

Health & Anatomy Part 1

Created by The Gabriel Foundation





Warning:

The following slides contain images that **some viewers may find disturbing**. **Viewer** discretion is advised.

Let's Talk About Poop!



**I Will Poop
On Everything
You Love**

Birds Poop!

Birds do not have bladders; their kidneys filter waste directly to the cloaca (vent).

Birds excrete pasty urates (the white part) and feces (the brown and green part) together in one bowel movement. The percentage of urates to feces should be approximately 50/50.

A cloaca is where both waste and reproductive tracts meet before they exit the bird's body at the vent.

Birds poop frequently to keep their bodies as light as possible for flight.



This poop is a great example of a bowel movement that has a good ratio of urates to feces!

What does this mean for you and your bird?

You should get familiar with your bird's poop! Changes in consistency, smell, or frequency may indicate that your bird needs to see a vet.

If you notice undigested food in your bird's poop you should take them to the vet immediately.

The color of fecal matter is greatly dependent on ingested foods. **Things such as concord grapes, blueberries, beets, carrots, red pellets, and more can all result in strong color changes.** For example, beets or red pellets typically result in dark red feces. This is normal!

Birds poop every 20 minutes on average, so you need to be prepared to clean up after your bird frequently. TGF does NOT recommend "potty training" your bird, because holding their poop for too long can lead to a fecal impaction.

The amount of water contained in droppings can vary from bird to bird and is also dependent on diet; eating more fresh foods will result in droppings that contain more water. Know what is normal for your bird!



Poops that might give you a scare!



Remember: Poop can change color with food!

Both poops have a red tint to them but are totally normal! The red color is due to red pellets and beets in the diet, not blood!



The poop below is more of an orange color – this could be due red pellets or carrots in the diet. Still normal!



** One thing we might want to note about this poop is the consistency. This poop is a little on the watery side. Watery poops can be caused by a number of factors but if this is out of your bird's normal range, it would be a good idea to take them in to the vet for a check up!

Birds Lay Eggs

- Birds can be stimulated to lay eggs by a variety of factors such as diet, ratio of sunlight to darkness, the presence of a nesting cavity space, and being sexually stimulated.
- Female birds can lay eggs even in the absence of a male.
- Laying eggs temporarily decreases a bird's calcium stores and can be life threatening if the egg becomes stuck in the reproductive tract. This is commonly referred to as “egg binding” or “being egg bound.”
- You should NOT supplement with calcium unless directed by a veterinarian. Calcium supplementation can be very dangerous!



Tasman, an Eclectus parrot, spends long hours in boxes large enough to fit in, indicating that she views them as nesting cavities. We no longer provide her with large boxes but will give her smaller ones to play with!

What Does This Mean for You and Your Bird?



- Birds may view boxes and blankets as a nesting site. It is best to remove them if your bird shows signs of using them as a nesting cavity, such as spending long amounts of time inside or under them or defending them aggressively.
- You should only pet your parrot on the head and neck, avoiding excessive cuddling. Some parrots may be stimulated if touched anywhere, even the head.
- Excessive sexual stimulation may possibly cause your parrot to strain its cloaca resulting in prolapsed tissue (or exposed tissue.) A prolapse is a bulging, drooping, or falling out of a cloaca from the bird's vent.
- These guidelines are important for male birds as well!



This is a prolapse from one of our male umbrella cockatoos. He requires baths several times a week to remove the poop that builds up around the prolapse and on his tail. We also monitor the prolapse closely to check for lesions, blood, and other signs of trauma.

Birds have feathers

Feathers arise from feather follicles in the bird's skin. They grow inside of a keratin sheath supplied with blood known as a vascular calamus. The feather's blood supply dries up after the feather is fully grown, and the bird will flake off the protective sheath over the feather. The feather when contained in the sheath is commonly known as a "pin feather."

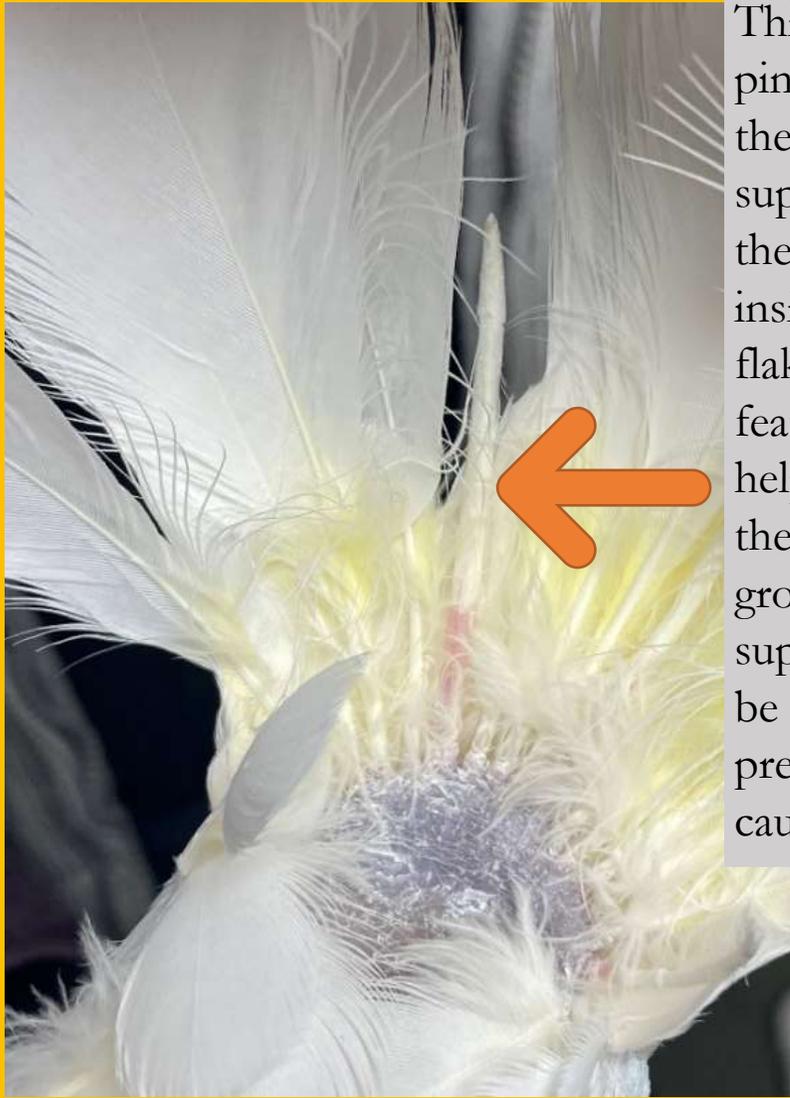
Parrots grow new feathers when the old shafts fall out. Clipping feathers does not result in a new feather growing.

Parrots lose flight feathers symmetrically and molt their wings and tail once or twice a year. Body feathers are replaced year-round, but they may molt out more of them while their flight feathers are also molting.

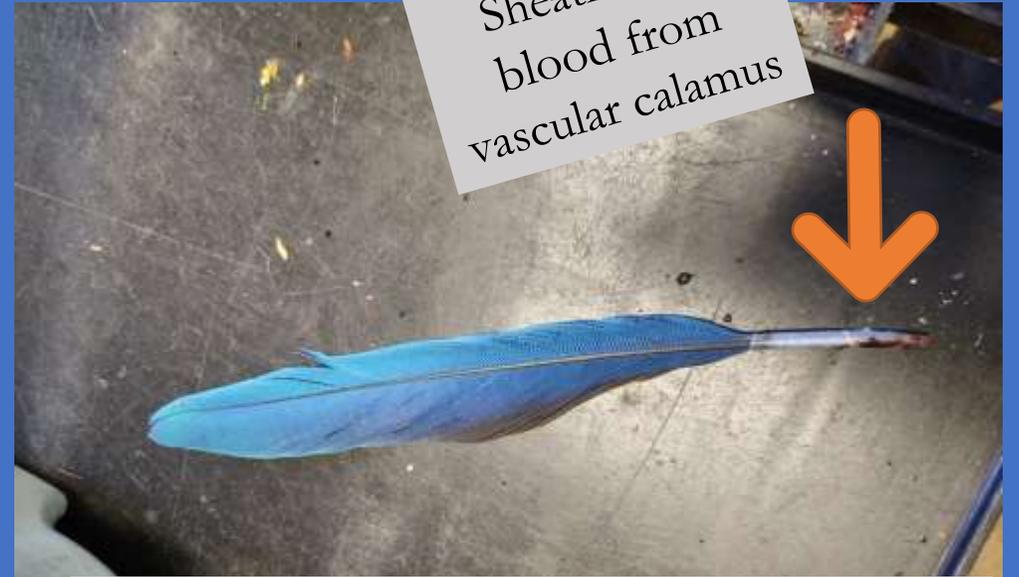
Most birds have an uropygial gland at the base of the tail, known colloquially as a "preen gland." This produces oils that birds gather with their beak and spread on their feathers to keep them clean, shiny, and waterproof. Amazons, hyacinth macaws, and Lear's macaws do not have this gland.

Feathers are a bird's primary source of thermoregulation. They can erect their feathers to trap warm air and increase their body temperature. They do not have sweat glands to help them cool off.





This is a pin feather! The pink portion at the base of the feather is the blood supply. The white portion is the sheath, and the feather is inside! The sheath can be flaked off to expose the feather. Be careful when helping your bird preen – if the feather is not fully grown and still has a blood supply, the pin feather can be sensitive to the touch and preening too far down can cause pain!



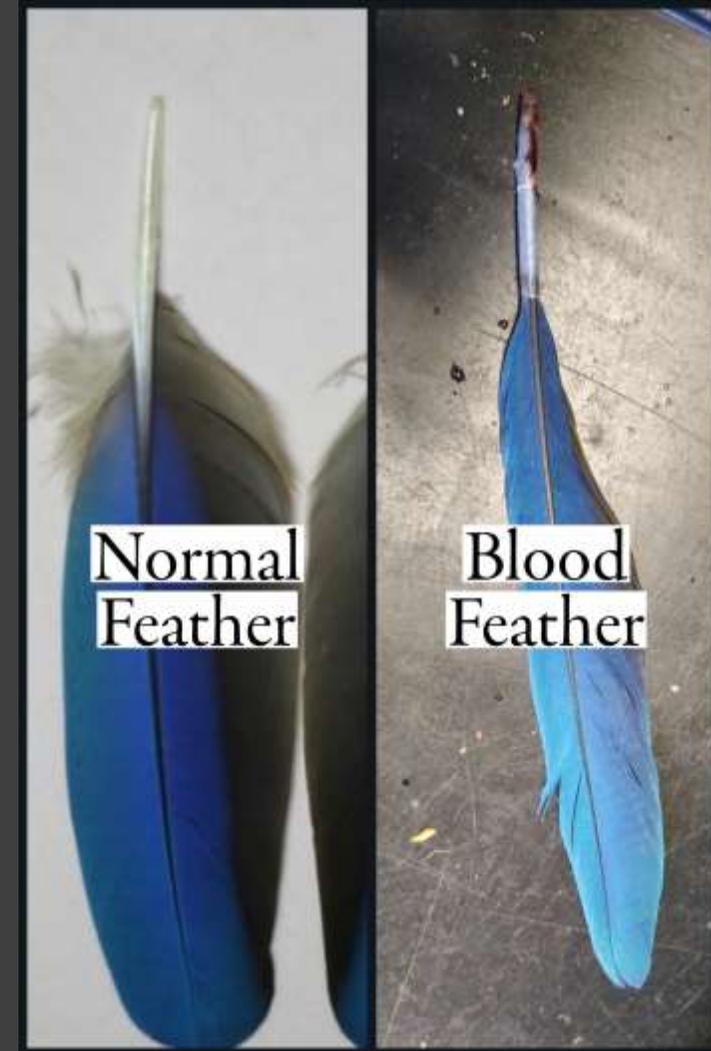
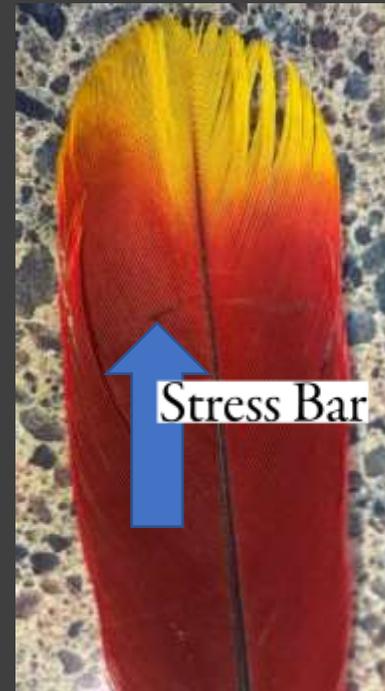
Sheath with blood from vascular calamus

Here you can see a feather that was plucked (by the bird) before fully growing in.



Things to look out for!

- Birds will occasionally break blood feathers. This can look very dramatic, but the bleeding should stop after several minutes. If the feather continues to bleed for a prolonged period, you can try to stop the bleeding by packing the broken feather end with flour or cornstarch and apply slight pressure at the feather base for up to 45 minutes. If bleeding persists, contact your vet.
- Never pull a blood feather!
- If you notice feathers growing in with stress bars, off colored (e.g., feathers that should be green growing in brown or black) or any other abnormalities, you should take your bird to the vet.



Baby, it is hot outside.

- Without sweat glands, birds cannot cool themselves as easily as humans. Birds will open their beaks and pant when overheated (or stressed.) To help cool them off you can wet their feet with cool water and/or spray mist.
- Make sure birds have adequate shade when they are outside so they can prevent themselves from getting too hot in the first place.
- Plucked birds are more sensitive to both heat and cold and should be monitored carefully in extreme temperatures.





TGF Wing Clipping Policy

& things to consider

- We do not clip our birds at TGF, and we generally discourage adopters from clipping their birds. Even if a bird has a history of being clipped, we allow for those feathers to fully grow out.
- Although wing clipping is discouraged, you can clip a bird's wings to prevent them from flying as they molt in each new set of flight feathers. It is important to consider your reasons for clipping your bird's feathers carefully before proceeding. A properly done wing trim should allow birds to safely maneuver to the ground, but not really get lift. Consult us or a vet to determine if a wing trim is right for your bird.



TGF Wing Clipping Policy

- The “vanity trim” leaves the first few primaries untouched so the wings appear untrimmed. Birds with vanity trims can often still propel themselves into the air but will have little control, causing them to crash when they try to land. This can also lead to tail injuries. TGF can provide wing clips, but we do not provide vanity trims since they go against current AAV guidelines.
- Over-trimming a bird’s flight feathers can cause a bird to be unbalanced and cause them to fall when they attempt to fly. A bird may also panic, fly into things and hurt themselves. Wing trims can also hinder escape from other pets or unsafe situations.
- These situations may lead to the bird losing confidence in maneuvering its environment, becoming injured, or beginning to pluck its feathers.

Continued...

What does a fully-feathered wing look like?

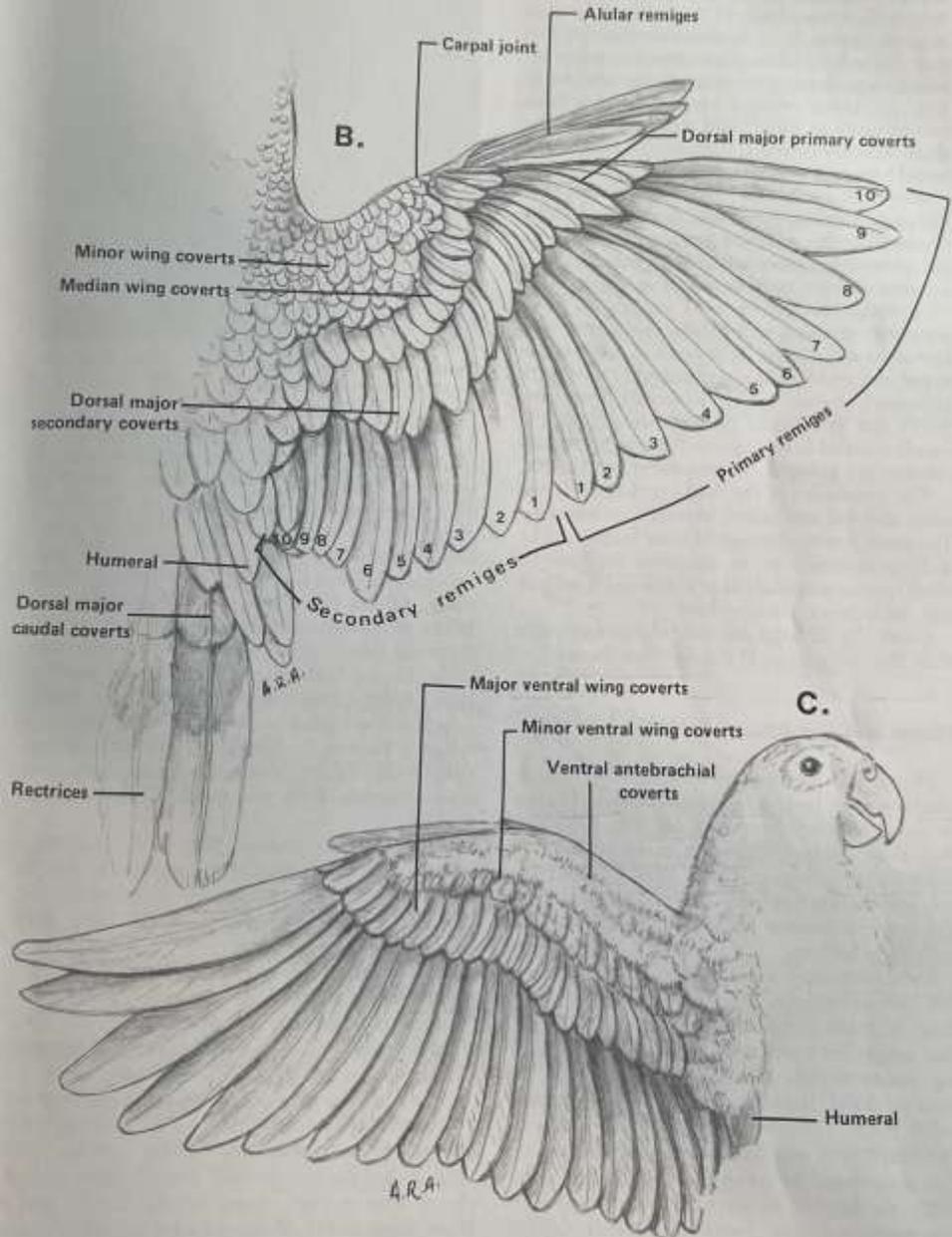


Figure 4-3 Continued. B, Dorsal wing feathers. C, Ventral wing feathers.

- The picture to the left shows what a fully-feather wing should look like! The upper picture (B) shows what the wing looks like when viewing the bird from the back and the lower picture (C) shows the wing from the front!
- In the next slide we use anatomical terminology including primaries, secondaries, and coverts. On the diagram, these are the primary remiges, secondary remiges, and the dorsal and ventral major primary and secondary coverts.

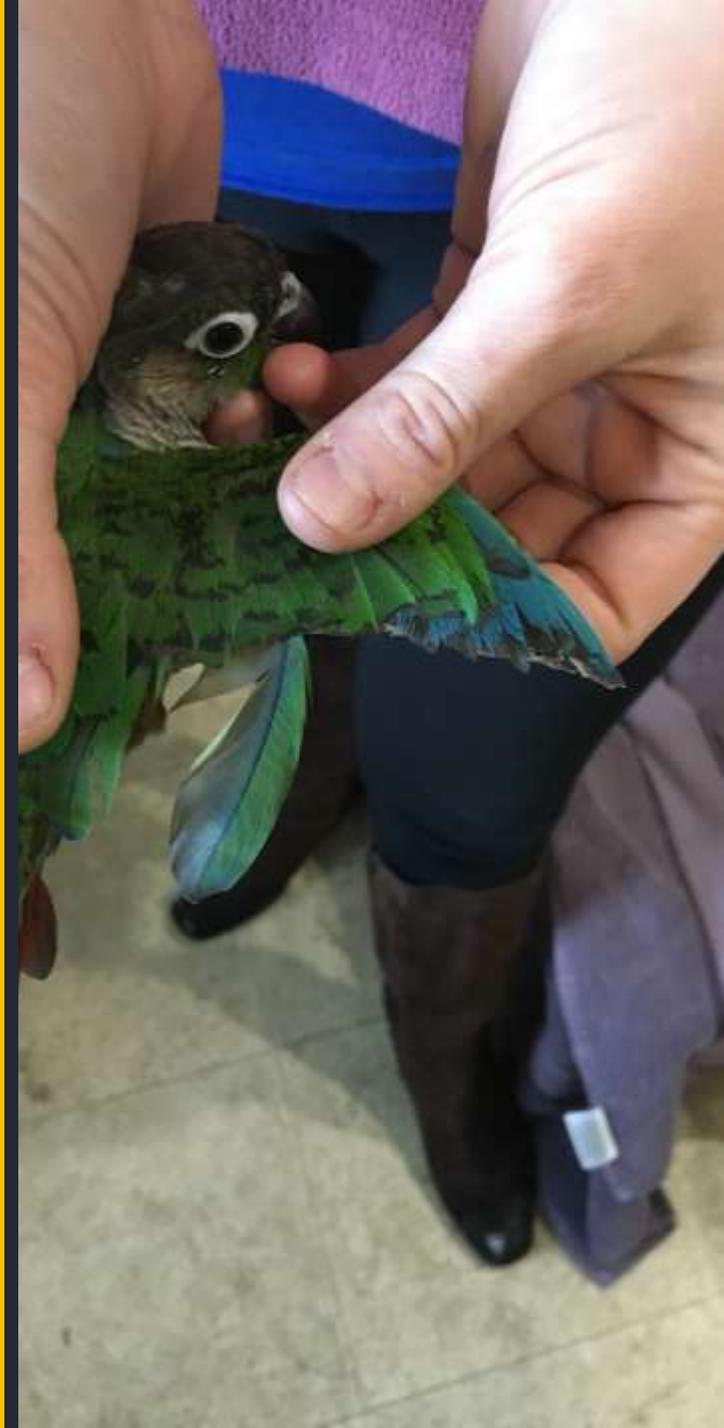
Harrison, G. Harrison, L. (1986) *Clinical Avian Medicine and Surgery*. Philadelphia, PA: W. B. Saunders Company, pp. 35, fig. 4-3 B, C.

These photos show a **terrible** wing trim on a Green Cheek Conure



- Here we can see that both the primary and the secondary feathers have been trimmed.
- A proper wing trim should only cut the first 5-7 primaries and should NOT touch the secondaries.
- In these images, both the primary and secondary covert feathers have been damaged as well.

This is the kind of wing trim that could result in harm to your bird!



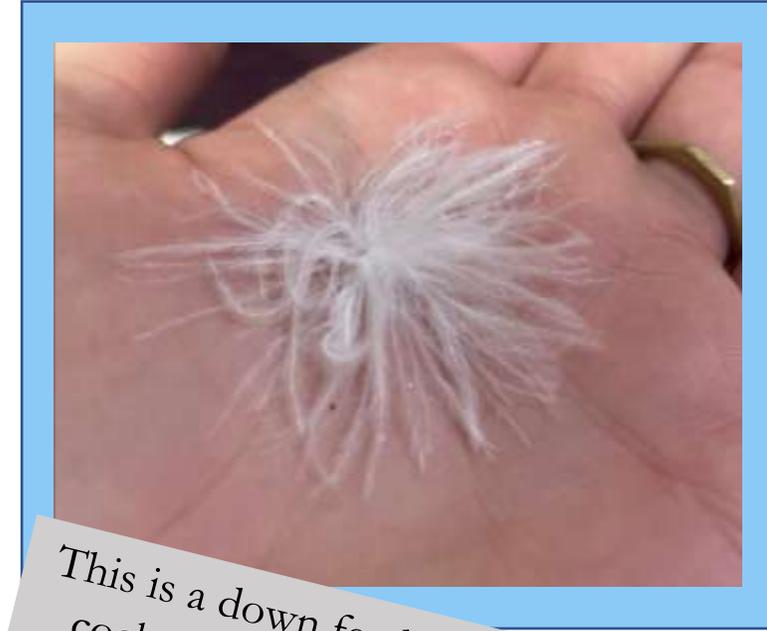
Bathing your bird



- Regular baths help keep skin and feathers in good condition but are not so important that a bath should be given if a bird is unwilling.
- Try multiple methods for bathing your bird to see what they prefer. Some examples include a perch in the shower, a mist bottle, a hose outside with a mist setting, and a bowl or sink shallowly filled with warm water.
- Give your bird plenty of bathing options and multiple opportunities to take advantage of.
- Allow your bird to say “no” when they aren’t interested in a bath.
- While it is not necessary to bathe your bird daily, TGF recommends getting your bird soaking wet 2-3 times per week, as long as the bird is willing. Consider that in the wild there are wet and dry seasons.



- Parrots produce a white powder down, or dander. It is created from soft down feathers being broken into tiny pieces as the birds preen. Cockatoos, cockatiels, and greys produce the most dander.
- Because of the oil on their feathers, the powder sticks to surfaces it lands on.
- This dander can be extremely irritating to some human lungs and have negative health effects. “Bird Fancier’s Lung” is triggered by exposure to proteins present in dry dust of the droppings and sometimes feathers of a variety of birds.



This is a down feather from an umbrella cockatoo! This feather will eventually break down into small pieces that can be irritating to human lungs.



What does this mean for you and your bird?

If you have a respiratory illness, you may wish to speak with your doctor before committing to adopting a parrot.

It is not uncommon for people to be allergic to bird dander. You may want to warn guests about your parrot beforehand, especially if they have any respiratory illnesses such as asthma.

TGF recommends against having your bird in your room while you are sleeping, as you can breathe in excessive amounts of dander overnight. This is also dependent on the size of the bedroom and placement of the bird.

Even if you do not experience any immediate effects, prolonged exposure to dander could possibly result in health complications later in life.

TGF recommends the use of an air purifier near the cage to help reduce dander.

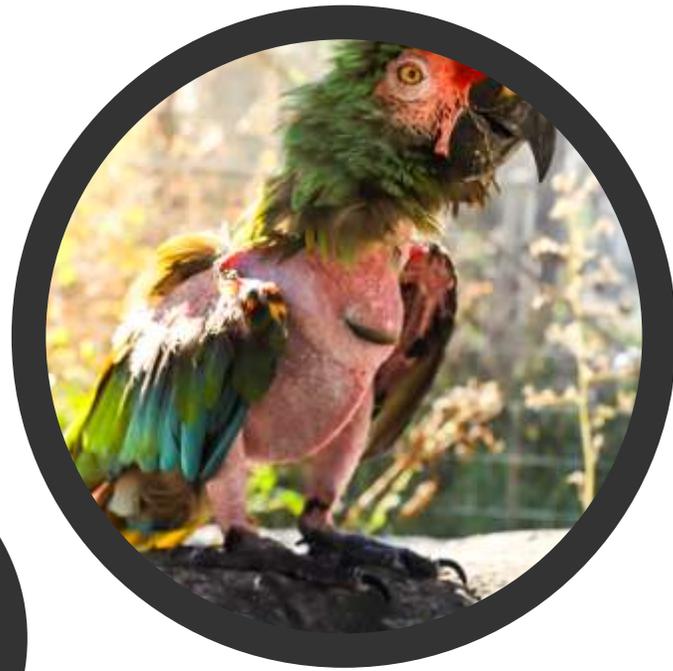
Feather plucking

- Feather plucking is a complex behavior that is difficult to stop once it has started unless an underlying physical cause is diagnosed and treated.
- Birds may stop feather destructive behavior (FDB) after the initial triggering event has resolved, or they may continue.
- Birds can damage their feather follicles if they pluck too often, which prevents feathers from ever growing back, even if the behavior has stopped. Just because you see a naked bird doesn't mean they are currently plucking or that they are unhappy and suffering!
- Prevention is the best method of keeping a bird from plucking. Give your bird lots of enrichment and a good diet. If you notice your bird starting to pluck, you should have them examined for underlying health conditions and then begin a behavior modification regime.
- Typically, collars are only considered for extreme cases, such as mutilation of the skin, since collar use can result in stress to the bird. They don't resolve the issue by covering it up!



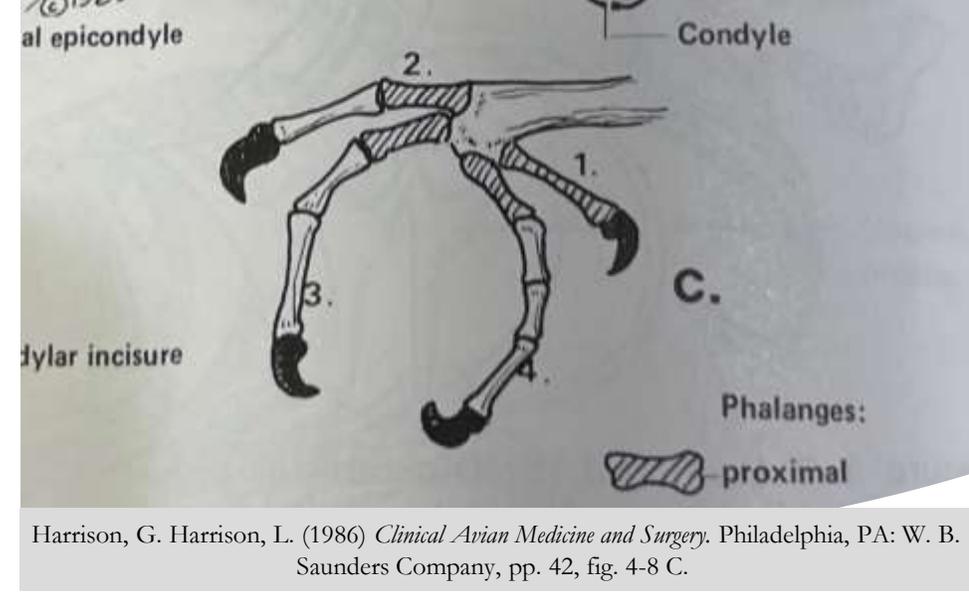
These are some examples of collars and shirts that we use to prevent serious skin mutilation.





All these birds have varying degrees of feather destructive behavior, and all are healthy birds!





Birds have nails!

- Birds have 4 digits, 2 extending cranially and 2 extending caudally.
- Each digit has a varying number of phalanges, but the most distal phalange is the visible nail!
- Each nail has a nerve and blood supply, called the quick. In lightly colored nails, the nerve and blood supply, called the quick, is visible. It's harder to tell where it ends with darker nails.

Quick Tips!

Your bird's nails are too long if the toe is elevated from the ground when the bird is on a flat surface.

Overgrown/sharp toenails can catch in carpets, toys, blankets, and fabrics, causing the bird to panic.

You should take your bird to the vet or a trusted groomer for nail trims!

The toes may be sore after trimming, but if your bird still shows signs of tenderness after two days, take them to the vet.

Make sure your groomer does not trim the nails too short; your bird needs them to grip things, and will fall a lot if their grip is damaged.

Some people train their birds to allow their nails to be filed with an emery board without restraint. You can blunt nails with a nail file if they are sharp but not long yet!



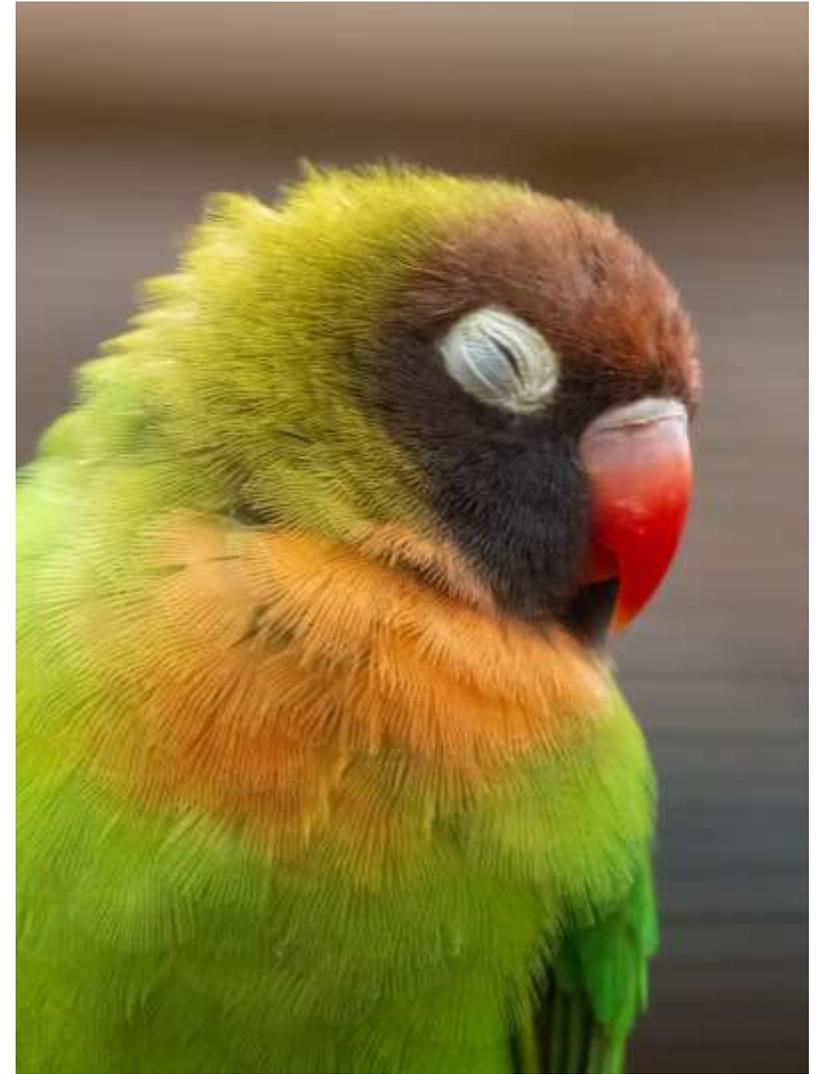


Sleepy time!

- Birds need 10-12 hours of complete dark and silence most nights to get the required amount of rest.
- Birds may also nap during the day.
- Most birds wake up at sunrise and go to sleep at sunset; parrots are diurnal.

Quick Tips!

- Birds can become startled by sudden noise and lights from inside and outside the house, which may result in the bird falling from its perch or excessive vocalizations in the evening. You should keep your bird's sleeping area away from busy parts of the house where light and noise could disturb them.
- Covering the cage is not necessary, though some birds may prefer it.
- If you prefer to stay up late at night, you should plan on putting your bird to bed earlier in the evening and not have them stay up with you.
- You should provide your bird with a perch high in its cage for it to roost on at night. We refer to this as a "sleep perch."



Thank you

Thank you for completing Part 1 of our Health and Anatomy presentation!

Next, please navigate to Part 2