

## Companion Bird Grooming

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### What is The Gabriel Foundation®?

♣ A 501(c)(3) avicultural and veterinary affiliated parrot welfare organization licensed by the State of Colorado, promoting educational outreach, conservation, rescue, rehabilitation, adoption and sanctuary pertaining to the needs of parrots everywhere.

#### Parrot Welfare Organization – defined:

A parrot welfare organization provides for the complete physical, psychological and environmental well being of the parrots *in the organization's care*. Through the education of the public, proper legal documentation, extensive support services, and constant follow-up procedures, a parrot welfare organization insures that whether the parrots remain in a sanctuary or are in adoptive or foster homes, the parrots are continually nurtured.

### Why groom?

♣ **Nails** — too long to allow comfortable gripping of perch, walking, present a danger to the bird itself, and too sharp for comfort of person holding bird.

♣ **Wings** — trimming flight feathers may prevent escape and reduce injuries caused by bird from flying into mirrors, walls, fans, toilets, stoves... and other household dangers.

♣ ...because a parrot with trimmed flight feathers may be easier to train for the novice because opportunity to fly *away* is minimized.

### What materials are needed?

- ♣ **Dremel** tool with triangular grinding attachment (optional), and
- ♣ Bird or cat claw scissors, and/or;
- ♣ Child-sized nail clippers, and;
- ♣ Sharp long bladed scissors, and;
- ♣ Towels (short- or no-loop), several sizes, different thicknesses;
- ♣ Glasses, if you need them!
- ♣ Styptic pencil or powder, or cornstarch or flour in case of a nail bleed (***USE STYPTIC POWDER ON BLEEDING NAILS ONLY***);
- ♣ “Acrylic nails” emery file;
- ♣ Denatured alcohol, best if in a spray bottle to cleanse equipment between birds;
- ♣ Hand sanitizer, to cleanse hands in between touching other animals/birds and bird(s) to be groomed;
- ♣ Separate towel for each bird to be groomed;
- ♣ An enclosed place such as cage, enclosure or carrier for bird post-grooming;
- ♣ Spray bottle of clean, fresh water for bird's feet and head in the event that bird becomes overheated.

♣ Note card or paper and pen/pencil for recording microchip number, band number (if applicable) and notes.

## **Restraint**

♣ Plan ahead before attempting restraint – have materials ready: appropriate size towel, decide whether to use Dremel tool, claw scissors, nail clippers, scissors, etc.

♣ Choose a quiet, well-lighted enclosed work space to prevent bird's escape;

♣ Visualize catching and restraint process prior to “catching” bird.

## **Things to Remember**

♣ Parrots are preyed upon by other animals and birds;

♣ Birds have air sacs in addition to lungs but NO diaphragm to expand chest, so direct pressure on the chest can and will cause death.

♣ Birds have fragile bones connecting upper and lower mandibles, and in wings and legs;

♣ Darkening a room just prior to capturing can temporarily “freeze” bird, but induces surprise/fear response; use as last resort;

♣ Minimize handling time to reduce stress and overheating observe bird for signs of stress or overheating;

♣ Signs of stress in birds: panting, heavy breathing, closed eyes, intense shaking, intense blushing, bleeding from eyes. Many birds will protest vocally during grooming; others may be exceptionally wiggly.

♣ Birds are highly empathic and observant – keep a pleasant expression on face, voice soft and melodious, and energy subdued to promote reassurance in a potentially terrifying experience for bird.

## **Toweling Technique**

### **...for medium to large parrots**

♣ If the parrot is hand tame, lay towel across chest, with bird facing towards you, with bird's feet firmly held by thumb and index finger.

♣ Use calm, slow movements and gentle tone of voice;

♣ Bring towel around bird – avoid “swooping” and surprise movement for restraint.

*Towel = Predator for bird.*

♣ Grasp bird firmly but gently around neck just below lower mandible, with forefinger and thumb touching, encircling bird's neck; use other hand to wrap towel over bird.

♣ Thumb and forefinger against lower mandible control the head; wrap towel around bird to create a “birdy burrito” allowing for access to bird's feet and extension of wing as needed.

♣ Secure towel with other hand, using two hands to restrain bird.

- ♣ Keep bird's head higher than rest of its body to prevent aspiration.
- ♣ Take additional time to lessen bird's fear of towel

### **The bird's in a towel – now what?**

- ♣ You can the breast area for a microchip and/or band number
- ♣ Check the bird's general condition, look for discharge from nares (nostrils), eyes, mouth, feather condition on body, under wings and tail, body score index, skin condition on feet, head and around eyes, facial patches; examine vent area for dried feces, protruding tissue, etc.

### **Trimming the nails**

#### **. . . for medium to large birds**

- ♣ With forefinger and thumb, gently but firmly remove foot from towel; use fingers to gently pry open “clenched toes” – using care on fragile but strong toes;
- ♣ If using Dremel tool with grinding tip, use quickly and efficiently to shorten and smooth bird's nails. Watch for nail quick, and avoid over grooming nails. Remember – Dremel tool creates heat and friction – use care; use emery file to smooth rough edges if needed;
- ♣ If using clippers, clip off sharp tips, use emery board to smooth rough edges.
- ♣ Quickly and gently groom other toes; upon completion of first foot, tuck back under towel, extend other leg and complete grooming of second foot.

#### *Small bird restraint*

- ♣ Bring caged bird into enclosed area.
- ♣ If bird stresses greatly when catching up, darken room and capture bird gently by restraining head between forefinger and middle finger, gently cupping bird with palm of hand and thumb.
- ♣ Avoid putting pressure on bird's chest.
- ♣ A wash cloth or paper towel may be used as a “birdy burrito” for restraint.
- ♣ Small birds nails may be clipped with pet nail clippers or filed with emery board; avoid cutting to the quick as this is painful to all birds.

### **Wings 101**

#### *Feathers*

- ♣ Primary flight feathers: those from outside of wing inward, named P10 through P1.
- ♣ Secondary feathers: those from inside of wing next to body to P1. **THESE FEATHERS SHOULD NEVER BE TRIMMED**
- ♣ Coverts: primary coverts overlap base of primaries and secondary coverts overlap the base of the secondaries.

- ♣ Feather types: filoplume, down, body contour, flight contour, semiplume, bristle.
- ♣ Feather structure: quill, shaft, outer and inner vanes, barb, barbicels, barbules.

## **Flight Feather Trim OR Wing Clipping? accurate terminology may prevent tragic accidents**

### **To trim or not to trim?, Part I**

- ♣ General rule is that the heavier bodied the bird, the fewer primary feathers that are removed.
- ♣ Secondaries should never be trimmed.
- ♣ Tail feathers should never be trimmed.
- ♣ Always allow primaries to extend beyond coverts when trimming flight feathers for protection of feather shaft and emerging new feather growth, and for prevention of irritation to body under wing area.
- ♣ Follow angle of wing line when trimming flight feathers
- ♣ Always trim both wings in same manner
- ♣ Exercise caution, each bird is an individual – even same species birds may not require same flight feather trim.

### **What to trim?**

- ♣ Never clip shaft of a blood feather; a blood feather is one with blood visible in the quill.
- ♣ Never trim a bird's tail feathers.
- ♣ Which clip for which bird?

Long-tailed, slim bodied birds (cockatiels, macaws, Indian rose-ringed, Quakers, etc.)  
usually require trimming of the first 5-10 primary flight feathers

Heavy-bodied, short-tailed birds such as amazons, African greys, Eclectus, Poicephalus,  
or lovebirds usually require trimming of the first 5 primary feathers.

Don't overtrim!

- ♣ Never trim a bird's beak as overgrown beak may be symptomatic indicator of other health problems.

### **How to extend the wing?**

- ♣ Gently but firmly hold wing at wrist extending out carefully from under towel, similar to opening a fan, using either sharp scissors or bird-claw scissors to trim feather shafts at appropriate length, following line of wing as guideline.
- ♣ When trimmed, gently fold, bend and tuck wing back under towel, and repeat procedure with other wing.

### **To trim or not to trim? Part II**

- ♣ Towel = Predator. Instill comfort, not fear.

- ♣ Trimming a bird's flight feathers *may* lead to feather destructive behaviors such as feather plucking, over preening, and may even result in bird's self-mutilation.
- ♣ Same trim not appropriate for all birds.
- ♣ Flight feather trim may result in head or bodily injury from crash landings due to *pneumatized* bone of psittacine and other bird species.
- ♣ Flight feather trim will not guarantee that a bird cannot fly away depending upon environment it is in.
- ♣ Flighted birds may panic, and when outside of cage or unrestrained, may fly into hard surface causing bodily injury or death.

## Beak Trims

- ❖ **A beak should never be routinely dremelled.**
- ❖ In the past, people have trimmed beaks far too aggressively.
- ❖ There is a bundle of nerves at the tip of the beak, and beak trims can be painful.
- ❖ There is a blood supply to the beak, which can be cut into.
- ❖ Overgrown beaks can be a sign of malnourishment or disease
- ❖ Maloccluded beaks will need to be trimmed on a regular basis.
- ❖ Notching beaks or splitting beaks to "cure" feather picking or aggression doesn't solve the problem and is painful and inhumane. The bird will always have a malocclusion.

## Things to Remember

- ♣ All parrots are highly intelligent, empathic non-human animals.
- ♣ All parrots are wild animals whether bred domestically or not.
- ♣ All parrots deserve our respect and trust.
- ♣ All parrots deserve to be handled calmly and compassionately.
- ♣ When trimming flight feathers or nails always exercise caution.
- ♣ Keep grooming session as short as possible to minimize stress on bird (*and groomer?*)
- ♣ When in doubt, check it out – ask for help!

## *Finally...*

- ♣ If the veterinary practice is not set up for birds, consider arranging in advance for knowledgeable foster homes to house birds and assist with placement of unclaimed or unwanted birds.