



# AVIAN REPTILE & EXOTIC PET HOSPITAL

## BIRD - CHRONIC EGG LAYING

### INTRODUCTION

Chronic egg laying in pet birds can cause multiple medical problems which can be avoided if we stop the egg laying behaviour.

It is best to consult with your veterinarian to find out about behavioural modification and medical treatment.



### BACKGROUND

It is important to recognise that our pet birds do not routinely undergo desexing (sterilization) procedures as domestic pets such as cats and dogs. They retain their reproductive organs and thus their desire to mate and reproduce. Some species such as budgerigars and cockatiels have been selected for their ability to reproduce in captivity. It is likely that some of our pet birds have an increased reproductive drive and increased ability to reproduce in captivity. We may also encourage reproduction by the way we interact with and take care of our birds. Problematic behaviours include chronic egg laying, broody behaviour and aggression in hens and masturbation, regurgitation and aggression in cock birds.

Other reproductive problems in females include egg binding, oviductal impaction, oviductal prolapse, cloacal prolapse, abdominal herniation, ovarian cysts and ovarian or oviductal tumours. All of these conditions will require veterinary attention and in some cases surgical intervention required. Chronic egg laying often leads to these other problems and early intervention may be preventative.

Budgerigars (*Melopsittacus undulatus*) and cockatiels (*Nymphicus hollandicus*) are two of the most popular parrot species kept as pets all

over the world. They are also the most common species that present with chronic egg-laying and reproductive problems. They are adapted to desert and semi arid regions of Australia and have developed breeding strategies that allow them to respond rapidly to the sudden availability of food and water such as when a drought breaks and the rains arrive. A pet bird that is kept inside under lighting, provided with abundant high fat seed, water and the undivided attention of a mate (their owner) is receiving messages that it is breeding season all year round!

### WHAT STIMULATES OUR PET BIRDS TO BREED?

It is important to understand the factors that stimulate hormone production leading to egg laying reproduction in our pet birds in order to prevent reproductive problems.

These factors include:

- the presence of a mate (or a perceived mate i.e. the owner),
- photoperiod i.e. length of light exposure through the day,
- food availability, and good body condition,
- availability of appropriate nesting material and a nest site,
- temperature and rainfall.

Assessing all these factors and managing them appropriately can help to reduce stimulation to lay eggs in many cases.



Budgerigar  
(*Melopsittacus undulatus*)

Cockatiel  
(*Nymphicus hollandicus*)

## METHODS OF REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL CUES FOR REPRODUCTION.

Chronic egg laying is detrimental to the pet bird when it results in calcium deficiency, egg binding, osteoporosis and poor body condition. The reproductive drive may be so strong that the bird becomes less interested in play, foraging and interaction with other family members. Aggression may be directed to anyone other than the bonded owner. Territorial aggression in the cage may also occur. Prevention is the best cure. If we are well informed, we can limit reproductive stimulation on our pet bird and thus decrease the likelihood of chronic egg laying. If your bird is already egg laying, by seeking veterinary attention and following the recommendations below, you are likely to have a much happier and healthier pet.

instead of high fat seed mixes (up to 50% fat). Feed seed that is lower in fat such as millet and budgerigar mixes instead of parrot mixes that contain sunflower seed, cracked corn and peanuts. Provide a CALCIUM source such as cuttlefish bone, oyster shell or mineral grits, mineral bells or perches. Your avian veterinarian may suggest a calcium and vitamin D3 supplement in the drinking water if your bird has had no access to calcium, has produced a lot of eggs recently and is likely to be calcium deficient.

4. Take out nest boxes, fluffy houses and any nesting material such as newspaper or foliage. If your hen has been overproducing for months or has produced a large number of eggs recently, it may be better to leave the eggs in place. Birds such as cockatiels will continue to lay eggs until a clutch is achieved. Change the cage location frequently.

1. Decrease cuddling, stroking down the back, mouth to beak feeding and shoulder carrying. Increase interaction with other members of the household. Have family members put food in the cage, have playtime and training time. Take out any cage toys, bells or mirrors your bird is attracted to.

5. Put your bird outside on sunny days only and keep the inside ambient temperature below 25 °C. Some pet birds, especially those that are hand raised and highly bonded to a human mate, will continue to be affected by reproductive problems. In some of these cases, the only true 'cure' will be surgical removal of the reproductive tract (salpingectomy). In other cases a course of hormone injections or a hormonal implant is likely to be recommended by your avian veterinarian. In combination with environmental and behavioural modification, hormonal control may be successful in reducing or preventing egg laying and further reproductive stimulation.

2. Reduce light exposure to 6-8 hours daily by placing your bird in a dark room or placing a dark cover over the night cage. Wake your bird up later and put it to bed earlier (e.g. 8am to 4pm).

3. Feed your bird high fibre low fat foods e.g. vegetables, fruit, seeding grass. Provide pelleted foods (5% fat)



Fischer's Lovebird  
(*Agapornis fischeri*)



Rainbow Lorikeet  
(*Trichoglossus haematodus*)

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