

Sick Pet Birds – Recognizing a Sick Bird

How can I tell if my bird is sick?

In the wild, a bird will endeavor to uphold a strong appearance when sick. This is called, "survival of the fittest". By the time a bird actually shows an owner that it is unwell, it has likely been sick for some time. Therefore, bird owners must learn to recognize the subtle signs a bird presents when unhealthy before it is too late. Many things contribute to ill health. Improper diet is the most common cause of ill health in our pet birds. Trauma, poor upkeep, inferior hygiene, stress and genetics may lead to ill health. Just because the bird's outward appearance is normal does not mean the bird is healthy. Any deviation from normal should be taken as a sign of ill health and tended to immediately.



"Improper diet is the most common cause of ill health in our pet birds."

The following is a categorized list of signs that should alert you that your bird is sick:

General

- poor general appearance (feathers look "ratty")
- fluffed feathers (looks fatter)
- anorexia (not eating, changes in eating habits or reduced eating)
- changes in amount of drinking
- weakness
- drooping wings
- listlessness, inactivity, depression
- reluctance to move
- sleeping more
- lumps, bumps, swellings or bulges on the body
- trauma
- bleeding
- changes in weight (increased or decreased)

Behavior

- any change in regular attitude, behavior or personality
- unusually tame behavior
- irritability, agitation, biting

Eyes

- closed eye
- eye discharge
- red eye

- cloudy eyes
- swelling around eyes
- swelling of the eyes

Respiratory

- labored breathing or open mouth breathing
- tail "bobbing" with each breath
- nasal discharge
- blocked nostrils
- increase or decrease in the size of the nostrils
- sneezing (excessive)
- wheezing or "wet" breathing
- coughing
- cere (the skin around the nostrils) irregularity
- staining of the feathers around the nostrils
- change in voice or no voice

Skin and Feathers

- abnormal feathers, dull color, texture, shape, structure, growth
- bleeding blood or pin feathers (new feathers)
- prolonged molt
- baldness or feather loss
- feather changes, color, chewed, plucked, damaged
- flaky or crusty skin
- excessive scratching
- overgrown beak
- abnormality of beak growth
- abnormal beak texture, color,
- overgrown nails
- abnormal nails (i.e. color, texture)
- sores on skin
- trauma, cuts, bruises
- lumps, bumps, swellings or bulges on the body

Musculoskeletal

- sore feet
- sore wing
- lameness or shifting of body weight
- swollen joints
- paralysis
- weakness
- drooping wings
- not perching, sitting on bottom of cage

Digestive and urinary

- wet droppings
- diarrhea (watery feces)
- change in the color of the droppings (i.e. red, yellow, tarry, pale)
- staining of the feathers around the vent (anus)
- decreased droppings
- straining to defecate
- wet feathers around face and head
- vomiting or excessive regurgitation
- protrusions from the vent (prolapse)



Neurological

- balance problems
- head tilt
- falling
- seizures
- unconsciousness
- paralysis
- not perching, sitting on bottom of cage
- weakness

If you are concerned about anything, consult your veterinarian immediately. Do not wait until tomorrow!

*This client information sheet is based on material written by: Rick Axelson, DVM
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