoot' under *Common conditions of birds of prey*). Trimming the beak can pose a risk of fracture to the beak, and as such it is always advised that you seek veterinary attention if you believe that your bird's beak is overgrown. It is important to remember that a beak that is slightly overgrown is far easier and safer to correct than one that has been left to become severely overgrown; as this can warrant successive trips to the vet to get it corrected over a period of time.

## Aspergillosis

Please read our fact sheet on Aspergillosis in our *Common Conditions of Birds of Prey* factsheet.

**The above information is intended to provide a brief overview of an example of a few of the more common conditions seen in these species – the information is by no means exhaustive, and if you have any questions or concerns regarding your bird(s) then please do not hesitate to get in touch.**

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