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Tips to Reduce Feather Destructive Behaviors



Companion Bird Care
S E R I E S

Support for Feather Destructive Behaviors in Companion Birds

FEATHER DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN PET BIRDS IS A COMPLEX ISSUE

There are many reasons that may induce the bird to destroy its own feathers (as opposed to feather loss from other causes).

Causes May Include:

- General malnutrition
- Deficiency of omega-3 fatty acids
- Pain
- Osteoporosis
- Atherosclerosis
- Endocrine disorders
- Parasites
- Hepatopathy (liver disease)
- Granulomas
- Ectopic eggs
- Egg-related peritonitis
- Boredom and other behavioral problems
- Excess salt in diet (e.g., cockatoos)
- Genetic
- Lack of social interaction
- Nesting frustration
- Excessive hormones
- Improper wing clips
- Cage mate aggression
- Uropygial gland impaction
- Aspergillosis in feather follicles
- Giardiasis
- Thyroid disorders
- Pancreatitis
- Malabsorption
- Mycotoxins
- Food allergies (e.g., peanuts, sunflower seeds)
- Dander from other birds
- Fear/panic following traumatic episode



WHAT TO DO UNTIL A DIAGNOSIS IS MADE BY AN AVIAN VETERINARIAN

Treatments for feather destructive behaviors vary considerably but should be based on the individual assessment with an attempt to address the underlying factors as well as the psychogenic manifestations.¹

Suggested Diet Changes

• **Harrison's Bird Foods** are the premium, certified organic formulas that provide a proper nutritional foundation necessary to address feather destructive issues. www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com

- Consider offering a low-antigen formula without corn and sunflower seed ingredients such as **Harrison's Adult Lifetime Mash**
- Administer **HEALx Omega-3 Booster**^{®*} dietary supplement. (Natural remedies often take longer than drugs before results are realized. Give recommended dose daily for 3-4 weeks before evaluating results.) 
- Administer **HEALx Releases**^{®*} dietary supplement if the behavior has a suspected hormonal cause. 
- Avoid feeding products with high sodium content (3 mg or more per serving).
- Avoid food items that are high in carbohydrates and sugar (some fruits) to reduce nesting frustration.
- Offer your bird 1 organic whole flax seed per 30 g body weight per day.

Avoid Nesting Behavior

- Avoid doing anything that could stimulate nesting behavior in your bird, such as cuddling or stroking the feathers.

- Prevent your bird from bonding with a favorite toy or mirror.
- Avoid dark hiding places in the enclosure that could simulate a nest.

Topical Relief

- Apply **HEALx Soother Spray**^{®*} or **HEALx Soother Plus**^{®*} (depending on severity) topically. Soother Plus[®] contains an antimicrobial ingredient for a nontoxic alternative to antibiotics for management of skin disorders. Several treatments per day may be required to manage condition.
- Provide an occasional opportunity for bath, shower or misting (at least weekly) with **HEALx Rain**^{®*} or water.



Environmental Enrichment

- Encourage pet birds to be more involved in all family activities.
- Provide opportunities for your bird to exercise, such as flying in a protected location.
- Provide a foraging tree/stand and foraging toys (where food is not so easily available) to reduce boredom.
- Offer your bird opportunities for protected outdoor exposure to sunlight (not through glass) - for a natural source of vitamin D.

*HEALx/AVIx products are available through your avian veterinarian or Harrison's Bird Foods (www.HarrisonsBirdFoods.com).

References and Further Reading

1. Ness R: Integrative therapies. In Harrison GJ, Lightfoot TL (eds): Clinical Avian Medicine. Spix Pub, 2006, p 357.
2. Harrison GJ, Lightfoot TL (eds): Clinical Avian Medicine. Spix Pub, 2006.
3. Ritchie BW, Harrison GJ, Harrison LR (eds): Avian Medicine: Principles and Application. Wingers Pub, 1994.