

Veterinary Viewpoints

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

You are welcome to visit and pose
questions to Dr. Amy Worell via her
website at:

www.yourpets.com

Question #1: What is the substance in a cat's claws that is so deadly to birds? What is the appropriate medical treatment and how fast must one get a bird that has been scratched to a vet?

Answer #1: *Pasteurella multocida* is the bacteria that occurs in the cat's mouth and therefore on the cat's claw since a cat licks its claws regularly. This bacteria will get into the bloodstream of the bird when it is bitten or scratched and within 48 hours the bird can die from a bacterial septicemia (widespread infection) without any signs that it is sick until a couple of hours before it is dead! It does not happen with every contact, but I have seen it happen enough that I recommend when there is any contact between cat and bird, even if you cannot see a wound (often you cannot due to the feathers) that the bird be checked and started on antibiotics. My antibiotic of choice is piperacillin by injection. The sooner the bird can be started on the antibiotic, the more chance of controlling the bacteria before it overwhelms the system. I always consider this an emergency situation. Prevention is, however, best and avoiding any contact between cat and bird is always preferable by confining one to cage or room while the other is out.

Rhoda Stevenson, DVM, ABVP-Avian
Jacksonville, Florida

Answer #2: Cats have a deadly bacteria living in their mouths called *Pasteurella multocida*. When they groom themselves, they spread this bacteria over the fur and claws. When they catch and scratch or bite a bird, they inoculate the wound with this bacteria. At the bird's higher body temperature, these bacteria will multiply

very quickly in the blood stream and cause the bird to become septic (systemically infected) and die very quickly. Even the presumption of exposure to cat saliva requires IMMEDIATE veterinary attention and treatment.

Rose Ann Fiskett, DVM, ABVP-Avian
Fairfax, Virginia

Answer #3: Wounds inflicted by cats to birds have the potential of producing fatal infections. *Pasteurella multocida* is the primary bacteria isolated in these infections. Cat inflicted wounds should be examined by a veterinarian as soon as possible. Cleansing of wounds and appropriate antimicrobials are in order and may prevent an infection from overwhelming the bird.

James M Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA

Answer #4: The substance in a cat's claws that you mention is actually a bacteria called *Pasteurella multocida*. Cats are considered to be carriers of this bacteria and a bird that has been mouthed, scratched, or bitten by a bird should be considered exposed to the bacteria. The bacteria, once in the body of a bird, rapidly multiplies and can lead to a fatal septicemia (widespread infection in the body). Because of this, immediate veterinary attention for any bird bitten or scratched by a cat, is strongly recommended. Antibiotic therapy is the treat-

ment of choice for cat attacked birds. Even then, I have through the years seen individual birds that survived the initial attack by the cat, only to succumb approximately three days later to the septicemia.

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

Question #2: I have had two luti-no lovebirds that passed away within the last 6 months. They became very lethargic and had black tarry stools that did not drop. I put the birds under a heat lamp and gave them antibiotics from my pet store and then took the first one to my local vet. He said to put the two (they were still both alive at this time) together in the cage and that would solve my problem. It did not solve it. The first one died in January and the second one in June. I then talked to the breeder who suggested that the problem was intestinal and that it could have been due to an overdose of vitamins. I had been offering them Petamine in the cage so they had it all the time. Could this have been the problem? I was also told that maybe they got into something. What kinds of things could harm them? What about perfumes, hairsprays, plants and such.

I now have a green Peach-faced and do not want the same thing to happen to this one. Are there any precautions I should take?

Thanks for your help.

D. Rousseau, CA

Answer #1: Black tarry stools are usually an indication of digested blood. The most common causes of this include bacterial infections, viral infections, and ingestion of toxic substances including heavy metals, household poisons, toxic plants, or "bad" food.

Overdosing vitamins can certainly cause problems, but if the Petamine

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ABC Birds, Humble, TX
Adventures in Birds, Houston, TX
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Anderson, Ken, Boerne, TX
Animal Adventures, Greendale, WI
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Clarkson, Sunny, Phoenix, AZ
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Dark Continent Aviary, Troy Hensley, Bethlehem, GA
David's Parrot Place, Tacoma, WA
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Dow, Clara & Dennis, Kirtland, NM
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F M Brown's Sons, Inc., Sinking Springs, PA
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Family Farms Equines & Exotics, Nuevo, CA
Fancy Publications, Los Angeles, CA
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Feathered Follies, Walnut Creek, CA
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First Flight, Belleville, IL
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Fox, Ted, Marcellus, NY
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Frasier Products, Denver, CO
Frey, Dr. Walter H., Idabel, OK
Friedman, Alan P., Baltimore, OH
Galler, Sharon, STAT Marketing, Oakton, VA
Gay, Bridget, Mount Aukum, CA
Ginny's Jungle, Andover, NJ
Graze, Timothee B., Clinton, CT
Hand-raised Exotics/Bebe Turck, West Hurley, NY
Hauer, Sandy, Dover, PA
Hazel, Coleen, Eden, MD
Hays, Belle, Comptche, CA
Hessler, M. Jean, Costa Mesa, CA
Hettler, John, Nescopeck, PA
Hidden Forest Wildlife Art Gallery, Fallbrook, CA
Higgin's Group, Miami, FL
Hill Country Aviaries, LLC, Dripping Springs, TX
Hobo Toys, Lancaster, NY
Hookbill Aviaries, Center Ridge, AR
Hunter Parrot Farm, Loganville, CA
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John's Aviaries, Sturgis, MS
Jungle Enterprises, Homestead, FL
Jurka, Frances, Pismo Beach, CA
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Kate's Books & Markdesign, Inc, Boyton Beach, FL
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Lafeber Company, Cornell, IL
Last Chance Farms, Inc, Miami, FL
Lima's Exotic Birds, Woodland Hills, CA
Little Friar Aviary, Philadelphia, PA
Living Design, Inc, Worthing, SD
Liz's Bird Shop, Chicago, IL
Lundeen, Judith L., Idaho Falls, ID
M & M Artistic Designs, Houston, TX
M & S Aviaries & Pet Supplies, Bandera, TX
Magnolia Bird Farm, Anaheim, CA
Marshall, Shirley, Jacksonville, FL
Martin, Steve, Lake Wales, FL
McCormic, Dan & Noelle, Wildwood, FL
Millikin, K.P., Palmetto, FL
Montgomery, Harold, Fort Pierce, FL
Morman, Kay L., Fremont, NE
Mt Olympus Aviaries, Crestwood, KY
North Carolina Zoological Park, Asheboro, NC
Old World Aviaries, Austin, TX
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Parrot Domain, Fredricksburg, VA
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Pasadena Parrots, Inc., Pasadena, CA
Pet Power, Inc., Phoenix, AZ
Pettin' Place, Reno, NV
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Pretty Bird International, Inc., Stacy, MN
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R & M Aviaries, Hunlock Creek, PA
R & R Bird Gardens, MO
Rain Forest Exotics, Inc., Conroe, TX
Reliable Protein Products, Palm Desert, CA
Rice, Doug, Walkerton, IN
Richardson, Colleen H., Eden, MD
Robertson, Joseph, Woodland Hills, CA
Rockledge Aviary, Spring Branch, TX
Rolf C. Hagen, (USA) Corp., Mansfield, OH
Ronie's for the Love of Birds, Sandy, UT
Roth, Janice, Baltimore, MD
Royal Bird & Supply Co, Lincolnton, NC
Rydant, Rick, Kingston, NY
Saunders, W. B., Stockton, CA
Scandaglia, Frank, Staten Island, NY
Scarlet Orchard Aviaries, Otis Orchards, WA
Schults Bird Farm, Langhorne, PA
Scott Pet Products, Rockville, IN
Sea World of Florida, Orlando, FL
Shadybrook Aviary, Hillsboro, OR
Sharpe, Mac, Plant City, FL
Skyline Garden, Jamul, CA
Snell, Marquard, Clarkesville, TN
Societe Des Parcs De Sciences, Canada
South Haven Birds, Montgomery, AL
Stuart, Carolyn & Thomas, Alvin, TX
Sugarcreek Bird Farm, Bellbrook, OH
Sundown Aviary, Lodi, CA
Sun Seed Company, Bowling Green, OH
Super Bird Creations, Pine, CO
Swan Creek Supply, Saginaw, MI
T & M Birds, St. George, UT
The Bird Shop, Sacramento, CA
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Tradewinds Exotic Birds, Terry, MS
Tropaquatics, Denver, CO
Tucker Farms, Estancia, NM
Up At Six Aviaries, Bosque, NM
Urban Bird, New York, NY
Van Kruijsen, Walter, Spain
Verde Squirts Aviary, Anaheim, CA
W.B. Saunders, Owings Mills, MD
Walnut Creek Service Center, Walnut Creek, CA
Waterloo Wings Stained Glass, Chelsea, MI
Web Ranch Bfmstrs & Birds, Mooreland, OK
Weinberg Int/NEKTON USA, Tarpon Springs, FL
West, Shirley, Vacaville, CA
West Parrot Society, Willis, TX
Williams, Elaine & Earl, Baytown, TX
Williamson, John R., Jersey City, NJ
Willow Creek Aviary, Richland, WA
Woody's Bird Farm, Dover, PA
Wyld's Wingdom, Norfolk, VA
Yale University Press, New Haven, CT
Yvonne's Swings and Things, Rochester, NY
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Zoological Imports IZI International, Vernon Hills, IL
Zupreem, Mission, KS

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was only offered as a supplement and not as the main diet, it should not have caused a problem. You did not say if the birds had "free run" of the house, but this is significant as far as exposure to toxins. There are many items in our houses that are toxic to birds if they ingest them, including baseboards, carpets, cleaning substances, many metals, paints, varnishes, finishes, certain plants, and the list goes on. We advise never to allow birds out of the cage without supervision (emotional maturity of a 2 year old!). If the birds are chewing on the cage and the cage is galvanized (high in zinc), soldered (high in lead), or painted with paint high in zinc, this can cause heavy metal toxicity. Bacterial infections usually occur from exposure to "bad" bacteria. This can come from contaminated water or water dish, contaminated food, handling by a person who has bacteria on their hands; walking on the floor, contact with other animals in the household, and the list goes on. Food, either pellets or seed, should be fresh and properly stored because when it gets old it can become rancid or contaminated with bacteria or mold. Fresh fruits and vegetables should be washed and removed after 6 hours to prevent excess bacterial growth. As you can see, there are many things that could have been involved with the death of your birds. It is a good idea to have a necropsy done by an avian veterinarian to determine the specific cause of death, particularly because you had 2 different birds die with similar symptoms 6 months apart. At this point, I would establish a relationship with an avian veterinarian and your new pet. I would then watch the droppings each day (paper towels on the bottom of the cage that are changed daily) and at the first sign of a black dropping, have the bird seen by the veterinarian.

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Rhoda Stevenson, DVM, ABVP-Avian
Jacksonville, Florida

Answer #2: Lethargy and black tarry stools warranted an immediate visit to an avian veterinarian. Added warmth is a useful first aid measure but over the counter medications without proper evaluation and diagnosis is usually not effective and may be harmful. When the first bird died, it would have been appropriate to have had a post mortem examination performed by a pathologist. This could have been arranged by your veterinarian. The information from this would help to develop a treatment plan for the remaining bird. Yes, there could have been involvement of the intestinal tract but the dark tarry stools and intestinal symptoms may have been a manifestation of a more generalized disease. Some vitamins in excessive amounts can be toxic. You need to consult with an experienced avian veterinarian who should be able to help you with advice on proper nutrition, husbandry, and screening tests for your new bird. The veterinarian can also advise you on toxic materials, plants, and other dangers to your bird.

James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA

Answer #3: I am sorry to hear about the loss of your two lovebirds. Regarding the cause of death of the two birds, unfortunately at this point, that cannot be determined. Additionally, what may have appeared to you to be the same condition in the two birds, may actually have been caused by two different causes.

Regarding your new bird, I would strongly suggest a visit to a knowledgeable avian veterinarian. In this visit, diet and husbandry in addition to a physical examination will be discussed and performed. You may also consider having diagnostic tests performed at that time. Best wishes.

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

*/Editor's Note: You are welcome to visit
Dr. Amy Worell at her website at:
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