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the Vet's Corner

The Watchbird has published many excellent articles on avian medicine by a number of renowned veterinarians. Continuing in this fine tradition we have been fortunate enough to have Drs. Walter J. Rosskopf, Jr. and Richard W. Woerpel agree to generate a series of articles for the Watchbird. These two veterinarians are eminently qualified and are distinguished among their peers.

Dr. Rosskopf was graduated from the University of California's School of Veterinary Medicine in 1969 and was the only member of his class interested in birds at that time. A major reason why young Rosskopf became a veterinarian is that when his 16 year old pet budgie injured itself Rosskopf went in vain from vet to vet but could find no one knowledgeable or even interested in pet birds.

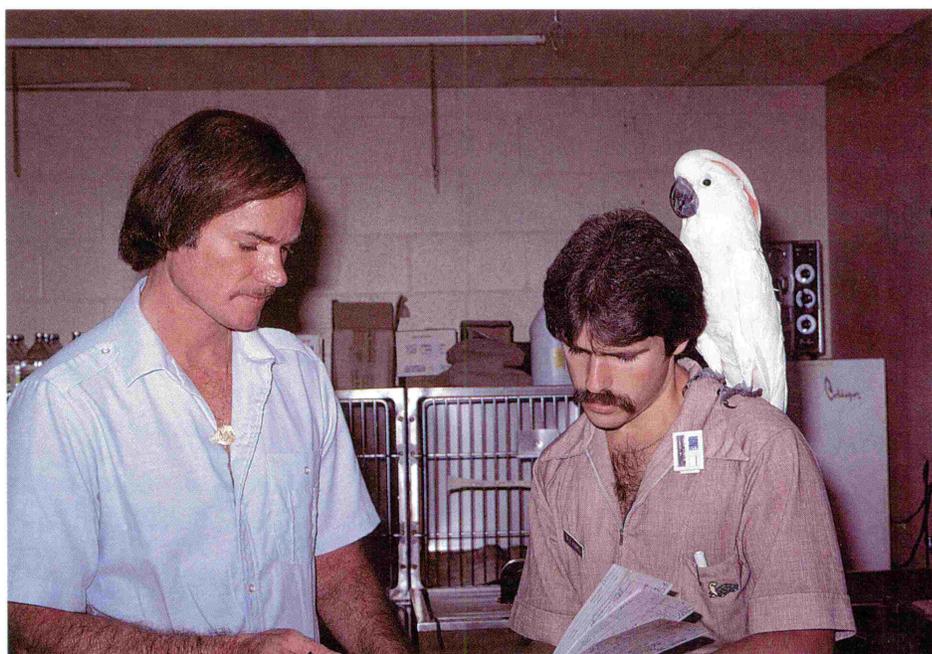
After graduation from vet school Dr. Rosskopf moved to the Los Angeles area and entered the small animal practice. At that time very few vets were interested in birds and Dr. Rosskopf began lecturing on the subject to neighboring vets. They responded by feeding him the avian cases they didn't want to deal with. In a short time over 40 veterinarians were sending their avian cases to Dr. Rosskopf. This, of course, led to much pioneer work and developed considerable experience and expertise which has now blossomed into a sophisticated, state-of-the-art avian practice.

In 1978 Dr. Richard W. Woerpel Editor

received his D.V.M. from the University of Illinois. Shortly thereafter he entered private practice with Dr. Rosskopf where his professional specialties of exotic animal medicine and surgery, and exotic animal clinical pathology became a great asset. Half or more of Dr. Woerpel's animal patients are companion exotic animals ranging from cockatoos, macaws, canaries, owls, hawks, pelicans, — in short, just about every kind of captive bird — to lizards, snakes, turtles, primates, rabbits and many other exotic animals.

Both Dr. Rosskopf and Dr. Woerpel have served in a leadership capacity in professional societies and both, separately and together, have published a very extensive list of professional papers. Both doctors are in constant demand and have spoken before innumerable professional and lay groups. They are, indeed, recognized leaders in the field of avian medicine.

In addition to their personal talents, Drs. Rosskopf and Woerpel have built the Animal Medical Centre of Laundale (not far from the L.A. airport) into one of the most technologically advanced animal hospitals in the entire country. It is our great good fortune to have Dr. Rosskopf and Dr. Woerpel share their immense experience and expertise with us through these pages.



Dr. Walter J. Rosskopf (left) and Dr. Richard W. Woerpel discuss a case with their patient, a shoulder perching Moluccan cockatoo.

Avian Axioms

by
 Walter Rosskopf, Jr., D.V.M.
 and
 Richard W. Woerpel, D.V.M.
 Hawthorne, California

Birds are unique in their manifestations of, and response(s) to disease (Axiom #1). A thorough understanding of this axiom and its ramifications are essential if one is to design a rational treatment protocol for caged birds.

All animals possess the limited ability to physiologically compensate for one or more medical problems involving one or more organ systems. An example of this would be chronic kidney disease in the dog. Definite clinical symptoms of illness are not usually exhibited until that fraction of the entire organ which is absolutely necessary to sustain normal homeostasis is consumed by the disease process. The onset of clinical symptoms is, therefore, usually associated with a state of physiological decompensation. Birds seem to possess this compensatory ability to an even greater extent. Indeed, birds appear to "hide" their symptoms (Axiom #2). Caged birds possess the unique ability to physiologically compensate for organic dysfunction and maintain this compensatory state for a surprisingly long period of time. Sustained *sub-clinical* illness results. Often, obvious symptoms of illness are not exhibited by ill birds until one or two weeks after acquisition of the disease agent.

Most people clients are much less observant of their caged bird(s) than of their pet dog or cat (Axiom #3). Therefore, subtle symptoms of illness are initially ignored or overlooked. Presentation of the avian patient to the veterinarian usually occurs at the time of obvious physical illness at which time the disease process is usually well advanced.

The number one misconception among bird owners regarding symptomatology is that an eating bird is a healthy bird. Most clients are lulled into overlooking subtle changes in their caged bird because its appetite remains unchanged. A "healthy appetite is *not* synonymous with a healthy bird (Axiom #4). Indeed, many birds will continue to eat right up until the time of death. Bird owners should always become concerned when there is a quantitative change in diet. More importantly, they should become suspicious when a bird with a substantial appetite exhibits even subtle symptoms of illness.

Stress plays an unusually significant role in the pathogenesis of avian disease (Axiom #5). Stress is any condition or

situation that compromises the state of well-being of an individual. Poor husbandry (especially inadequate diet), environmental changes, handling (taming), and trauma are common stresses experienced by caged birds and, as a result, they are also common precipitating causes of disease.

A special comment on diet: No individual or organization (including the National Research Council) has determined the actual nutritional requirements for exotic birds. This is not likely to become a reality either, because of economic restraints and the tremendous number of species that would, of necessity, demand inclusion in the study. Therefore, there are no truly scientifically formulated, completely balanced diets available for exotic birds. The alternative is a varied diet with mandatory vitamin and mineral supplementation, or a diet that has proved to be efficacious (ability to successfully breed, etc.).

Ignorance of the need to offer a variety of foodstuffs in an effort to provide all of the vital nutrients in their proper amounts and proportions is a universal problem. Malnutrition results, and represents chronic stress to caged birds, and is a leading cause of disease (Axiom #6).

A comment on drafts as a form of stress; a draft represents a sudden change in the ambient temperature precipitated by movement of air. Healthy birds can usually tolerate them, whereas diseased birds, or those incubating illnesses, are stressed by them. Drafts are, in my opinion, over-rated with regards to their direct role in the pathogenesis of disease.

Generally, the degree of stress experienced by an animal in captivity is in indirect proportion to the degree of domestication of that animal. The domestic dog or cat, for example, when ill is rarely seriously stressed by a visit to the veterinarian in the same way that an exotic bird, exhibiting the same degree of illness, is stressed by a mere routine physical exam.

Imported exotic birds experience an inordinate amount of stress during their capture, transport to the United States, quarantine, confinement in the retail market, and even during their initial establishment in a private home. Malnourishment, over-crowding, and poor sanitation are three rather consistent facts of life for these birds during all but perhaps the latter of the aforementioned circumstances.

To summarize; healthy birds can accommodate a modicum of stress, but sick birds are universally intolerant to all types of stress. Sick birds will disguise their sickness as long as possible. ●



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