



FRANK'S FEEDER

by Frank Miser

NO SURE CURE FOR FEATHER PICKING

There is no sure cure for feather picking, as it may be caused by any number of reasons. However, I will discuss the primary problems and recommended cures.

Proper nutrition is most important, and lack of it is probably hardest to detect, since long periods of time are involved. Birds go through various periods of life, such as breeding and moulting, which make severe demands upon the bird's physical system. A basic, correct diet is a must for the species of bird. This includes the correct seed mixes, greens, fruits, live food, etc., for your species of bird. With regard to seeds, some basic considerations are: sunflower, grey stripe is better than black; Canary - Moroccan is the most nutritious; millet-large Colorado or Australian is best, especially for small birds. Test the seed you purchase. Is it live? Will it germinate? Taste it. Is it rancid and/or bland? Smell it. Is it fresh? Look at it. Is it shiny? Check with your seed supplier if you feel you have problems. Complain, if you do, and request special seeds. Especially important in the nutritional requirement is providing vitamins and minerals, for cage birds, which would normally be obtained in the wild. Dermo and Tone powdered supplements can be mixed with seeds. Liquid vitamins can be added to the drinking water. This mixture must be changed daily. Consider the bird's natural habitat. I cured a feather picking palm

cockatoo by feeding a mixture of two tablespoons of sea water per quart of drinking water. Clean sea water, obtainable in a health food store, contains 44 minerals needed for health and good feather condition.

When the proper nutritional diet is provided, the other problem areas to consider are psychological, environmental and parasitic.

Psychological considerations involve boredom, especially in hookbills, and nervousness in all birds. To cure boredom, provide the bird with something to chew on or pick at. Eucalyptus branches, complete with leaves and seed pods, dog rawhide bones, paperback books, and pieces of soft wood are recommended. Do not use redwood or painted pieces. With regard to nervousness, check for the following: stalking cats; poking children; blowing drapes; bright lights; sudden light reflections; sudden noise, such as slamming doors; and any other irregular disturbance. Relocate the cage if you find any of the aforementioned.

Environmental considerations are cage size, cage height, and bathing requirements. A cage can be either too large or too small, especially when considering direction of normal bird flight and the bird's wing span. Height of the cage is important too, since most birds fly up to get away from danger. Waist high to head high is recommended. Bathing requirements are very important for feather care. Does the bird take an immersion bath in a bowl, such as a stream bather, or does the bird prefer a spray mist bath, such as would be obtained in a light rain or under cover during a heavy rain. I recommend a mixture of 1/2 listerine and 1/2 water as a spray mist bath mixture. However, be careful with forced baths, spray type, as this might antagonize the bird.

Parasitic problems involve mites and lice. Lice are easily visible with the

naked eye. However, mites are more difficult to detect. Place a white cloth over the cage at night. Remove the cloth in the very early morning. Look for black specks. If found, rub the specks. If bloody specks appear, you have mites. Scrub the cage once a week. Scrape and clean the perches. Do not immerse the perches in water. Spray and/or dust the bird with a non-toxic Pyrethrin. Use a metal cased "Bird Protector" on the cage - this works like a flea collar on a dog.

Remember, any changes made in trying to correct feather picking should be made in moderation, and should be kept up for at least three months. Do not asphyxiate your birds with spraying, or starve your birds by withdrawing their regular feed in favor of a recommended feathering feed. Any changes should be made in moderation or the result may be worse rather than better. ■

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