

Veterinary Viewpoints

edited by Amy Worell, D.V.M.
West Hills, California

Question #1: My emus have started producing for the first time this year. I have several other babies that are doing fine, and one baby that was only 10 days old suddenly died today. He had been running in a pen, came inside, lay down and died. What could have happened and do I need to be concerned about the other babies?

C. Thomas, Texas

Answer #1: Unfortunately, without a necropsy (autopsy) on your baby emu, it is difficult to determine what the cause of death was or if the other emu chicks might be affected. Common causes of death at that age include infections (especially yolk sac), cardiac problems, and impactions. Unexplained deaths should always be investigated, particularly if young birds are involved, to prevent or correct management or disease problems early in other birds in the collection.

Nicole VanDerHeyden, D.V.M.,
Diplomate, ABVP-Avian Practice
Indianapolis, Indiana

Answer #2: The sudden death of an apparently healthy chick is most perplexing. It is important to find out the cause of death and whether or not there is contagious disease present. The remains of the chick should have been rapidly chilled by wetting and refrigerating (not frozen) and submitted for a proper postmortem examination. Ask your veterinarian to submit the remains to a competent pathologist.

James M. Harris, D.V.M.
Oakland, California

Answer #3: Interest in ratites has increased astronomically in the last several years. A substantial part of this interest has been related to the perceived and actual possibility of extremely impressive profits. In part due to the profits potentially obtainable in the ratite industry, much knowledge has been gained in recent years towards the better understanding of the husbandry, nutrition, medical problems, and management of these primitive, yet interesting, birds.

The significance of all this to you is that there are available resources for you to investigate towards the end of successful management and future profitable production with your emus. Among these sources include state-wide and national ratite meetings, numerous excellent ratite magazines, knowledgeable avian veterinarians, knowledgeable ratite breeders and hobbyists, and improved commercially available life stage nutrition for ratites.

As to the cause of death of your neonatal emu chick, the possibilities are many. As the death of this individual was sometime in the past, its body may not be available or in a state amenable to a post mortem examination. So, please consider educating yourself, establishing a relationship with an avian veterinarian who has a knowledge or interest in ratites, and ideally present any additional deceased emu chicks to your avian veterinarian within 24 hours of its death. Good luck with your emus!

Amy B. Worell, D.V.M.,
ABVP-Avian Practice
West Hills, California

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Question #2: Can birds be allergic to the same sort of things as people? The two items I was particularly wondering about are monkey chow biscuits and antibiotics.
D. Nevil, New York

Answer #1: Birds can be allergic and have reactions to materials in their diet or environment. Food allergies are well documented in humans and other mammals and there is no reason to believe that birds would be any less likely to have food related allergic reactions. If a bird were sensitized to one of the ingredients in monkey chow, it would react if some were eaten.

Some people are indeed allergic to antibiotics, environmental substances, and other drugs or agents. So are mammals, such as dogs and cats. It follows that birds may also exhibit

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allergic manifestations.

James M. Harris, D.V.M.
Oakland, California

Answer #2: Recognized and proven allergic conditions in birds are rare. Attempts to study allergies in poultry have shown that chickens rarely show an allergic response to substances that generally cause allergies in mammals. Birds rarely itch, even when infested with lice and mites, and the redness and swelling frequently seen in mammals after exposure to an allergen is just not seen in birds. Nonetheless, it is probable that some birds may develop allergies, however, in my practice I have not seen any reaction to food or medication that I could attribute to a true allergy.

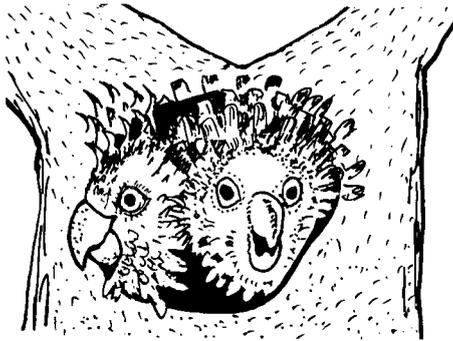
Nicole VanDerHayden, D.V.M.,
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Answer #3: Several times during my career as a veterinarian, I have had clients tell me of situations involving handfeeding psittacine babies in which the client felt that the babies had an allergic reaction to a certain commercially available brand of handfeeding food. The scenario is basically as follows. The babies are on Brand A handfeeding formula, they start to vomit or develop a rhinitis (basically a runny nose). The client then switches the babies to Brand B handfeeding formula and the babies are miraculously "cured." The clients have attributed the problems and hence the "cure" to an allergic reaction to something in the handfeeding food. Whether this is the actual situation or not is currently unknown. Other than these theoretical situations, I presently am unaware of any documented allergic reactions in birds to foodstuffs or antibiotics.

On the subject of antibiotics, it has frequently been documented that a percentage of avian patients of certain species will frequently vomit particular medications when given orally. One such antibiotic, when used orally, is doxycycline. Another antibiotic which often causes vomiting in the larger psittacines when administered orally is trimethoprim-sulfa (Bactrim). Whether these situations are actually allergic reactions is unknown.

Amy B. Worell, D.V.M.
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West Hills, California ●

The Natural Choice



by Eb Cravens
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Ring-necked Doves: Even the Common can be Fun!

The first birds I ever kept were Ring-necked Doves. From 1981 until 1984, "Lady," an albino hen and "Love," her normal tan mate, raised 17 illustrious babies (named "Baby One," "Baby Two," and so on . . .) at a 20-acre farm above Kona, Hawaii.

Even today, more than 10 years and 50 pet species later, I carry the fondest memories of those two doves and their young. Like the way the parents would repeatedly rush to the stand at afternoon feeding time and dive into the glass seed bottle — one bird could eat inside the glass, two birds were too scrunched for even a nibble!

Then there was the day we were giving a fancy sunset lunch for relatives and the moment we sat down to table, Lady swept through the patio doors and landed with a white flash on Grandma Miyagawa's head. The aging matriarch has never forgotten it and neither have we!

So if you ask me what I think of keeping Ring-neckeds as pets in home or aviary I reply with a heartfelt "yes"!

Streptopelia risoria is the generally accepted scientific name for our Ring-necked Dove; some wild populations have been distinguished as *S. roseo-grisea*. There are many varied common names in use: Indian Ringed Dove, Ringed Turtle Dove, African Collared Dove, Barbary Dove, even White Laughing Dove.

The original bird most likely came out of Asia and proved to be a master colonizer. They have steadily pressed across the Middle East into the Balkans, across Africa and throughout a

million square miles of Europe. The familiar "Barbary Dove" refers to the African race which may or may not be derived of or mixed with the Asian Ring-necked. Needless to say, Ring-necked Doves have arrived and, based upon their propensity for reproducing, they are here to stay.

This reliable breeding rate is one factor which makes this dove an attractive first bird or pair of birds. Upon maturing at six to nine months, almost any young pair can be observed clumsily going about the business of learning to "make babies." Not shy at all, they make a perfect aviary show for parents hoping to introduce their children to essential facts about "the birds and the bees." The child's education does not stop there, of course. With a little gentle prodding, dove hens (and occasionally males) will allow live eggs to be removed from beneath them for viewing. The parents, once adapted, can raise entire families in full view of school classes, for example, teaching children not only valuable early avicultural lessons, but lessons about life, birth, and the family devotion for which doves are so well noted.

Add to this the average cost of a Ring-necked Dove (approximately \$10) and the fact that they don't bite, it's no wonder our shop finds customers sometimes choose doves over parakeets as first pets.

For those wishing to gain aviary experience before moving into costlier and more advanced dove species, Ring-necked Doves are a perfect gateway. Some of the color mutations on the market include many different peds, silver-ringed, a chocolate brown, beautiful tangerine colors and a bull-eyed white — kind of a pale pink with a white neck ring.

"One of the problems with today's new breeders is they all want to start with the rare doves," noted Lynn Hall, one of the U.S.'s foremost dove and pigeon specialists. "But these species may not breed well so the aviculturist becomes discouraged."

"Keeping doves is a labor of love," he went on. "They are easy to maintain, not disease prone, and if you go away on weekends they can be fed and left."

Sometimes beginners will purchase a pair of Ring-necked Doves, put them out in a greenhouse and, presto, two years later they have 14 birds and

counting. Young aviculturists must be advised against gross inbreeding of dove families. Though island dove species are often known to recoup their numbers by inbreeding after a hurricane, it is still not a responsible practice in domestic aviculture. The Miami, Florida area has for years had a thriving feral population of Ring-necked Doves — probably all descendants of a few escaped pairs.

Ring-necked Doves are extremely inexpensive to feed for their size. Dove and wild bird seed mixes work well as staples, and are supplemented with salad greens, whole wheat bread and table scraps, etc. For those with other birds, the doves may often live off of what is left by parrots feeding. Simply blow off the hulled chaff and feed the rest to the doves.

This is precisely why doves are so valued in mixed aviaries. They feed mostly on the ground, cleaning up wasted seeds and soak n' cook grains spilled by birds above. They seldom bring aggression into a mixed aviary provided the birds are in stable pairs. The most aggression we found was when the fledged babies were left too long in the cage with the parents and "papa" would take to picking primarily upon his upstart sons; these had to be removed before feathers were plucked out.

On the few occasions we handfed albino babies, we ended up with fledglings who were literally all over their owners for attention. We mixed standard baby formula to a somewhat pastier consistency; then spooned it into a stiff rubber glove thumb with a hole cut out of the tip for a baby to insert its beak into. A squishing motion like a toothpaste tube would promptly fill the fluffy baby. To this day I can picture Baby #7 and Baby #8 peep-peeping their way down our hallway whenever they caught sight of that feeding glove.

That brings up another delightful aspect of keeping Ring-necked Doves as pets — the sound they make is wonderful. Their cooing at break of day is both haunting and joyful, much like a mourning dove but different. Sometimes it is the booming "coo, coo-coo" of the male bobbing and posturing his territory; sometimes the plaintive "cooooooo" of the female calling a lover. Be sure not to make the common mistake of believing only the male Ring-neckeds coo. Both gen-

ders can make surprisingly similar sounds depending upon circumstance, but only the male struts upright and bobs while cooing (hens normally lower their beak near the ground, then lift and vibrate their wing or tail feathers).

As free-flying pets, we found Ring-necked Doves excellent to work with. They are best taught about their new freedoms when in the process of incubating a second or third clutch. If the cage door is left open during the day while the male is on the eggs, an inquisitive hen will often begin to explore the threshold and the new world beyond. It may help to mark the cage door with yellow paint or a bright threshold, etc. to give her a starting point. Then look to where she will venture next and provide a landing perch — on the deck, a clothesline post, etc. The more visible the cage from out in the yard, the better. Though I do not find these doves extremely intelligent birds, their homing instincts, especially when there are eggs and a husband in the cage, can generally be trusted.

I have to admit, Lady's first flight on the farm was a tense time for me. She

would swoop and soar past the patio, always coming to land further away until I was reduced to calling her and moving poor Love, cage, nestbox, eggs and all, around to where I thought she could see him. No luck. I finally gave up and went inside to eat. Not 20 minutes later she flew up to the deck, hopped into her cage door entrance and uttered her joyful "arrival" laugh.

Most doves are speedy, agile fliers and we felt they more than held their own with raptors. However, we did not live with danger from Cooper's Hawks or Peregrines. The ground and all the dangers it presents is a different story. I swear that a Ring-necked Dove caught unawares nibbling on a choice tuft of grass can escape by the narrowest of margins (perhaps leaving a few tailfeathers with the mongoose or cat); then will be down at that same tuft of grass the very next day as if there was no lesson learned. Lady and Love saw many of their sons and daughters caught over the years. I'm not sure they even comprehended what was happening. The longest lived babies went to local pet shops and into homes. ●

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