NEW! COCKATIELS:
Breeding Smart! $15.95
Selecting Stock • Setting Up An Aviary
Linebreeding • Inbreeding
Lethal Genes • Establishing New Mutations

Limited time offer:
COCKATIEL GENETICS
MADE EASY! $39.95
Assumes No Knowledge
No Computer Necessary!
15 chapters • chapter quizzes & answers
• step by step instruction
"There is enough information in this little volume to teach anyone the secrets of dealing with recessive, sex-linked and dominant mutations...from the simplest pairings to complex combinations...the book will give much pleasure and knowledge to all." Dr. Rainer R. Erhart, ACBM, Dec. 1993.

Self-published works by:
Linda S. Rubin
AFA Watchbird Feature Columnist
(Recipient 1993 Watchbird AVY Award)
U.S. Contributor, Cage & Aviary Birds, U.K.

Free Shipping in U.S.A.
AVES COMMUNICATIONS
Dept. AFA, 93 Woodcliff Road
Chestnut Hill, MA 02167
Check or Money Order.
Foreign orders add $12.00 s/h,
U.S. Funds only.

AFA '97 Proceedings
200 pages of information from the exciting speakers at the San Antonio Convention

$30
plus $2 shipping/handling

Also available:
Proceedings from '96 - $30 each,
Proceedings from '91 thru '94 - $20
Add $2 s/h for each item
(No Proceedings available for '94)

Order from:
American Federation of Aviculture
P.O.Box 56218, Phoenix, AZ 85079
(602) 484-0931, fax (602) 484-0109
VISA and Master Card accepted

26 January/February 1998
Question #2: Several of my breeding pairs of birds have no feathers on the back of their heads. The best I can tell, it is the females. I assume that the males are picking their heads. These are Pionus, Cockatiels and lovebirds.

B. Price, Massachusetts

Answer #1: Feather picking by a mate is not uncommon. This is one form of “Hen Pecking,” a term used for one bird abusing its mate. This can be the result of too small a cage, overcrowding, or a mismatched pairing of birds. There are other causes such as lack of a proper nest box or suitable nesting material. Consult with your veterinarian and consider an on-site visit by your veterinarian to evaluate your breeding facility.

James M. Harris, DVM
Oakland, CA

Answer #2: You do not mention the aviary setup in your question or how the birds are arranged. Are the pairs of breeding age, with each partner being sexually mature? Are they housed in small quarters with a high population density? There are many causes for feather loss but picking in psittacines is usually due to some stressor(s) in the environment. Try and eliminate some or all of the stressors if possible. First, make sure that the cage is of sufficient size for the species being bred and that there is only one pair per cage. Next, ensure that you have a “true” pair and the sexes are not mismatched. Birds should also be matched with their maturity conspecifics, meaning that the pair should be sexually mature in order to ensure that they will be synchronized in the breeding cycle. Older birds, due to frustration, will often abuse younger birds due to a lack of breeding readiness. Make sure the aviary is in a low traffic area to both people and pets. Reduce the population density of the aviary and if possible erect visual barriers between cages since some species are more territorial than others.

The species you mention, except for Pionus, are usually adapted to breeding in small cages and high population densities. So, there may be other reason(s) why the picking is occurring. It would be best to consult a good aviculturist in your area and have them review your aviary and breeding set-up. It appears that in your situation, the problem is husbandry related.

Darrel K. Styles, DVM
Dripping Springs, Texas

Answer #3: It is not uncommon in many species of captive psittacines, to observe feather picked heads in a pair or group of birds. It has been my experience that the feather picker is the male and the feather picked bird is the female. I suppose it can occur where the female picks the male, but I have not personally observed this behavior. As feather picking in birds appears to be a captive related behavior that is precipitated by stress, one can assume that there is some stress among birds that display this behavior. My impression has been that the male is interested in breeding and the female is not. And, hence, the stressed male displays the behavior of picking the back of the female’s head. Interestingly, this pattern of behavior most commonly is noted in the smaller species of birds, including canaries, and rarely occurs in the larger species of birds.

Often it can be noted in small species of psittacines, in particular with Cockatiels, where the adult birds will pick the backs of the heads of their growing offspring. This is thought to be an attempt to move them from the nest so that the pair can breed and raise another clutch.

Other than separating the two birds, I know of no solution for this captive induced behavior. I don’t feel that it is medically detrimental to the birds but definitely is unsightly. Switching individuals in a pair may be helpful in some situations.

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

---

"Gifts that Keep on Giving"

The American Federation of Aviculture’s Endowment Fund

Leaving a Legacy to the Future

For Further Information on How to Participate Through Honoraria and Bequests, Please Contact
Jim Hawley, Jr., AFA Chief Financial Officer
P.O. Box 56218
Phoenix, AZ 85017