

Signs of Illness in Birds



Early signs of illness in birds are frequently missed by the average pet owner. In the wild, a sick bird will attempt to maintain a normal appearance as long as possible. One result of this behavior in companion

birds is that by the time signs of illness are obvious, the bird may have been ill for some time. The bird that dies “suddenly” may be a result of failure of the caretaker to identify changes in the appearance or behavior of the bird. For this reason, owners should familiarize themselves with early signs of illness in pet birds so that any therapy and care by their avian veterinarian will have a more favorable outcome.

EVALUATION OF DROPPINGS

Droppings can be an indicator of your bird's health. Paper towels, newspaper or other smooth surfaces can be used to line the cage bottom so that the number, volume, color, and consistency of the droppings can be noted. A bird's normal droppings will vary in appearance depending on its diet.

Normal Droppings

Feces (food waste material from the digestive tract) can differ somewhat in color and consistency. Diets with a high seed content usually produce homogeneous black or dark green feces. Birds on formulated diets normally exhibit soft, brownish feces.

Urine is normally a clear liquid. A diet high in vegetable and fruit matter may increase the urine component.

Urates (creamy white waste from the kidney) are often suspended in the liquid urine or appear to wrap around the feces.

POSTMORTEM EXAMINATION

If a bird is found dead, the body should be thoroughly soaked in soapy water, placed in a plastic bag, refrigerated and taken to an avian veterinarian to possibly determine the cause of death. This is important to protect the health and safety of family members and other birds in the home.

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following [AAV](#) Client Education Brochures:

- Feeding
- Aviaries
- Basic Care
- Grooming
- Conservation
- Health Exam
- Psittacosis
- Handfeeding
- Feather Loss
- Enhancing your Bird's Life
- When should I take my bird to a veterinarian?
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care

- Band, Tattoo or Microchip?
- Behavior, Normal and Abnormal

AVOID

- Sandpaper perches
 - Air pollutants such as cigarette smoke, insecticides, and toxic fumes from overheated Teflon-coated utensils
 - Mite boxes or mite sprays
 - Easily dismantled toys such as balsa wood, small link chain items, toys with metal clips or skewers, toys with lead weights
 - Access to toxic house plants, stoves or fireplaces, ceiling fans, uncovered toilets, leaded glass, cats, dogs, or young children
 - Access to cage substrate
-