

## Identifying Signs of Illness in Your Bird

### Instinctive Behavior

It is a natural instinct for parrots to hide signs of illness. In the wild, this skill serves them well, and in fact, may save their lives. Birds that show signs of illness are more likely to be attacked by predators. Other birds in a flock will also chase away or even attack sick birds since their presence may attract the unwanted attention of predators to the group.

When a pet bird is ill, it will practice these same instinctive behaviors. In the presence of its “flock members” (you and your family) the ill pet bird pretends to feel well. It will sleek its feathers, stand up straight, it may peck at a toy half-heartedly, and it will even pretend to eat by going over to the bowl and cracking seeds or crumbling pellets.

### Signs of illness are subtle until disease is advanced

Since birds can hide sickness so well, important clues to their true health status may be quite subtle. Therefore birds are often seriously ill by the time the first signs of illness become apparent to their companion human. Some avian experts believe that one day of known illness in a bird is equal to seven days of illness in a human. In other words, if your bird has shown signs of sickness for only one day, it could mean the bird may have been ill for the past seven days.

Below is a list of signs of illness in birds. If your pet shows one or a combination of these signs, contact an avian veterinarian immediately for advice.

- Reduced or absent appetite
- Closed or partially open eyes
- Fluffed and ruffled feathers
- Change in the quality or quantity of droppings
- Inactivity, weakness
- Inability to perch, bird rests on the bottom of the cage
- Weight loss : *Regularly weighing your bird is an important way to monitor its health. Evaluation by an avian veterinarian is recommended if your pet loses weight for three consecutive days or loses 10% of its body weight over any time period,*
- Decreased preening and feather maintenance
- Swelling around the eyes
- Discharge from the eyes or nose
- Sneezing
- Change in clarity or color of the eyes
- Soiling or matting of feathers on the head or around the nose
- Changes in voice, loss of voice
- Open-mouthed breathing at rest (very serious)
- Tail bobbing or a rhythmic pumping of the tail at rest
- Sudden feather loss when not in molting season
- Gagging or retching, stretching of the neck
- Regurgitation or vomiting
- Limping or not bearing weight on one leg
- Swollen feet or joints
- Lumps or masses anywhere on the body

- Bleeding –this is almost always an emergency situation, regardless of the origin

Be observant and act promptly. Learn to look for subtle signs of illness, and take special note of changes in the routine and habits of your pet. Seek veterinary assistance promptly if you suspect illness.

### Keeping your bird healthy

In addition to careful monitoring, a healthy diet, and proper housing, regular physical examinations are an important component of basic companion parrot care. An annual physical exam may also uncover problems your pet is attempting to hide.

Transport your bird to the doctor's office within its cage or use some other suitable container (smaller cage, pet carrier box). Never visit the veterinarian with your bird perched on your shoulder, since this practice does not provide enough protection for your pet. Whatever container you choose should be covered to help minimize the stress to your sick bird during its visit. If you take your bird to the veterinarian in its own cage, do not clean it first since the evaluation of your bird's droppings may provide valuable information.

***Please contact a local avian veterinarian with any questions or concerns regarding your bird's health or if your bird is showing signs of possible illness.***

Figure 1. Signs of illness may include closed or partially open eyes, fluffed and ruffled feathers, and inactivity.

Figure 2. Signs of illness may include closed or partially open eyes, fluffed and ruffled feathers, and inactivity.

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