

Signs of illness in birds



Early signs of illness in birds are subtle and can easily be missed. In the wild, a sick bird will hide evidence of illness to avoid appearing weak and thus eaten. This behaviour is counterproductive in companion birds, as they can be ill for some time before symptoms are obvious to the owner. A bird that appears to die suddenly often has been sick for a while, with the caretaker unaware of the subtle signs of illness the bird has been displaying. For this reason, it is important to familiarize yourself with early signs of illness in birds, and take note of any changes in their pet's normal routine. Early detection of illness allows for quick medical attention and a better result for your sick pet.

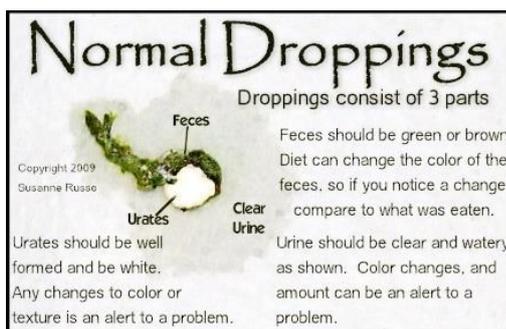
Monitoring Weight

Monitoring weight is one way to catch illnesses early. We recommend that all bird owners have an electronic gram scale and weigh their birds weekly. Rapid weight loss or weight gain is abnormal. If you notice a significant change in your bird's weight (+/-10%) then a visit to the veterinarian is needed.

Evaluation of Droppings

A change in your bird's droppings can be an indicator of a change in your bird's health. Use paper towels or newspapers underneath your bird's cage and perches so that you can easily see the droppings. Replace the paper daily so that the number, volume, colour, and consistency of the droppings can be noted.

Normal Droppings



A bird's normal droppings will vary in appearance depending on the diet and what type of bird it is. Most parrots will have formed faeces of a dull green colour with varying amounts of clear urine and white urates. Eating berries or foods with food colouring may temporarily change the colour of your bird's faeces, and a diet high in moist foods will increase urine production.

Abnormal Droppings

- Decrease in the total number or volume of droppings
- Colour change of the urates (opaque portion of the urine) from white to green or yellow
- Liquid unformed faeces (diarrhoea)
- Increase in the urine portion (polyuria) independent of eating moist foods
- Presence of blood in the droppings
- A strong odour to the droppings (other than the first morning dropping)

Looser faeces can be normal under some circumstances. Birds that eat nectar such as lorries and lorikeets will have more liquid faeces. Birds laying eggs and baby birds on hand-feeding formulas will normally have looser stools. Similarly, a bird's first void of the morning is often larger and less formed than those that occur later in the day. Nervousness or stress can cause temporarily loose droppings that should resolve with removal of the stressor.

We recommend you evaluate several droppings under normal circumstances before becoming alarmed.

Early signs of disease in birds

- Crusty material in or around nares
- Redness, swelling or loss of feathers around eyes
- Stained feathers over nares (nostrils) or around the face or vent
- Flakiness on skin or beak
- Overgrowth of beak or nails
- Changes in vocalization, eating habits, or aggression
- Broken, bent, picked, or chewed feathers
- Unusual or dull feather colour
- Prolonged molt
- Lameness or shifting of body weight
- Sores on bottom of feet

Signs of Serious Illness

The following signs can indicate a serious health problem and veterinary assistance should be sought at once:

- Blood loss or injury
- Discharge from nares (nostrils), eyes, or mouth
- Labored breathing or abnormal respiratory sounds
- Decreased or excessive food or water consumption
- Loss of weight or general body condition
- Enlargement or swelling on the body
- Vomiting or regurgitation
- Significant reduction in the quantity and frequency of droppings, or a pronounced change in their odour or consistency
- Decreased vocalization and interest in social interaction
- Fluffed posture and sleeping more than normal
- Seizures or other neurologic abnormalities
- Inability to perch

Emergency First Aid

An ill bird should be kept in a warm and quiet environment until veterinary care is available. Minimize handling and provide your bird with easily accessible food and water.

Heat

The ideal temperature for most sick birds is 27°-29° Celsius. A temporary incubator can be made by placing a heating pad along the side of or underneath your bird's cage, then covering the cage with a towel, blanket, or cage cover. Space heaters or heat bulbs may be useful as well but can cause over-heating. Ensure that cage covers do not touch the heat source, and that your bird cannot chew on any electrical wires used. If the bird starts breathing rapidly or holds its wings away from its body, the temperature is too high and needs to be lowered. Avoid any heaters that emit fumes or smoke, as they can cause more harm than good.

Food/Water

It is important that sick birds continue to eat and drink unless they are regurgitating or vomiting. Place food and water within easy access of where your bird is perching or laying. If your pet is tame, offer favourite foods by hand. An electrolyte solution, such as warmed pediatric electrolytes can be offered drop by drop with a syringe or eye dropper.

Reference www.aav.org

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Mistakes to Avoid

- Don't attempt to drop food or liquids into a bird's mouth if it is too weak to swallow.
- Don't give any drugs or remedies that were not specifically prescribed for your bird.
- Don't wait to see how the bird is tomorrow.
- Don't wait to call your avian veterinarian!

Have a Relationship with your Avian Veterinarian

It is very helpful to have a relationship with an avian veterinarian before your bird gets sick. This will give you and the doctor important baseline information such as how much the bird usually weighs, how the bird usually acts at the veterinarian's office, and what test results are when the bird is well. It is also helpful to know the local emergency clinics, so it isn't a mad dash at 9 pm on a Friday night to find out.

