

Chronic Egg Laying

What is chronic egg laying?

Chronic egg laying is the production of an excessive number of eggs or repeated clutches (or collections) of eggs. Chronic egg laying often occurs in the absence of a normal bird mate and outside of the normal breeding season.

Without significant nutritional support, heavy egg production creates a drain on the body leading to loss of calcium and protein stores. High levels of calcium are required to shell the egg, and calcium also stimulates the uterine contractions needed to push the egg along. Falling calcium levels increase the risk of egg binding or dystocia, as well as the formation of abnormally shelled or shell-less eggs. The production of malformed eggs also increases the risk of egg binding or dystocia.

Symptoms: Your bird becoming lethargic or reducing its activity level around the cage, birds may also become more aggressive and territorial and may favour one family member whilst being aggressive to all others.

Some birds may become egg-bound, which occurs when they cannot pass an egg due to inappropriate nutrition, an excessively large egg, poor muscle tone and or inflammation of her oviduct. If this happens in your bird, they will go off their food, become fluffed up, and may strain intermittently or continuously

Which birds suffer from chronic egg laying?

Chronic egg laying may be seen in any bird, however this problem is most commonly seen in small psittacines like the budgies, cockatiels, lovebirds, lorikeets, eclectic parrots and chickens.

Why are some individuals more likely to be chronic egg layers?

In the wild, specific environmental cues may stimulate reproductive activity and egg laying. Companion parrots may be strongly stimulated by some of these cues such as:

* Long day length: Birds are often exposed to the same light schedule as we are (6am-12am), which may give them 18 hours+ of light. This signals the body that conditions are ideal for egg laying, and thus the cycle begins and maintains.

* The presence of a mate

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- Warm temperatures
- Rainfall
- Abundant food supply
- In captivity, some genetic lines appear to be predisposed to reproductive problems.

Diagnosis: There is no specific test for chronic egg-laying. The diagnosis is based on several things including the history, physical exam and sometimes organ function testing or radiographs (x-rays).



How to minimize egg laying in your bird?

Treatment revolves around environmental changes and potential medical treatments

- Allow eggs to remain in the cage for at least a couple of weeks after they have been laid. To minimize the risk of breakage, eggs may be hard boiled or frozen. Craft store 'fake' eggs may also work as substitutes eggs.
- Provide a strict 6-10 hours of daylight per day for at least 30 days or recommended by your avian veterinarian.
- Stop exposure to the mate (real or perceived). The mate may be another bird housed in the same cage, the same room, or simply within hearing distance. A perceived mate may also be a favourite toy or mirror, or even a human being.
- Remove nesting material such as shredded paper and any dark cavity with an opening that the bird may perceive as a nest box.
- Offer calcium-rich foods such as boiled egg with the shell and dark, leafy greens.

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- Gradually improve the nutrition by converting your bird to a healthy diet that includes a formulated food (see additional handouts).
- Avoid interacting with your pet in ways that may stimulate reproductive activity such as rubbing over the back, under the wings, or around the vent.
- In select individuals it may also help to switch cage location. This change may distract or 'stress' the bird out of its broodiness or breeding behaviour.

What can your avian veterinarian do to help?

- Some birds with evidence of hypocalcemia may require oral calcium supplementation
- Medical treatments may include hormone injections and hormone implants
- Surgical removal of the oviduct and uterus/a partial "spay" is sometimes necessary. This is a technically challenging procedure and is only indicated in select cases as it carries a high level of risk.

If these tips do not stop the excessive laying or your bird seems to be struggling or egg bound seek veterinary attention immediately.