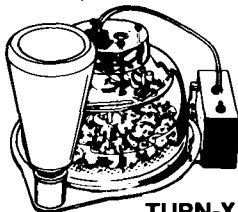
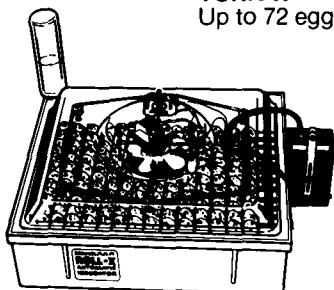


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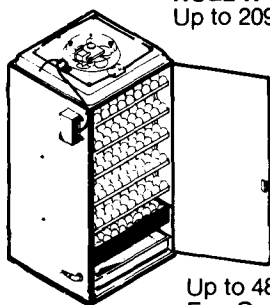
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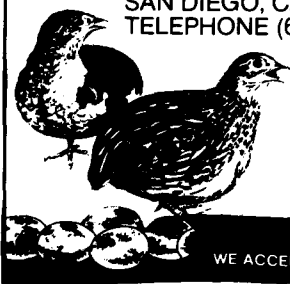
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Signs of the Sick Bird and its Emergency Care

by Amy Worell, D.V.M.
Woodland Hills, California

Signs of illness in birds may not be as obvious as in other animal species since birds often hide their problems until they are quite ill. This tactic serves as a preservation means, as obviously sick birds are easy prey in a natural environment. Sick birds, therefore, will attempt to maintain as near normal an appearance as possible. By the time signs of illness are recognized, the bird may have been ill for some time. Close, daily observation is necessary for the early detection of subtle changes in your bird. If you suspect your bird is ill, seek immediate care by your avian veterinarian.

Early warning signs of developing problems include:

1. *Change in the number, color, or consistency of the droppings.* Learn to recognize what is normal for your bird. Feces pasted on the feathers near the vent is abnormal.

2. *Decrease or increase in food or water consumption.* Lack of appetite is dangerous since a bird that stops eating will die.

3. *Change in attitude, personality, or behavior.* May be seen as a decrease in talking, singing, activity level, or in lack of response to external stimuli. A common change is increased sleeping time.

4. *Change in appearance or posture.* Sick birds often ruffle their feathers, sit low on the perch, or may appear to be sleeping due to partially closed eyes. Any bird sitting on the bottom of the cage is critically ill if he is too weak to perch.

5. *Change in respiratory character.* Tail bobbing while at rest, heavy breathing after exertion, and abnormal or unusual sounds such as sneezing, wheezing, or clicking, should be looked into immediately.

6. *Change in weight or general body condition.* A prominent breastbone indicates a seriously thin bird.

7. *Discharges from mouth, nostrils, or eyes.*

8. *Any swelling or growth on the body.*

9. *Vomiting or regurgitation.*

10. *Bleeding from any part of the body.* Should be considered as a true medical emergency.

If you notice any of these signs you should take the following emergency care steps while arranging for veterinary care.

Emergency Care of the Sick Bird

Emergency care for your bird is supportive, temporary care to be given prior to veterinary assistance. These steps should be taken if the bird shows any of the signs listed above.

The following supportive measures should be implemented immediately and are also applicable for the recovering bird.

1. *Temperature.* Sick birds require a warm environment. A temperature of 85-90 °F should be provided and regulated by a thermometer placed near the cage. An incubator-type environment can be provided by several methods. A heating pad under the cage and towels wrapped on three sides may work well for small cages. An infrared light or a 75 to 100 watt light bulb, placed 6 to 12 inches from the side of the cage, works well for larger cages. Be sure the light shines only on part of the cage and perch to avoid overheating the bird. The bird will begin rapid breathing, hold his wings out from his body, and pant, if he is too hot. Gradually decrease the temperature if this occurs.

2. *Nutrition.* Birds have a rapid metabolic rate and must intermittently replenish lost food stores. The bird which stops eating will soon die. Continuing food consumption is therefore of the utmost importance. Food and water should be placed close to the bird, and be readily accessible. If he is on the bottom of the cage, place his food on the bottom also. Offer his favorite foods. Supply cracked seeds if he refuses to crack them himself. Remove grit as ill birds may overeat and become impacted. Birds that refuse to eat must be force fed.

3. *Rest.* Keep disturbances to a minimum, avoid frequent handling, and offer a quiet environment. Ideally, the bird should have 12 hours of darkness for sleeping each night. To encourage eating though, a 24 hour light may be provided. If the light bulb is colored green, red, or blue, light, heat and a restful environment can be offered simultaneously.

4. *Isolation.* Isolate the sick bird away from other birds to prevent the spread of disease. A separate room of the house is preferable. Once separated, individual monitoring of droppings and food consumption can be more easily monitored.

5. *Stop bleeding.* Apply styptic powder (Quik-stop) and pressure. Keep styptic powder on hand for such unexpected emergencies as a broken toe nail or a bleeding blood feather.

6. *Seek veterinary care immediately.* ●