

Veterinary Viewpoints

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

Question #1: I am having problems with some of my Cockatiels. We have about 100 birds, of which about 65 are Cockatiels 15 lovebirds and two macaws and two grays. We have been breeding the 'tiels for five years and this year we tried to expand our breeding. We bought out a few breeders and all new birds were quarantined for 45 days with no problems and now as they breed, some of the chicks are starting to die. No adults have died yet. They were purchased about nine months ago. For a while I was buying two week old chicks from another breeder but I have since stopped. We handfeed the chicks, with pipettes. We never use a pipette for more than one feeding although we do feed all the chicks with the same pipette for that one feeding. All chicks are kept in brooders.

What ever they die from happens at about five weeks of age. The signs are: a redness to the skin (in the first stage), the crop slows, the bird refuses to eat, loss of appetite, in one bird I noticed that the eyes appeared to bulge like the skull had shrunk, vomiting, and labored breathing. I have noticed also that the tongue turns white and appears to swell. I think some of them have maybe had convulsions. They die after about 36 hours after the first signs are noticed.

I would like to get to the bottom of this. I can't decide who to test or when to test, and what tests need to be done. Should I test one of the parents of the last chick to die or wait to see if another chick dies and then do a necropsy at that time? We currently have three babies in the brooder. Please advise me.

J. Klumb, California

ANSWER #1: The best place to start with a situation like this is to have a necropsy done on one of the chicks. As soon as the baby dies, it should be wet down with mild soapy water, placed in a plastic bag and refrigerated. DO NOT FREEZE the body as this causes ice crystals to form in the tissue and disrupts the cell structure. The pathologist is then unable to identify viral inclusion bodies and other vital information. Your avian veterinarian should be placed on alert as to your current situation. The necropsy should be done the same day the chick dies if at all possible, because the fresher the tissues, the more accurate the information from the necropsy. As a body decays, autolysis sets in and this disrupts cell structure so again the pathologist cannot identify vital information.

It is often useful to necropsy more than one, so I usually recommend two or three bodies be necropsied so we can see if the lesions are similar in all. Sometimes the disease process is more evident in one than in another. There is always more information in a necropsy than in any testing that can be done on a live bird. However, once the necropsy has been done, depending on the findings, further testing can be done on the parent birds. In your situation, there may be a bacterial, yeast, viral, chlamydial, or parasitic problem that is causing the deaths in these chicks. Once the specific nature of the problem has been identified by histopathology then if, for example, it is a bacterial problem, the parents and the environment can be cultured to identify the specific bacteria. Once that is known, eliminating the contamination source would be the ultimate goal.

*Rhoda Stevenson, DVM, ABVP-Avian
Gainesville, Florida*

ANSWER #2: The best and most cost effective way to discover the cause of death in the Cockatiel babies, would be to have necropsies done on recently deceased babies. As one bird may not result in an answer, it would be advisable to submit several babies for examinations. Depending on the cause(s) that are uncovered, the action to be taken can be determined. One concern of course is with infection with the polyomavirus. Other causes can also be the culprit, hence the importance of the post mortem examination. Best wishes.

Amy B. Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian

Question #2: I have a Green-winged Macaw that had a wet sneeze last night. The liquid, which was thin and clear like water, came out of her left nostril only.

I talked to a friend who has been around macaws for a number of years and she asked if our house was dry (because we heat with our woodstove it is quite dry). She believes this could be the cause.

What are your thoughts regarding this matter?

L. Beck, Texas

ANSWER #1: One wet sneeze does not necessarily mean there is a problem but it can be an indication of an infection, an allergy, or foreign material in the nostril. If the bird is behaving normally, then it is reasonable to watch the bird to see if there are any more signs of discharge or sneezing. If the bird is quieter than normal, sleeping excessively, losing weight, or

eating less, a visit to an avian veterinarian is indicated. Also, if it has been over a year since a check up has occurred, the bird should see the doctor. This is a good time to examine the diet of the bird. Vitamin A is very important in respiratory integrity. Many times an increase in foods rich in vitamin A will resolve a mild respiratory problem. Pelleted diets are a much better source of vitamin A than seed mixes. Humidity can also play a role in the respiratory system as can the smoke from wood burning. Birds are extremely sensitive to toxins in the air. Be sure that there is good air circulation and that there is no buildup of smoke near the bird. If it is very dry, a humidifier may be helpful.

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ANSWER #2: In my experience it is unlikely that the cause of sneezing in any bird would be due to dryness in the house. If only one sneeze is noted, it could simply be due to reflux of fluid from the oral cavity through the choanal slit and into the nostrils. If your bird has not had a comprehensive physical examination by an avian veterinarian with diagnostic tests, I would strongly suggest that be considered.

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Question #3: I am searching for some answers about my 8 1/2 year old female Peach-faced Lovebird, Ringo. Ringo has a mate named

Kimo and they have been a happy couple for seven years. She has laid numerous eggs without difficulty and raised babies three years ago. For the last few months, Ringo was going through all the motions of planning for another clutch of eggs. No eggs have been laid though. Her belly has looked to have an egg in it, and she is nesting and Kimo is feeding her. The last three eggs have not had enough calcium on them, but she was able to lay them. I have added a calcium supplement to her seed diet.

Recently she has become short of breath and breathes very fast. She does not have a runny nose, and she is not wheezing or coughing.

I started her on some Cipro that I had for another bird. Two days later she was improved and seems better each day.

My questions are:

- Will a bird her age reabsorb the eggs when her body can no longer produce them properly? Will she be able to get back on track?
- She looks emaciated to me though I see the male feeding her. I'm afraid if they are separated they would be very upset. What do you think?
- Do you agree that the Cipro has seemed to be effective? How long of a course should I do? (I am an RN with 20 years experience, and I understand that without seeing her, it is harder for you to help me).

Thanks for your help.

K. Crews, Arizona

ANSWER #1: It sounds like she may have some egg material in her abdomen that is causing the swelling but not a normal egg that can be laid. A bird can have yolk build up in the oviduct or in the coelomic cavity that produces inflammation and can also be associated with a bacterial infection. The antibiotic will help with the infection but will not cause the yolk to resolve. She may need a surgical procedure to remove the yolk. I would strongly recommend that you take her to an avian veterinarian for evaluation. The sooner this problem is diagnosed and treated, the better her chances of survival.

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ANSWER #2: Without an examination of your pet bird, it is difficult to say what is needed and best for the bird. Your description suggests that the bird is not doing well and so I would strongly suggest that an examination for your bird – sooner rather than later is well indicated. As a medical professional yourself, you well know that what is described is not always what actually is occurring with the patient. Please see your chosen avian veterinarian ASAP.

*AB Worell, DVM, ABVP-Avian
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