



Medical Center For Birds

www.medicalcenterforbirds.com

3807 Main Street Oakley CA 94561

PH: 925-625-1878

Re-Adjusting a Pair-Bonded Relationship With Your Bird

When your pet bird views you more as a mate than a member of its flock, there is a greater risk for the development of potential reproductive or hormonally mediated problems. Allopreening, or mutual grooming, when offered by their owners to their pet birds is typically received much more willingly by the bird than true “petting” which does not have a purpose like petting your pet dog or cat. Excessive allopreening, petting, kissing, and other similar tactile activities between owner and pet bird, over time, are similar in many ways with the constant types of behavior of a bonded and/or mating pair of the bird’s wild counterparts. A continuously reinforced pair bonded relationship between owner and bird can function in many circumstances as a signal that breeding activity is justified. The reproductively stimulated pet parrot is potentially vulnerable to a wide variety of problems. Many of these problems are initially manifested behaviorally. Some of these may include normal behaviors in an unacceptable or undesired setting such as aggression (biting/lunging), abnormal vocalization, feather damaging behaviors, and masturbation. Medical problems that can be encountered include chronic egg laying, osteoporosis, weight loss, muscle weakness, bone weakness and fractures, egg binding, egg yolk peritonitis and internal ovulation, cloacal prolapse, oviduct torsion or impaction, and even possibly the sternal mutilation syndrome of cockatoos and the foot mutilation syndromes seen in Amazon parrots.

Here are some suggestions to review with your veterinarian to address pair-bonding:

- Reinforce basic training and foundation behaviors for your bird. Refreshing on basic training means you can revisit, reshape, and reinforce appropriate interactions with your bird. Teaching them to sit on a play stand instead of on your shoulder or lap can be helpful, as well as where they are encouraged to perch when they are on you like on your hand versus in your shirt.

- Define acceptable social interaction: Petting can easily be construed as a “green light” for sexual behavior in pet birds. This includes under the wings, on the back, belly, or tail. Allopreening, or mutual grooming, is another behavior that can be seen as mating behavior by your parrot. When petting your bird, the head and neck are often viewed as “safe” areas to avoid reproductive behavior like regurgitating, masturbation, and egg-laying. If you notice any of these signs while petting your bird, stop petting them. Luckily, there are many

other fun behaviors to do with your bird instead of petting, including training or playing games. These still ensure that your birds gets attention and social interaction but likely will decrease the likelihood of them taking the attention and turning it into reproductive behavior.

❑ Diet adjustments: Your veterinarian can help assess your bird's diet and make adjustments as needed. These adjustments might include converting to a pelleted diet, giving a controlled amount of food, or cutting out high fat foods but it is crucial to remember that every bird is different, and the specific details of these types of changes need to be tailored to you and your particular bird.

Follow-up: Regular communication and follow-up evaluations are essential to monitor your progress and get help with any questions you may have.