



# Avian First Aid

## AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION

It is very important when starting this discussion to emphasize that none of the information contained within substitutes for professional assistance by a qualified avian veterinarian. First aid procedures are intended to provide necessary support for a bird until this can be accomplished.



The other issue that must be discussed is the fact that the majority of "emergency" cases seen in birds are not really emergencies. They are birds that have been sick for weeks or months but have gone unnoticed until they are critical. Close observation of birds combined with regular veterinary examinations and lab

evaluation will catch many problems at a time when the success of treatment will be higher and the cost of treatment will be lower.

In addition, many of the physical injuries and poisonings that are encountered in birds can be prevented. If birds are kept caged when unsupervised and their wings and nails are kept trimmed most of these events would not occur. Leg bands can be hazardous, especially if they do not fit well. If they are necessary, make sure they are well fitted and placed properly. Birds should be tamed and accustomed to the routines of the household. Leaving a nightlight on, especially for lutino cockatiels,

will help reduce night panics. Cage covering procedures should be consistent. Turning off ceiling fans and covering mirrors and windows when a bird is flying in the house is advisable. Birds should be separated from other animals and other types of birds as many birds will bite the toes of other birds. Birds should not be allowed access to toxic plants, painted surfaces, or other toxins. Overheating cooking oils or dry non-stick pans may emit toxic fumes. No one should ever smoke around a bird. Birds should be removed from the area when any painting or other projects are occurring.

By following these guidelines many emergencies can be avoided.

## PLAN FOR THE UNEXPECTED



The time to find an avian veterinarian is not when an emergency occurs. Establishing a relationship with an experienced avian veterinarian and a medical record for the bird are very important. The bird owner should find out the procedures for emergency care after hours. After hours care is

more expensive and some practices will refer emergencies to an emergency clinic. If these factors are known, there will be no surprises.

In the event of injury or illness, owners can improve the odds for their birds if they are prepared for immediate care. It

helps to have a first aid kit available. Listed below are some measures that can be taken to stabilize a bird until medical attention can be administered. The following are general recommendations for a variety of emergency situations.

**Avian First Aid Kit**

- Towels
- Droppers or Syringes
- Sports Drink or Pedialyte
- Cloth Tape
- Self-Adhesive Flexible Bandage
- Styptic Powder
- Carrier
- Heated Cage
- Thermometer for Cage
- Scale
- Antiseptic Solution (Betadine or Chlorhexidine)



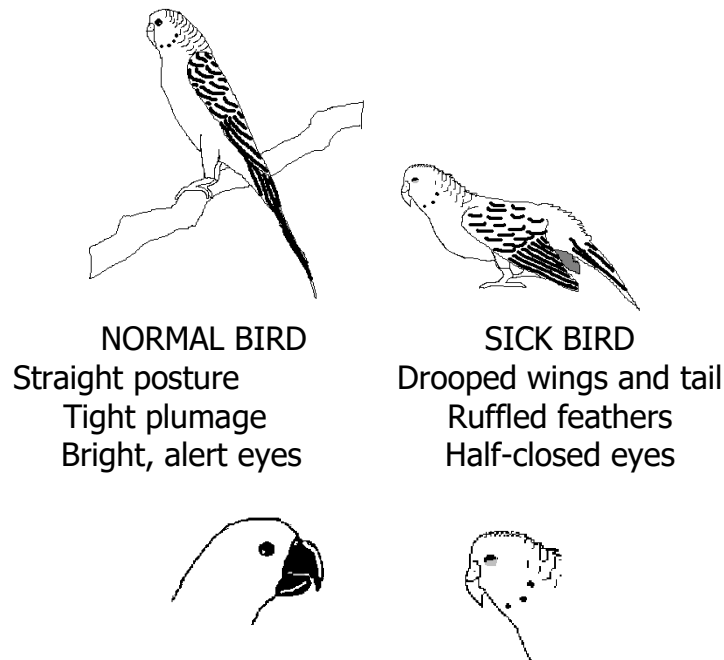
**DETERMINING THE PROBLEM**

Bird owners should make a habit of observing their birds. While they may not have the training to interpret the results, this process can be valuable in determining when a problem is present. If it is never done until the bird is sick, it will be difficult to determine what is normal and what is not.

The bird should be examined from a distance, either on a perch or in the cage. A healthy bird should be alert, have a straight, upright posture, tight smooth plumage, and move without difficulty. The breathing should be effortless. Tail bobbing and open mouth breathing are considered

abnormal. Birds that sleep a lot, are ruffled, or have droopy wings or tail are probably very ill and require immediate veterinary attention. (Figure 1) In birds like this, great care must be taken to avoid excessive stress.

FIGURE 1



## THINGS TO AVOID

Many recommendations published in bird books or on the internet are potentially harmful and often unsupported.

First, any ointment applied to the skin, orally, or in the cloaca should be

avoided. These oil based products can severely damage feathers and irritate the intestinal tract.

Second, force feeding birds is extremely hazardous. Trying to feed a bird with a syringe can cause the bird to inhale and aspirate the food with fatal



consequences. Veterinarians force feed birds with a feeding tube and should only be done by trained professionals

Third, do not remove blood feathers. Improper removal of blood feather remnants can cause worse hemorrhage than was occurring before. The veterinarian has means of controlling this bleeding.

Fourth, do not use styptic powder on the skin or feather follicles. These products work by causing a chemical burn. This is safe for nails or beak tips, but can cause serious skin damage in other cases. Be very careful to avoid letting the bird

swallow any of the styptic as esophageal burns are serious problems.

Lastly, do not give over-the-counter medications orally or in the drinking water.



These products are often ineffective and cannot be dosed properly. Products used in the drinking water can also discourage drinking.

While home care can be lifesaving in some cases, far too often well-meaning owners cause more harm than good. Professional veterinary care should never be delayed.

## EMERGENCIES

*Don't let the sun set on a sick bird.*

While we still see healthy birds for wellness exams, we are no longer equipped to treat a sick bird. With birds' ability to mask

the signs of illness, the onset of any noticeable signs may occur when the problem has reached a critical level. If your bird is sick or injured, you need to call the University of Illinois



Small Animal Clinic and Emergency Service.

It is unwise to adopt a "wait and see" approach. If you are unsure, please feel free to call our clinic.

### ***Important Numbers***

- All Creatures Animal Hospital: 217-328-4143
- University of Illinois Small Animal Clinic and Emergency Service: 217-333-5300
- National Animal Poison Control (A consultation fee will be applied): 1-888-426-4435

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Signs</b>	<b>Action</b>
Aint Doin' Right	Ruffled Feathers Sleeping More Decreased Appetite Weight Loss Decreased Activity	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Place in Warm Cage (85F) Make Food and Water Accessible Avoid Stress
Bleeding	Blood Seen in Cage Blood Seen on Bird Blood in Droppings	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Identify Source of Bleeding Apply Pressure to Site if necessary Apply Styptic Power to Nail or Beak DO NOT Pull Blood Feather
Bite Wound	History of Fight or Attack Puncture Wounds Missing Feathers Bruising	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Apply Pressure to Wound if necessary Keep Warm
Broken Bone	Not Using Leg Drooped Wing Exposed Bone	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Restrict Activity
Abnormal Droppings	Diarrhea: Dark Portion Loose Polyuria: Clear Liquid Increased Green Urates: White Part is now Green	Schedule Appointment with Vet ASAP Check for Other Problems
Egg Binding	Straining Sitting on Bottom of Cage Abdominal Swelling Laid Eggs Before	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Keep Warm Provide Plenty of Fluids DO NOT Apply Ointments or Oils
Lumps, Bumps, Protrusions	Any Abnormal Tissue Swelling	If Tissue is Protruding: <i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Otherwise, Protect from Injury and Schedule Appointment with Vet ASAP
Not Eating	Food not Disappearing White, Chalky Droppings Frantic Behavior Weakness	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Offer Clear Fluids by Dropper (DO NOT force) Provide Familiar Foods Hand Feed if Baby Bird
Respiratory Disease	Wheezing Coughing Holding Head Back Passing Out	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Avoid Handling Keep Dark, Quiet, Humid
Seizures	Twitching Loss of Consciousness Wing Flapping Spinning Falling of Perch	<i>Call Emergency Vet ASAP</i> Pad Cage or Put in Box Keep Cool Time Seizure
Head Trauma	Flew into Object Various Levels of Incoordination Pupils are not the Same Size	Keep in Cool, Dark, and Quiet Room If No Improvement in 10-15 Minutes, <i>Call Emergency Vet</i>
Vomiting	Pumping of Neck Mucus Matting of Head Feathers Pools of Vomited Material Soft, Doughy Crop	Offer Water in Small Volumes Remove New Foods If Occurs more than Once: Schedule Appointment with Vet ASAP