Poisons and Parrots

Poisons and Toxins : Protecting Your Birds From Danger
by Gary Gallerstein D.V.M.
(Adapted From The Complete Bird Owner's Handbook)

Keeping birds in our home environment presents us with many challenges. Insuring the safety and well-being of our feathered friends is a large responsibility and one that is taken seriously by many of those that enjoy keeping birds as pets. Keep in mind that our homes are not a natural environment for birds and in many ways can be very hostile to them. To keep them from harm one should always monitor their birds when they are out of their cages.

The following excerpts are from The Complete Bird Owner's Handbook, Gary A. Gallerstein D.V.M. , Howell Book House, 1994. This excellent book covers all aspects of bird care and health that is essential for both the pet bird owner and avian professional. We wish to thank the author for the permission to present this material to you. Net Pets hopes that you will find Dr. Gallerstein's information as an exceptional reference source in helping to provide a safe environment for your birds.

Poisoning

Route of Poisoning

- Ingestion (by mouth)
- Inhalation (by breathing)
- Topical (Contact with skin)

Suspect poisoning if your bird is sick and you observe:

- Contact with a known poisonous substance, including chewing or playing with the packaging, exposure to fumes or odors.
- Opened or spilled containers of any poisonous substance.
- Toxic plants recently chewed on.
- A foreign substance noted on the feathers

Signs To Watch

- For Sudden onset of regurgitation, diarrhea, coughing, breathing problems, and/or depression.
- Bloody droppings Redness or burns around the mouth.
- Convulsions.
- Paralysis.

- Shock.

First Aid For Poisoning

1. Remove the poison to prevent further ingestion.
2. For eye contact, flush the eye with lukewarm water. For skin contact, flush the area with water. For fume intoxication, ventilate the room immediately - open windows, use a fan, or better yet, remove the bird from the area altogether.
3. Call your veterinarian.

- Bring a sample of the poison and its packaging.
- Bring a sample of the bird's most recent droppings.
- Provide general supportive care.

Lead Poisoning

Lead poisoning is one of the most common toxicities occurring in pet birds. There are a number of potential sources of lead in most homes. This type of poisoning could frequently be prevented by simply recognizing the common sources of lead in the environment.

Sources Of Lead For Pet Birds

Bird toys weighted with lead, old costume jewelry, lead caulking in stained-glass windows, fishing weights, curtain weights, and some types of screens and wires cause the majority of lead poisoning in pet birds.

Newsprint, lead pencils, and paint manufactured within the last twenty years will not cause poisoning.

As strange as it may seem, inspect branches to be used as perches before placing them in the cage. There have been cases of birds finding and ingesting buckshot embedded in the wood.

Signs To Watch For

- Depression, weakness.
- Blindness
- Seizures, "walking in circles," "head wandering".
- Regurgitation.
- Droppings; excessively wet, may even be bloody ("tomato juice-colored" urine)
- General signs of a sick bird.

First Aid For Lead Poisoning:

Unfortunately, there is no first aid available. In most instances, the pet owner is not even aware the bird has ingested lead. Treatment is very

specific, and veterinary care must be initiated as soon as possible.

"Teflon Toxicity" or Polymer Fume Fever.

Polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) is a synthetic polymer used as a non-stick surface in cookware. The brand names Teflon, Silverstone, and T-Fal are the best known, but PTFE-coated products are also manufactured under other trade names.

As Dr. Peter Sakas states: Under normal cooking conditions, PTFE-coated cookware is stable and safe. When PTFE is heated above 530 degrees Farenheit, however, it undergoes breakdown and emits caustic (acid) fumes. Most foods cook at lower temperatures: water boils at 212 degrees, eggs fry at 350 degrees, and deep frying occurs at 410 degrees. But when empty PTFE-coated cookware is left on a burner set on the high setting, it can reach temperatures of 750 degrees or greater. Thus, if a pan is being prre-heated on a burner and forgotten, or if water boils out of a pot, breakdown of the PTFE can occur. In other words, PTFE cookware has to be "abused" to emit toxic fumes, but this is not as rare as it might seem; many people fall asleep after they put pots or pans on the stove to heat.

Birds kept in areas close to the kitchen will usually die very shortly after breathing the fumes. Even birds kept in another room are at great risk. Severe breathing difficulties, such as gasping for breath, may be seen just prior to death. Humans, dogs, cats, and other mammals are somewhat less sensitive to the very serious effects of these fumes.

First Aid For Teflon Toxicity

1. Remove the affected bird immediately from the home and supply lots of fresh air. Unfortunately, other than this, no first aid exists.
2. Call your avian veterinarian immediately.

Insecticide Poisoning

The most common insecticide poisoning in pet birds occurs when the house is sprayed (" fogged" or " bombed") for various pests. As already mentioned, birds have very sensitive respiratory systems. Always take the birds and their cages out of the house before spraying. When spraying is finished, open all doors and windows to help remove the odors. Use fans if needed. Do not bring your birds back in the home for at least twenty-four hours. Consult your veterinarian for the safest and most effective foggers.

First Aid For Insecticide Poisoning

1. Remove the bird immediately and supply lots of fresh air.
2. Provide general supportive care.
3. Call your veterinarian immediately.

4. Bring the insecticide along.

(Author's Note: Our homes "house" many dangerous products. There's a very real risk for pets getting into them. For birds, the kitchen poses the greatest peril. Gallerstein, The complete Bird Owner's Handbook, Howell Book House, 1994)

Common Household Poisons

Acetone, Ammonia, Antifreeze, Ant syrup or paste, Arsenic, Bathroom bowl cleaner, Bleach, Boric acid, Camphophenique, Carbon tetrachloride, Charcoal lighter, Clinitest tablets, Copper and brass cleaners, Corn and wart remover, Crayons, Deodorants, Detergents, Disinfectants, Drain cleaners, Epoxy glue, Fabric softeners, Garbage toxins, Garden sprays, Gasoline, Gun cleaner, Gunpowder, Hair dyes, Herbicides, Hexachlorophene (in some soaps), Indelible markers, Insecticides, Iodine Kerosene, Lighter fluid, Linoleum (contains lead salts), Matches, Model glue, Mothballs, Muriatic acid, Mushrooms (some varieties, Nail Polish, Nail polish remove, Oven cleaner, Paint, Paint remover, Paint thinner, Perfume, Permanent wave solutions, Pesticides, Photographic solutions, Pine oil Plants, Prescription and non-prescription drugs, Red squill, Rodenticides, Rubbing alcohol, Shaving lotion, Silver polish, Snail bait, Spot remover, Spray starch, Strychnine, Sulphuric acid, Suntan lotion, Super glue, Turpentine, Weed killers, Window cleaners.

(Source: Adapted from Gary Gallerstein, Bird Owner's Home Health and Care Handbook (New York: Howell Book House, 1984); Sheldon Gerstenfeld, The Bird Care Book (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1981); and Margaret L. Petrak, ed., Diseases of Cage and Aviary Birds, 2nd ed. Philadelphia, Lea and Febiger, 1982)

Common Poisonous Substances

Acids, Alkalis, Petroleum Products, Dishwasher detergent, Drain cleaner, Floor polish, Furniture polish, Gasoline, Kerosene, Paint remover, Paint thinner, Shoe polish, Toilet bowl cleaner, Wax (floor or furniture), Wood preservative.
(Source:Sheldon Gerstenfeld, The Bird Care Book (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1981)

Plants Considered Toxic to Birds
(The following is a list of some potentially toxic plants. Be sure you correctly identified all plants in your bird's environment.When using these lists, ensure you use the Scientific Name to identify Plants, if uncertain remove the plant)
(Abbreviations: Spp=subspecies, Sp=species)

Plant Name	Scientific Name	Parts Known to be Poisonous
Acokanthera	Acokanthera spp.	all parts toxic

Amaryllis	Amaryllidaceae	Bulbs
American Yew	Taxus canadensis	Needles, seeds
Angel's Trumpet	Datura spp.,	leaves, seeds, flowers
Apricot	Prunus armeniaca,	pits, leaves, and bark
* Autumn Crocus	Colchicum autumnalle	bulb
Avocado	Persea americana	pit, leaves, unripe fruit, and stems
Azalea	Rhododendron occidentale	Leaves
Balsam pear	Memordica charantia	Seeds, outer rind of fruit
Baneberry	Actaia spp.	Berries, roots
Belladonna	Atropa belladonna	All parts
Bird of Paradise	Caesalpina gilliesii	Seeds
Bittersweet	Celastrus spp.	All parts
Black Locust	Robinia pseudoacacia	Bark, sprouts, foliage
* Bleeding Heart	Dicentra	all parts
Bluegreen algae	Schizophycaea spp	Some forms toxic
Bracken Fern	Pteridium aquilinum	All parts
Some forms toxic Boxwood	Buxus sempervirens	Leaves, stems
Buckthorn	Rhamnus spp.	Fruit, bark
Burdock	Arctium spp.	All parts
Buttercup	Ranunculus spp.	Sap, bulbs
Calla lily	Zantedeschia aethiopica	Leaves
Caladium	Caladium spp.	Leaves and rhizome
Castor Oil Plant	Ricinus communis	Beans, leaves
Catclaw Acacia	Acacia greggii,	twigs and leaves
Chalice vine	Solandra spp.	All parts
Cherry tree	Prunus spp.	Bark, twigs, leaves, pits
Chinaberry	Melia azadarach	All parts
Chokecherry	Birdcherry Prunus	seeds (stones),
Christmas candle	Pedilanthus tithymaloides	Sap
Clematis	Clematis spp.	All parts
Coral plant	Jatropha multifida	Seeds
Cowslip	Caltha polustris	Seeds
Crocus (autumn)	Cholchicum autumnale	All parts
Cycad, or Sago Cycas	Cycas revoluta	All parts
Daffodil	Narcissus spp	Bulbs

Daphne	Daphne spp.	Berries
Datura	Datura spp.	Berries
Deadly amanita	Amanita muscaria	All parts
Death camas	Zygadenis elegans	All parts
Delphinium	Delphinium spp.	All parts
Devil's Ivy	Epipremnum aureum	All parts
Dieffenbachia	Dieffenbachia picta	Leaves
Eggplant	Solanaceae spp.	All parts but fruit
Elderberry	Sambucus mexicana,	roots, leaves, stems, bark
Elephant's ear (taro)	Colocasis spp.	Leaves, stem
English ivy	Ilex aquafolium	Berries, leaves
English yew	Taxus baccata	needles, seeds
Euonymus	Euonymus spp.	fruit, bark, leaves
European Pennroyal	Mentha pulegium	
False henbane	Veratrum woodii	All parts
Figs	Ficus spp	sap
Fly agaric mushroom (deadly amanita)	Amanita muscaria	All parts
Four o'clock	Mirabilis jalapa	All parts
Foxglove	Digitalis purpurea	Leaves, seeds
Golden chain (laburnum)	Laburnum anagyroides	All parts, especially seeds
Heliotrope	Heliotropium spp.,	leaves
Hemlock	poison Conium spp.	All parts, especially roots and seeds
Hemlock	water Conium spp.	All parts especially roots and seeds
Henbane	Hyocyanamus niger	Seeds
Holly	Ilex spp.	Berries
Horse chestnut	Aesculus spp.	Nuts, twigs
Horse Nettle	Solanum carolinense	All parts
Hyacinth	Hyacinthinus orientalis	Bulbs
Hydrangea	Hydrangea spp.	Flower,bud
Indian turnip (jackinthepulpit)	Arisaema triphyllum	All parts
Iris (blue flag)	Iris spp.	Bulbs
Ivy (Boston, English, and some others)	Hedera spp.	All parts
Japanese yew	Taxus cuspidata	Needles, seeds

Java bean (lima bean)	Phaseolus lunatus	Uncooked beans
Jerusalem cherry	Solanum pseudocapsicum	Berries
Jessamine, Yellow	Gelsemium sempervirens,	leaves, stems
Jonquil	Narcissus jonquilla	All parts
Jimsonweed (thornapple)	Datura spp.	Leaves, seeds
Juniper	Juniperus virginiana	Needles, stems, berries
Lantana	Lantana spp.	Immature berries
Larkspur	Delphinium spp.	All parts
Laurel Kalmia, Ledum	Rhododendron spp.	All parts
Lilly of the valley	Convallaria majalis	All parts, including the water in which they have been kept
Lobelia	Lobelia spp.	All parts
Locoweed	Astragalu mollissimus	All parts
Lords and ladies (cuckoopint)	arum sp.	All parts
Lupine	Lupinus spp.	All parts
Marijuana	Cannabis sativa	Leaves
Mayapple	Podophyllum spp.	All parts, except fruit
Mescal bean	Sophora spp.	Seeds
Mistletoe	Santalales spp.	Berries
Milkweed	Asclepias spp.	All parts
Mock orange	Poncirus spp.	Fruit
Monkshood	Aconitum spp.	Leaves, roots
Moonseed	Menispermum canadense	All parts
Morning glory	Ipomoea spp.	All parts
Mushrooms	Amanita spp. and many others	All parts
Narcissus	Narcissus spp.	Bulbs
Nightshades (all types)	Solanum spp.	Berries, leaves
Oak	Quercus	acorn, young plant
Oleander	Nerium oleander	Leaves, branches, nectar of blossoms
Pennyroyal	Mentha pulegium	All parts
Peach	Prunus persica,	leaves, pit, bark
Peony	Paeonia officinalis	All parts
Periwinkle	Vinca minor, Vinca rosea	All parts
Peyote	Lophophora williamsii	All parts
Philodendron	Philodendron spp.	Leaves, stems

Pigweed	Amaranthus spp.	All parts
Plum	Prunus spp.,	leaves, pit, bark
Poison Hemlock	Conium maculatum	All parts
Poison ivy	Toxicodendron radicans	Sap
Poison oak	Toxicodendron quercifolium	Sap
Poison Sumac	Rhux vernix	All parts
Poinsettia	Euphorobia pulcherrima	Leaves, flowers
Pokeweed (inkberry)	Phytolacca americans	Leaves, roots, immature berries
Poppy	Papaver somniferum and related spp.	All parts
Potato	Solanum tuberosum	Eyes and new shoots
Pothos	Eprimemnun aureum	All parts
Primrose	Primula spp.	All parts
Privet	Lingustrum volgare	All parts, includling berries
Ragwort	Senecio jacobea and related spp.	All parts
Red Maple	Acer rubrum	All parts
Rhododendron	Rhododendron spp.	All parts
Rhubarb	Rheum rhaponticum	Leaves
Rosary pea (Indian licorice)	Abrus precatorius	Seeds
Sage	Salvia officinalis	All parts
Sedum	Sedum	All parts
Shamrock Plant	Medicago lupulina, Trifolium repens, Oxalis acetosella	All parts
Skunk cabbage	Symplocarpus foetidus	All parts
Snowdrop	Ornithogalum umbellatum	All parts, especially buds
Snow on the mountain (ghostweed)	Euphorbia marginata	All parts
Sorrel	Rumex spp., Oxalis spp.	All parts
Spindle Tree	Euonymus	leaves, fruit, bark
Spurges	Euphorbia spp.	All parts
Star of Bethlehem	Ornithogalum umbellatum	All parts
Sweet pea	Lathryus latifolius	Seeds and fruit
Tansy	Tanacetum vulgare	all parts
Tobacco	Nicotinia spp.	Leaves
Tomato	Lycopersicon esculentum	stems and leaves

Tulip	Tulipa spp.	All parts
Vetches	Vicia spp.	All parts
Virginia creeper	Pathenocissu quinquefolia	Sap
Water Hemlock	Cicuta spp.	
Waxberry	Symphoricarpos albus	
Western yew	Taxus breviflora	Needles, seeds
Wisteria	Wisteria spp.	All parts
Yam bean	Pachyrhizus erosus	Roots, immature pods

Source: Adapted from American Medical Association Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1985); R. Dean Axelson, Caring For Your Pet Bird (Poole-Dorset, England: Blanford Press, 1984) Gary Gallerstein, Bird Owner's Home Health and Care Handbook (New York: Howell Book House, 1984); Greg J. Harrison and Linda R. Harrison, eds., Clinical Avian Medicine and Surgery (Philadelphia: W.B. Saunders, 1986) and John M. Kingsbury, Poisonous Plants of the United States and Canada (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, 1964).Alicia McWatters, Ph.D., C.N.C.