

Veterinary Viewpoints

Edited by Amy B. Worell, DVM Dipl. ABVP
Woodland Hills, California

Question # 1 I recently purchased a Red Lory for a pet. I have started him on the dry lory food and apples. What else can he eat and what do lorries like best?

A. Windette, New York

Answer # 1 The best course of action is to contact lory breeders and owners as they know what works. There are also several books you can purchase. I suggest you contact a local bird club or look at ads in this magazine and others to find people who know about lorries.

Most lorries do well eating a low-iron dry lory food supplemented with fruits. They can also eat tablefood, vegetables and seeds.

Kim L. Joyner, DVM, MPVM
Raleigh, NC

Answer # 2 Lorries are nectar eaters. Their food is generally mixed with commercial fruit nectars and supplemented with other fruits and vegetables.

James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA

Answer # 3 A number of companies produce and distribute commercial lory food, which is often fed dry. Nectar foods, which start out dry and require the addition of water, may still be available commercially. This is an easy start to a diet for lorries. Additionally, they often readily ingest monkey chow biscuits soaked in water or fruit juice, they like a large variety of fruits and often will eat bread. When we have lorries in the veterinary hospital, we find they will often eat dry lory diets better if mixed with a commercial parrot hand-

feeding food and water. When I kept lorries years ago, I made my own lory nectar foods up for them. There are a number of similar diets published, and the ones I always thought they liked best included peanut butter. A number of my clients also feed a variety of soft vegetables.

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP—Avian
West Hills, CA



Question # 2 My Cockatiel has recently started feather picking her chest and legs. I took her to my veterinarian for an examination and he said stress is what caused the bird to pick her feathers. I don't understand how the bird can be stressed. I think she has the perfect housing and life. The stool exam found no parasites. The veterinarian suggested we put the bird on a hormone drug called HCG that is used for humans. What is this drug? Will it hurt my bird? Does it work? If it is not OK to use, what should I do?

L. Kipp, CA

Answer #1 Indeed, your question addresses the ever complex issue of feather picking that frustrates bird owners, veterinarians and birds alike. In any case of feather picking it is wise to have a complete medical "workup" performed on your bird, including laboratory tests and a physical examination. Radoigraphs, feather pulp cytology, and biopsies may be necessary. Stool exams for parasites should be repeated as negatives do occur when,

in fact, the bird does have parasites such as Giardia. A complete review of the bird's diet, caging, environment, interaction with people, other birds, and pets may also indicate problem areas that are affecting your bird. A trained bird behaviorist can also be consulted. If all medical causes have been ruled out and environmental changes have not helped, there are a variety of drugs (with or without collaring) that can be tried. Many of these drugs have side affects and often do not decrease the feather picking. HGC is a human reproductive hormone that can in some cases reduce feather picking (and also decrease persistent egg laying). Its use in birds is new and experimental, but veterinarians using it have not recognized side affects.

While we are trying to do the best for our pet and aviary birds, we should never lose sight of the fact that these creatures are originally designed to live in the wild. It may be in the bird's best interest to refrain from further complicating its life with drug therapy when

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the only negative affect of its feather picking is an unsightly bird. Indeed, the amount of feather picking we see in our captive birds may give one cause to ponder if captivity is truly appropriate for many birds.

Kim L. Joyner, DVM, MPVM
Raleigh, NC

Answer # 2 Creatures meant to be free probably all have some level of stress when kept in captivity. In addition to a stool exam for parasites, there are other tests used to rule out other medical causes of picking. You should discuss these also with your veterinarian. Sexual frustration and brooding

will sometimes induce feather picking behavior.

Human chorionic gonadotropin, (HCG) is a hormone that has been successful in both stopping and decreasing unwanted egg-laying and feather picking. It appears to be a safe drug as no apparent untoward effects have been reported. It often works, but requires a series of injections. Other drugs, such as long acting progesterones, have potentially serious side effects and should not be used.

James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA

Answer # 3 Feather picking in captive psittacines is, sadly, a very common occurrence. As feather picking does not occur in wild free-living psittacines, it is thought to occur in captivity in relationship to stress. As to what the stress may be will, of course, vary with the individual bird. Certain types of psittacines, such as African Grey Parrots and Eclectus Parrots, have a very high incidence of feather picking which suggests to me that these birds are highly stressed in the variety of captive situations we offer to them.

Once a bird begins to feather pick, shear or mutilate his feathers, this new behavior may become permanent in the bird's lifestyle. Even if the initiating stressful event is resolved, the behavior appears to become habitual and thus continues. A thorough review of the bird's environment and diet, though, is paramount.

Ideally, a physical examination by an avian veterinarian and a series of diagnostic tests should be performed to rule out identifiable underlying disease states. From there a variety of environmental changes can be tried, in addition to consultation with a reputable bird behaviorist. Treatment modalities, including the use of acupuncture, have been shown to be helpful in some birds. Drug therapies have varied and changed through the years. Generally speaking, the majority of them show very little if any beneficial effect in feather picking birds. In regards to the use of the drug HCG for aid in feather picking birds, the reports are conflicting.

HCG is a hormone that is produced by the human placenta. It contains a number of subunits that contain luteinizing hormone (LH), follicle-stimulating hormone (FSH), and thyroid stimulating hormone (TSH). It acts by stimulating the the production of androgens and progesterone. Its uses in human medicine include aiding with testicular descent and with female fertility. As to a possible mechanism for benefit in feather picking birds, I would suggest that it may possibly be

helpful only to those birds with hormonal related disorders. It is really unknown. I have found clinically that it sometimes benefits birds that I treat for feather picking in conjunction with acupuncture, but have had no beneficial responses to the drug when used alone for feather picking. It also appears that this drug is not detrimental in birds.

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian
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