

Pet birds

Toxic household-hazards

Due to the characteristic physiology of the respiratory tract of birds, they are particularly susceptible to airborne toxins.

Especially pet birds are exposed to many dangers due to their husbandry in close proximity to humans. Often the owners are not aware of those hazards, as they are usually not a problem for humans and other animals like dogs and cats.

Many of the toxins that can be dangerous for other animals can also be harmful to birds but beyond that, birds are at a higher risk of specific poisoning, especially heavy metals and inhaled toxins.

Alcohol

To start with man's favourite poison: Alcohol can be very toxic to birds because they react to relatively much smaller doses than humans do since their liver is highly sensitive to alcohol.

Even though many pet birds seem to enjoy the taste of beer, even the foam can contain enough alcohol to make the bird sick. So it should not be considered to let them participate in your end-of-work-ritual.

Caffeine

Coffee, or other sources for caffeine like chocolate, soda and tea can cause vomiting, hyperactivity, tremors and seizures in birds.

Avocado

Although avocados are tasty and healthy for humans, they can cause severe sickness in some avian species. Most importantly, all parts of the plant (leaves, seed, fruit and bark) contain the toxins that can be dangerous to birds. Therefore it is critical not to include avocado in their feed.

Garlic and Onions

While garlic and onions are often key ingredients used in many kinds of dishes, birds should not have access to them, whether raw or cooked.

The contained alkaloids may induce haemolytic anaemia in birds and other animals and should thus be stored safely packed. Here again, all parts of the plants are toxic.

Smoke

The nicotine that is contained in tobacco smoke can be dangerous for birds. Especially birds that are chronically exposed to fumes, such as birds that live in a smoker-household, are at great risk of developing respiratory diseases, conjunctivitis and skin conditions.

However, smoke from open fires, malfunctioning ovens, engine exhausts, burning food or cooking oil, stoves or other smoke sources may also cause disease in birds exposed to them.

FACT SHEET

The irritation of the airways caused by the chronic exposure to smoke can also pave the way for harmful bacterial, viral or fungal microorganisms to settle in the respiratory tract of birds.

Teflon Vapours

Non-stick pots and pans emit an odourless vapour when heated above a critical temperature (above 280°C), especially when they are new. This vapour assembles in the bird's lungs and causes liquid to accumulate, thereby affecting gas exchange. Furnace linings and curling irons may also be sources of Teflon vapours.

Clinical signs due to Teflon vapour intoxication may include dyspnoea, incoordination, weakness, coma and death.

Other Aerosols

In general, every agent that produces aerosols can be harmful or irritant to the respiratory tract of birds.

In many cases we are not even aware of the danger, for example in the case of nail polish, perfume, hairspray, glue, air fresheners or scented candles. As a universal rule of thumb, these and alike agents should only be used in a fair distance to your bird.

Special care should be taken when using harsh cleaning agents, especially if they are used to clean the bird cage. They should always be rinsed with water after cleaning and it must be ensured that no residues remain which could cause irritation to the skin or respiratory tract via aerosol formation.

Inhaled toxins also have the potential to compromise the immune system of birds, making them more susceptible to other pathogens.

Zinc

Common sources of zinc toxicity are the coating of cages made of galvanised wire, nails, keychains, galvanized metals, sequins, jewellery, metal zippers, feed and water bowls. Clinical signs of zinc toxicity may include lethargy, weakness, over excessive drinking, diarrhoea, regurgitation and neurological symptoms.

Lead

Because of its sweet taste, lead is often ingested by birds. Sources can be paint, toys with lead weights, jewellery and glitter, lead ammunition of air rifles, ornaments and tin foil.

The clinical signs associated with lead poisoning are similar to those of zinc intoxication, but are usually more severe and neurologic signs are more frequently observed.