

## COMMON CONDITIONS OF PET BIRDS

### **General Information**

Pet birds often become ill. While most diseases of birds can affect every species, there are some species that are more prone to develop certain conditions. By being familiar with the various conditions that commonly affect a certain species, your veterinarian is able to formulate a diagnostic and treatment protocol that is most likely to result in a correct diagnosis and cure for your bird's illness. While not listing every possible disease that may afflict your bird, the following discussion will make you more familiar with the specific problems your pet is most likely to encounter.

### **Budgerigars**

Budgerigars or budgies are known for developing various solid external tumors as well as internal cancer. A common cancer affecting the kidneys or reproductive organs causes a unilateral (one-sided) lameness that owners often mistake for an injured leg. Knemidokoptic mange is a frequent cause of crusty dermatitis of the cere (area around the nostrils over the beak), face and feet. Thyroid disorders such as goiter and hypothyroidism occur in budgies. While not common in birds, budgerigars can become afflicted with diabetes mellitus. Chlamydiosis is a common cause of respiratory disease in these popular birds. Since many owners incorrectly feed an all seed diet to their budgies, hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease) is a problem that often causes death in this species. While reproductive problems are not usually seen in most pet birds, egg binding is seen with some frequency in pet budgerigars, even those housed individually without a mate.



### **Cockatiels**

Cockatiels, like budgies, are commonly afflicted with respiratory disease caused by chlamydiosis. An unusual manifestation of the internal parasite *Giardia* is seen in cockatiels. These birds are very itchy and violently attack themselves, especially under the wings. Another protozoal disease, trichomoniasis, often causes regurgitation in cockatiels, as does the yeast infection *Candida*. Birds on an all seed diet often become obese; these birds are easily stressed and sudden death is common. Fatty liver disease also occurs as a result of the high fat, all seed diets; it can also cause sudden death. As with budgies, reproductive problems are seen with some frequency, even in individually housed pets.

### **Canaries**

Canaries have several genetic maladies. Feather cysts, which require surgical removal, frequently occur in canaries. Cataracts are not uncommon. Male baldness of the heads of certain canaries also occurs. An unusual form of Knemidokoptic mange called *tassle-foot* occurs frequently in these popular birds. Air sac mites that infect the trachea and air sacs, commonly contribute to respiratory disease in canaries. Owners who provide their canaries with nesting material made of fine thread often unknowingly cause a problem for their birds: the fine thread can wrap around a toe or foot causing gangrene within a short period of time. Finally, pox virus

often causes skin disease or death in canaries. As with other small birds, reproductive problems such as egg binding are seen in canaries.

### ***Finches***

Similar to canaries, finches often have air sac mites, leading to severe respiratory disease. Tapeworms commonly infect the intestinal tract of pet finches. The fine thread nesting material that can cause gangrene of the limbs in canaries also causes the same problem in finches. As expected, these small birds often have egg-binding problems that can rapidly result in death if not treated early.

### ***Conures***

Conures are noisy birds but can make good pets. Since they can be silent carriers of Pacheco's virus and polyoma virus without showing clinical signs, it may be prudent to house these birds separately from other species. A strange bleeding syndrome occurs in conures; but luckily can be treated effectively. Feather picking is seen with some frequency in pet conures. Papillomas (warts) occur in conures, as does proventricular dilatation syndrome, which is fatal.



### ***Lovebirds***

Lovebirds are often affected with chlamydiosis and the yeast infection candidiasis. The pox virus often causes a discoloration of the skin rather than true crusted lesions as seen in other birds. Lovebirds are intolerant of heat and are easily stressed. Various infectious causes of feather loss occur in lovebirds. Epilepsy is seen in lovebirds. Reproductive problems, seen frequently in other small birds, also occur with some frequency in lovebirds.

### ***Grey Cheek Parakeets***

Grey cheeks often develop sarcoptic mange, an itchy skin disorder. Chlamydiosis often occurs in these birds, and they are the number one species infected with tuberculosis. Unlike most birds, blood flow after nail clipping is very slow and sometimes non-existent. Additionally, post-nail trimming lameness often occurs.

### ***African Gray Parrot***

These high-strung birds often develop psychological feather picking. A potentially fatal syndrome occurs in grays where they develop low blood calcium resulting in seizures. Aspergillosis, a potentially fatal fungal infection, is difficult to diagnose but is often seen in grays. Respiratory conditions such as sinusitis are seen; many bacterial infections are difficult to treat. Cancer is seen with some frequency in this species, as is the fatal beak and feather disease.

### ***Amazon Parrots***

Amazons are commonly afflicted with upper respiratory diseases, many of which result from vitamin A deficiency associated with all-seed diets. Pox virus is commonly seen in Amazons, as are cloacal papillomas (warts). Mutilation of the wings and legs occurs. Amazons commonly exhibit mating season aggression towards their owners; some of these birds become too aggressive to handle. Some Amazons develop epilepsy. Like African Grays, Amazon parrots also develop cancer. And like most birds on an all seed diet, Amazons commonly develop obesity and hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver disease).

### **Macaws**

Macaws were the first species to develop proventricular dilatation syndrome, which causes chronic and progressive weight loss and ultimately death. Chlamydiosis occurs in this species with some frequency, as do the gastrointestinal parasites capillaria and ascarids. Oral and cloacal papillomatosis are seen frequently; and acne, normally rare in birds, occurs in macaws. Psychological feather picking often occurs in the larger species of birds that are tightly bonded to their owners; macaws are no exception. Regression to juvenile behavior occurs frequently and may be the only sign of illness in sick macaws.



*Proventricular dilatation*

### **Cockatoos**

Cockatoos, like other large birds, often develop psychological feather picking that is difficult to treat; however, other problems such as beak and feather disease, first seen in cockatoos, may also cause feather loss. For this reason, any feather loss should be thoroughly investigated by your veterinarian. Tapeworms and blood parasites are common in cockatoos. Like macaws, regression to juvenile behavior is often seen in cockatoos and may be a very early sign of severe illness in this species. Cloacal prolapses, often confused with cloacal papillomas, occur frequently in cockatoos. Lipomas (benign fatty tumors) are commonly seen in Rose Breasted Cockatoos.

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*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM  
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