Common Myths about Chronic Egg-laying

• **MYTH: A hen needs a mate in order to produce eggs.**
  Some species require either the male courtship calls or displays or copulation in order to induce ovulation, but the majority of birds have reproductive cycles cued to the light cycle or photoperiod. Single birds that do not have any avian companions make up the majority of birds seen in veterinary clinics with excessive egg-laying issues.

• **MYTH: A hen needs a nest area in order to lay eggs.**
  If the hormonal cycle is working, an egg will be produced whether or not there is an appropriate place to lay it. Eggs may be laid anywhere — on the bottom of cages, in food bowls or on stuffed toys. A designed nest area or “sleeper tents,” however, may stimulate egg-laying in birds that are already primed.

• **MYTH: A hen needs a special diet or extra calcium to lay eggs.**
  Many birds will produce eggs on startlingly poor diets. Malnourished birds are at higher risk of becoming ill, as the hen’s eggs withdraw vital nutrients. Calcium, fat, vitamin A and trace minerals are rapidly depleted in malnourished birds, which can lead to life-threatening problems.

• **MYTH: A bird that has never laid eggs is probably a male.**
  Even DNA sexing is not 100% accurate. The only way to be 100% sure of a bird’s sex is to have the bird surgically sexed via endoscopy.

Recognizing Chronic Egg-laying

Many pet birds that lay too many eggs become sick. The most common species with chronic egg-laying disorders are canaries, Gouldian finches, zebra finches, budgies, cockatiels, small conures, cockatoos, and macaws, although any species may be affected.

The clutch size varies depending not only on the family of bird, but also on the species. For some hens, it is not unusual to double-clutch or triple-clutch in a year, while in other birds it is extremely rare to produce more than a single clutch. This variation in egg output by family and species makes it difficult to know when too many eggs are being produced in too short a time. In general, you have to know the breeding particulars of a species in order to recognize excessive egg-laying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commonly Kept Species and Their Expected Clutch Sizes</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Species</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Canary</td>
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<td>Gouldian finch</td>
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<td>Zebra finch</td>
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<td>Budgies</td>
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<td>Cockatiel</td>
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<td>Green-cheeked conure</td>
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<td>African grey</td>
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<td>Moluccan cockatoo</td>
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<td>Umbrella cockatoo</td>
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<tr>
<td>Blue &amp; gold macaw</td>
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<td>Scarlet macaw</td>
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How Releaves® Works

There is much research on the antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, antitumor and pro-cardiovascular effects of polyphenols found in raspberries. However, these polyphenols also have the ability to counteract an animal’s hormonal imbalances (see the scientific Mode of Action by Dr. Nick Koszewski, Associate Scientist, Dept of Biomedical Sciences, Iowa State University College of Veterinary Medicine at [http://Releaves.HEALx.com](http://Releaves.HEALx.com)).
What is Chronic Egg-laying?

Egg-laying is excessive when a hen:
- continues to produce eggs after reaching the upper end of the reported clutch size. (See back panel for more about clutch sizes for common species.)
- starts to lay more eggs several days after the first clutch is finished and before the first clutch’s last egg would have hatched.
- lays one or more eggs outside of the normal breeding season, particularly if the eggs are laid at irregular intervals.
- is producing eggs with one or more of the following: thin shells, abnormal coloring, undersized, oversized or misshaped.
- is steadily showing signs of illness (loss of appetite, labored breathing, change in stools, fluffed appearance, lethargy, unsteady posture, sleeping a lot on the nest rather than being watchful, or spending a lot of time on the bottom of the cage).

What Can You Do?

If the hen seems ill or is producing eggs that look abnormal, it must be seen by an experienced avian veterinarian. If the hen seems healthy but fits the description of a chronic egg-layer, there are some home treatment approaches that can be tried; however, the bird should be taken to an avian veterinarian immediately if there are any signs of distress or illness.

**DUMMY EGGS**

Artificial or “dummy” eggs may be used as a form of birth control. If an egg is laid, it is replaced in the cage or nest box by a dummy egg that is similar in size, shape and weight to the real egg. Most hens shut down egg production after they lay the typical clutch size. Substituting dummy eggs at the upper end of the clutch size may cause even a prolific hen to stop laying.

**RELEAVES®**

Releaves® is an organic red raspberry supplement that works synergistically with continuous light cycle therapy but may also be used on its own. Raspberries have a hormone-like action that stops hens from further ovulations and may ease the passage of eggs already in the oviduct (see the Mode of Action at http://Releaves.HEALX.com). For best results, Releaves® should be started about 4 weeks prior to the anticipated date that the first egg would be laid or start of the breeding season. If bird’s egg-laying cycle is not known, Releaves® may be started at any time.

**LIGHT CYCLE THERAPY**

Manipulation of the light cycle is a simple way to interrupt egg-laying. Exposing the hen to continuous light for 3-7 days in a row may disrupt the circadian and annual rhythms to “reset” the reproductive hormones to a resting state. Most birds will rest with 3 days of continuous light; however, others may need up to 7 days. The light should be as bright as a room in the middle of the day. Bright white incandescent bulbs (approximately a total of 300-400 watts or 4200 lumens daylight compact fluorescent bulbs [ie, 95 CRI, >5500°K]) may be used in the room with the cage. A nest box or anything the bird could use to hide from the light should be removed from the cage. If the hen stops eating or starts to appear fluffed or stressed, the natural day-night cycle should be resumed.

**DIET**

While a healthy, certified organic formulated diet (like Harrison’s Bird Foods) is ideal, changing a bird’s diet during egg-laying may be dangerous and must be done under the guidance of an avian veterinarian. For more information about diet conversion, visit http://bit.ly/DietConversion. All high-fat and high-sugar foods, such as corn, grapes, apples, nuts and sunflower seeds, should be discontinued. If the bird is on a seed diet, switching to a lower fat diet, such as white or grey millet, may also be helpful.

**BEHAVIOR**

A thorough assessment of behavior by a veterinarian or a qualified avian behaviorist may help determine the reason for the bird’s egg-laying. If a pet bird is exposed to sexually stimulating styles of owner interaction, has little competition for attention, and has no other options for interaction, it may likely become sexually active and perceive its owner as a mate. Examples of inappropriate pair-bond behaviors by owners include regular, prolonged cuddling or caressing of the bird, frequent carrying on the shoulder or inside of clothing, and sharing food directly from the mouth. Many owners are unaware that their interactions may be sexually stimulating, even when birds pant or demonstrate coital-like spasms in response to petting. Replacing this type of interaction with games and other non-physical touch interaction may be helpful.

**LEUPROLIDE INJECTIONS**

Some birds may not respond to home treatments. A veterinarian can perform a physical examination and may recommend additional diagnostic tests to better assess the bird’s condition. It is not unusual for older hens to have a diseased ovary that has sparked the egg laying. Injections with leuprolide acetate or other hormones may be recommended. Leuprolide may need to be repeated multiple times to reach the desired effect and may need to be continued for the lifetime of the bird. Additionally, some birds may not respond at all to leuprolide, and there is also the possibility of side effects. Veterinarians may recommend Releaves® and light cycle therapy in conjunction with injections or instead of injections.

**SURGERY**

In some cases, surgery is necessary. Removal of the oviduct (salpingectomy) requires an expert avian surgeon but may prove practical for birds that are chronic egg-layers with seemingly healthy ovaries. This surgery leaves behind the ovary but removes the oviduct and thereby breaks an important part of the hormone feedback loop that governs egg-laying. This works very well; however, there is a risk that a hen may ovulate into its body cavity if the feedback loop continues to function (common in chickens).

For more information go to www.chronicegglaying.com.