

# Veterinary Viewpoints

Edited by  
Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian  
All Pets Medical Center, West Hills, CA

**Question # 1:** I have an Alexandrine Parakeet that has started to do this weird wing flapping movement. The bird will be sitting there, and multiple times in an hour, he clicks his wings to his body. I took him to my veterinarian and she ran some tests on him. She did not find out why he was doing this, and all the tests came back normal. She said that she had seen this in birds before.

What do you think is wrong with my bird?

*S. Dark, Maryland*

**ANSWER # 1:** A two-year-old Blue and Gold Macaw at our local pet store also flaps his wings in what sounds like the same manner when he is being watched by a customer or customer(s). Lately, he has also started biting his toes and nails in an excited (but fortunately not yet harmful) manner when he is approached. It may be possible that your Alexandrine is suffering from a compulsive disorder, in which repetitive, nonproductive movements are produced in response to stress or boredom. Stall weaving in horses and paw biting in dogs may be similar disorders in some respects. It is also possible that the bird is in some kind of physical discomfort that has not yet been identified, or that the bird has a neurological disorder. Your veterinarians may wish to continue to monitor this bird and/or explore some behavioral analysis in the hopes of preventing more serious expressions of a behavioral disorder.

*Louise Bauck, DVM*  
Montreal, Canada

**ANSWER # 2:** If the Alexandrine is demonstrating this wing-clicking behavior seasonally or intermittently, I suspect that it may be a form of pre-nuptial behavior. If it is a persistent behavior and all the tests were negative for any abnormalities, consider

looking for some irritating causes such as a poor wing clip with the ends of the feather quills poking into the bird.

*James M. Harris, DVM*  
Oakland, CA

**ANSWER # 3:** My two thoughts on the wing flapping that you describe would be either behavioral or medical in origin. Regarding the behavior aspect, some birds seem to find certain movements or actions that they enjoy and they will fixate on that behavior. Behaviors in this category that come to mind are a cockatoo that would take a food item, place it on his left shoulder and let it drop off behind his body. This bird would perform this behavior over and over for long periods of time. So, it is possible that this sort of behavior is what the wing flapping is about.

My other thought is that I have seen several birds that were later diagnosed with PDD (Proventricular Dilatation Disease), that displayed the odd wing-flapping behavior that you describe. In this instance, X-rays done initially followed by a barium series (a radiographic contrast study using barium to highlight the gastrointestinal tract) if suggested by the initial X-rays and a crop biopsy might be warranted in suspect cases.

*Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian*  
West Hills, CA

**Question # 2:** All my birds are kept outside in outdoor flights. Most of them are raised flights. I have been having a terrible problem with the field mice getting in the birds' nestboxes and eating their food. I have put out mousetraps but it doesn't seem to make much difference. I have tried poison but somehow I accidentally lost a bird and so I won't use it again. I know this is not an uncommon problem, but I am unsure what else to do. I have not yet tried a cat, as I think it would scare the birds,

and there are coyotes and dogs in the area. Please help!

*J. Giffen, California*

**ANSWER #1:** Mice and rats are a problem any time birds are kept. Depending on how your cages are suspended, use rat guards (metal cones around the poles or suspending bars or cables) to prevent rodents from climbing into the cage. They use these on the mooring ropes when ships are docked at port. You can also place the legs of standing cages in containers of water. Be sure to put a little oil in the water to present mosquito larvae from hatching.

*James M. Harris, DVM  
Oakland, CA*

**ANSWER # 2:** I don't have any quick or easy answers for this common problem. I guess I would try the cat(s) as some of these guys are great mousers. Other than that, weekly checking of the nestboxes with removal of the mice at that time may aid in reducing the numbers of the little varmints. I would continue to use traps as long as the birds cannot get near them. I have heard it recommended to grease the legs of the supports for the raised cages so the mice are unable to run up the legs into the cages and boxes. I know it's a difficult problem as I have seen them SQUEEZE into and through extremely small wire mesh. Good luck!

*Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian  
West Hills, CA*

**Question # 3:** My Hyacinth Macaw has a long time area on her wing edge that won't heal. It is slightly scabby and I don't think the bird is bothering it. The veterinarian has had her on a topical spray that helps, but the sore won't go away. I had also had the bird on antibiotics, but it still did not resolve the problem. What do you suggest?

*T. Meekfield, Oklahoma*

**ANSWER # 1:** In my opinion, it would be a good idea to use some caution regarding repeated applications of

the topical spray if it contains a steroid. I have used these preparations before on birds with inflammations secondary to self-mutilation and have had some successes. However, their repeated use may put the bird at extra risk of immunosuppression or other negative effects of steroid use. Birds seem to tolerate the secondary effects of steroids less well than mammals.

Most avian veterinarians would suspect that self-mutilation plays a role whether before or after the fact in wing web lesions in macaws and lovebirds. However, collaring a Hyacinth should be avoided if at all possible (in my opinion). Bandaging the wing may be tolerated for a short time. Your veterinarian may suggest a complete physical along with some laboratory investigations at this point, and a biopsy and a culture of the lesion may also be tried. Unfortunately, it is rare to get a firm diagnosis in these cases.

*Louise Bauck, DVM  
Montreal, Canada*

**ANSWER #2:** It would be helpful to know where on the bird's wing the non-healing area is. I suspect it may take a combination of protective coverings and restraint collars. The bird might need some diagnostic work if this does not result in healing.

*James M. Harris, DVM  
Oakland, CA*

**ANSWER #3:** I suspect that your bird is self mutilating the wing area which is why it will not heal. Assuming that is the case, intermittent bandage changes with a topically applied antibiotic are often necessary. Situations like this may take months to heal, if ever, depending where on the bird's wing the area is located. Systemic antibiotics may need to be given if the veterinarian feels that the lesion warrants their use. As always, a full diagnostic workup including a biopsy of the affected tissue is recommended.

Best wishes and hang in there!

*Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian  
West Hills, CA*



# Veterinarians

## Commercial Members

### Arizona

Ross E. Babcock, DVM • 602-944-9661  
Palo Verde Animal Hospital, Phoenix

### California

Edvarado Acosta, DVM  
Sunset Cliffs Animal Clinic, San Diego

### Florida

Animal Clinic of Lady Lake • 352-753-5333  
Lady Lake

Bern M. Levine, DVM • 595-595-1674  
Last chance Farm, Inc, Miami

Rhoda Stevenson, DVM • 909-268-0204  
Exotic Bird Hospital, Jacksonville

Tim Swango, DVM • 941-676-6176  
Swango Animal Hospital, Lake Wales

### Georgia

Kitty Remington, DVM • 912-243-0380  
Animalhouse Vet Services, Bainbridge

### Illinois

Nye, Ness, McDonald, Mori, DVMs  
Westchester 708-344-8166

### Indiana

Ellen K. Cook, DVM • 317-758-6069  
Cicero

### Massachusetts

Wendy Emerson, DVM • 978-887-3836  
Mobile Veterinary Services, Topsfield

William C. Sager, DVM • 508-486-3101  
Littleton Animal Hospital, Littleton

### Maryland

Bonnie J. Miller, DVM • 410-363-2040  
Animal Avian & Exotics, Owings Mills

### Missouri

David Kersting, DVM • 314-469-6661  
Bird medicine & Surgery, Chesterfield

### Mississippi

VCA Animal Hospital of Livonia • 248-615-7670  
Livonia

### North Carolina

Lauren Powers, DVM • 919-918-4000  
Timberlyne Animal Clinic, Chapel Hills

Mark J. Stehr, DVM • 704-933-1414  
South Ridge Veterinary Clinic, Kannapolis

### New Jersey

Lisa-Anne Attanasi, DVM • 201-461-8651  
Englewood Cliffs Veterinary, Englewood Cliffs

Dean J. Cerf, DVM • 201-447-6000  
Ridgewood Vet. Hospital, Ridgewood

### New York

J.C. Adsit, DVM • 518-463-0600  
Albany

Laura L. Wade, DVM • 716-832-2800  
Blue Cross Small Animal Clinic, Amherst

### Nevada

Patrick W. Hauck, DVM • 702-734-9761  
Flamingo Pet clinic, Las Vegas

### Ohio

Linda Wiley, DVM • 440-826-1520  
Metropet Animal Hospital, Berea

Wallace E. Wendt, DVM • 216-521-0533  
Drs. Wallace & Wendt Animal Hospital, Lakewood

### Pennsylvania

Toby Erlichman, VMD • 610-692-7560  
Animal Hospital of Chester City, West Chester

### Tennessee

Shanon B. McGee, DVM • 901-853-8519  
Collierville Animal Clinic, Collierville

### Texas

Roy Cruzen, DVM • 281-890-7257  
Steeplechase Animal Hospital, Houston

Bob M. Denton, DVM • 817-297-6939  
Deer Creek Animal Hospital, Crowley

Karen Lass, DVM • 972-985-0081  
Preston Park Animal Hospital, Dallas

Carol-Lynne Meissner, DVM • 512-476-4938  
Austin