

YOUR CHAT MODERATOR



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Managing Behavior Issues in Pet Birds



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Introduction

Most pet birds are relinquished due to behavior problems

- Screaming
- Aggression

The longer they go untreated, the more difficult they become to treat

Many issues are a result of learned behaviors

Others may be a result of abnormal neurophysiology

Common Complaints

- Fears and phobias
- Aggression and biting
- Destructive behavior
- Excessive vocalization
- Feather picking and self-injury
- Other repetitive behaviors
- Inappropriate sexual behaviors
- Overeating or failure to accept new diets

Why do these problems occur?

Environmental conditions

Normal behaviors misconstrued

Early adverse experiences

Prey species



Background

Owner expectations

Wild caught vs. captive bred

Hand weaning vs. parent weaning

- Who weaned the bird?

Captive breeding programs

- Incubator hatching
- Hand-rearing



Hand Weaning

Early adverse experiences influence later psychopathology

Lack of exposure to conspecifics

- Maternal/paternal separation
- Separation from clutch-mates
- Social deprivation
- Inadequate socialization
- Loss of security

Maternal Separation

Long term consequences

- Coping style
- Neuroendocrine response to stress
- Cognitive function
- Neural circuitry
- Social competency

Fear

Vocalizations

Defensive postures

Avoidance

Escape attempts

Frantic behavior

Displacement behaviors

Aggression



Displacement Activity/Behavior

A normal behavior shown at an inappropriate time, ie out of context for the occasion

Suggests frustration or conflict

May become repetitive

Grooming behavior is a common displacement activity for many species

Dealing with the Fearful Bird

Prey animals!

Recognize fearful postures

Avoidance!

Habituation

Desensitization and counter conditioning

Don't punish!



Aggression

Territoriality

- What about dominance?



Dealing with Territorial Aggression

Move cage away from high traffic area

Teach “step up”

DS/CC



Aggression

Territoriality

Play and Exploration



Dealing with Play Aggression

Provide appropriate items

Stop inappropriate interactions

Don't punish!



Aggression

Territoriality

Play and Exploration

Learned aggression



Dealing with Learned Aggression

Respect the bird's desire's

Avoid unpleasant interactions

Use positive reinforcement to teach desired behaviors



Aggression

Territoriality

Play and Exploration

Learned aggression

Fear and redirected aggression



Redirected Behavior

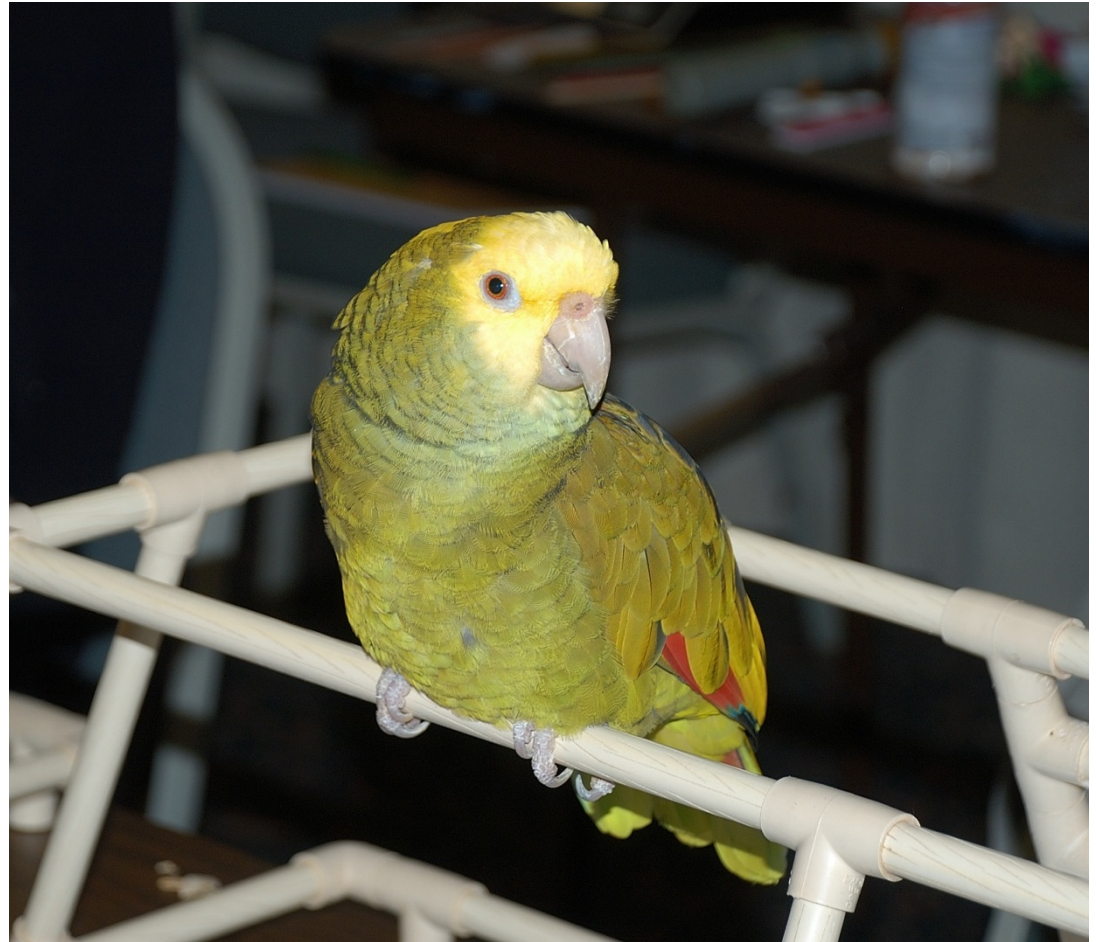
Activity, recognizable from its form as being usually directed toward a particular stimulus, but on this occasion directed towards another stimulus.

May occur when highly motivated to perform a specific behavior but thwarted

Feather picking – a redirected form of foraging behavior?

Dealing with Fear or Redirected Aggression

Avoid triggers!



Aggression

Territoriality

Play and Exploration

Conditioned or learned aggression

Fear and redirected aggression

**Mate-related and sexually
induced aggression**



Reproductive Behaviors

Screaming or frequent contact calling

Aggression

- Territorial defense of cage and nesting sites
- Intolerance of handling
- Irritability
- Favoring one person

Sexual displays

- Frequent regurgitation
- Panting
- Masturbation
- Nesting



Dealing with Reproductive Behaviors

All family members participate in care

Avoid stimulation

DS/CC

Change photoperiod

Decrease fat in diet

Remove nesting areas

Some may need hormonal therapy



Normal Feeding Behavior

Opportunistic foragers

Consume mostly seeds, nuts and fruits

High energy requirements due to their feeding and reproductive behaviors



Destructive Behavior

Powerful beak

Forage for a living



Dealing with Destructive Behavior

Normal behavior

Provide appropriate environment

- Foraging devices

Supervise



Excessive Vocalization

Differences in noisiness

- Most parrots vocalize loudly several times a day for up to 15-20 minutes

Attention-seeking behavior

Fear induced vocalizations

Excessive contact calling

Distress or injury

Lack of environmental enrichment

Dealing with Excessive Vocalization

Don't reinforce!

Reward for quiet behaviors

Withdraw attention when noisy

Be sure the environment is appropriate



Feather Picking or FDB

Feather removal

+/- Soft tissue injury

Many medical causes exist





Commonly Affected Species

African Grey Parrots

Cockatoos

Conures

Eclectus

Grey-cheeked Parakeets

Monk Parakeets

Cockatiels



Causes of Feather Picking

Multifactorial!

- Developmental influences, socialization deficits, neurochemical abnormalities, environmental issues, temperament traits, hormonal influences, genetics, undiagnosed medical conditions & learning

Separation anxiety

Stress

Exaggerated or prolonged reproductive behavior

Early maternal deprivation

In Addition...

Likely hereditary

Affected by stressors

Not a learned behavior

More common in females

Treatment of Feather Picking

Secondary & underlying
medical conditions

Environmental
modification

Behavior modification

Pharmacological therapy

Restraint only if needed to
prevent serious injury
(cotton tube sock
sweater)



Environmental Modification

Air quality

Bathing opportunities

Housing

- adequate stimulation (varied perches and devices for manipulation)
- foraging devices
- +/- conspecifics

Regular photoperiods (2 cage system)

Behavioral Modification

Positive reinforcement for appropriate behaviors (food treats, praise, object rewards, etc.)

Training sessions

- provides mental stimulation
- encourages appropriate bird-caregiver interactions
- helps owners redirect more effectively

Desensitization

Response substitution

Stereotypy

Abnormal, unvarying, repetitive and functionless behaviors

Barren environments

- highly motivated behaviors are frustrated
- functional goals not attainable
- behavioral competition is low

Effort to cope - may have internal reward

Parrot Looping



Stereotypies

- Not hereditary
- Not learned
- No gender differences
- Definitely improved by enrichment and the presence of conspecifics

Captive Environments

Should allow for expression of species typical behavior

Accommodate natural time budgets

- Foraging opportunities
- Sleep patterns
- Physical activities
- Social interactions

Conclusions

The sooner you treat, the better the chance for success.

Feather picking (or any SIB), once begun, may never resolve completely.

Medication is rarely the solution!

Appropriate environment and enrichment is the key to preventing most problem behaviors.

Avian Care Webinar Series

aspcapro.org/webinars

Recorded:

- Overview of Avian Care for Shelters
- Bird Housing, Enrichment, and Care
- Normal Avian Behavior