

# Toe-tapping.

## From the Combined Perspectives of an Eclectus Owner and an Avian Veterinarian

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“Toe tapping” is the common name given to a condition characterized by repetitive muscular extending and contracting of the toes of a bird. In most circumstances, this condition is seen in the Eclectus Parrot *Eclectus roratus*, and has been observed by many pet bird owners and breeders for over a dozen years.

“Toe Tapping” is specific in its appearance, and is not associated with other conditions, such as “wing flipping,” seizures, paralysis, itching of the feet/legs, and/or self mutilation of the feet/legs. Unfortunately, these other syndromes and clinical behaviors have often been “lumped” or grouped into the “Toe Tapping” syndrome, adding interpretive and complicating factors to the recognition and management of Toe Tapping, when encountered.

For clarification purposes, Toe Tapping, by our definition, is not characterized by a progressively worsening condition, and these birds do not develop other problems, even when not clinically managed. Most of the other conditions described above, are seen in progressively worsening cases, where there is strong suggestion of a segmentally progressive neuropathy. Many of the birds with combined clinical signs beyond simple “Toe Tapping” will continue to progress in severity, and other disease processes can be identified with time or at necropsy that can explain the clinical signs more clearly.

### **Recommendation for Initial Correction of Toe Tapping**

Remove from the diet ALL pellets, vitamin powders, vitaminized seed mixes, vitaminized treats, spirulina, and other herbal mixtures, processed human foods such as commercial bread mixes, pasta, processed cheese, pizza, TV dinners, and any food item which contains man-made vitamins, preservatives or chemicals of any kind. Read the ingredients on packages carefully to make sure that these items are effectively and completely being removed from the diet.

Provide ONLY food items in their most natural form, well cleaned and fresh or cooked. Yes, Eclectus Parrots need Vitamin A, but they do best when their Vitamin A comes in the natural form of betacarotene.

For all Eclectus Parrots that are demonstrating marked clinical signs of Toe Tapping or other clinical signs of neurologic basis as mentioned earlier, it is important to have a complete and careful veterinary examination performed. A sound laboratory workup should be included with physical examination, in an effort to determine if there are other identifiable factors involved with the bird. It is important to remember that laboratory abnormalities, if present, do not necessarily indicate a need for drug treatment, and do not necessarily indicate a clear correlation with Toe Tapping or other neurological based clinical signs the bird is demonstrating.

When the results of a medical work up suggest that the bird is basically of sound general health, it is prudent to make the appropriate dietary changes and investigations mentioned above.

Toe tapping, when the condition is comparatively light, can be eliminated in a matter of a few days when the “causative agent” has been removed from the diet. When the condition is more severe or chronic, it may take much longer for the problem to be eliminated following dietary change.

Some other conditions can be misinterpreted as “Toe Tapping,” as they are occasionally associated with agitation, discomfort, and neurologic signs including but not limited to twitching of the legs/ toes. These can include heavy metal toxicosis (particularly lead), bacterial or fungal dermatitis, Proventricular Dilatation Disease, some forms of renal disease, and some nutritional imbalances, such as vitamin E deficiency and/or Omega fatty acid imbalances. As such, it is important to have a sound working relationship with your veterinarian, to help rule out or rule down some of these issues, and to most effectively arrive at a sound solution and resolution of this problem. ❖

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