



THE CENTER FOR

BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

Egg laying in Pet Birds

It often comes as a surprise to the owner of a female bird that their pet can lay eggs without the presence of a male bird. These eggs are not fertile and will not hatch even if incubated. Excessive egg laying is a common problem in multiple species of birds especially cockatiels, lovebirds, budgerigars (parakeets), canaries, and finches.

Egg laying is a natural seasonal process in wild birds, breeding birds, and some pets. However, excessive egg laying will rapidly deplete nutrient stores predisposing her to life threatening health problems such as egg-binding, yolk peritonitis, and osteoporosis.

A bird in the peak of health on an ideal diet maybe able to sustain egg production up to 10 – 20 eggs per year without serious harm. Beyond that number, egg laying will likely have serious consequences sooner or later, no matter how the bird looks. For a bird that eats a seed based diet or has underlying health problem any egg laying at all is potentially dangerous. Even a perfectly healthy bird may have problems with egg laying.

An avian veterinarian should examine every egg laying bird. The doctor can screen and treat for any underlying disease, establish a sound nutritional program, and offer preventative advice. Excessive egg laying is a time-bomb situation!

Environmental factors

Certain environmental factors predispose the pet bird to lay eggs. Correction of these, when possible, will often reduce or eliminate the egg laying.

Factors that encourage Egg laying

High-fat seed diet

Access to nest box or nesting material

Access to dark enclosed spaces

Presence or sound of a male bird

Allowing free flight

Petting the bird's lower back or abdomen (We maybe perceived as a mate)

Removing the egg immediately will stimulate her to lay another within a few days

Ways to discourage Egg laying

Convert to a low fat formulated diet (pellets)

Place a wire grate in the cage bottom to avoid access to newspaper, bedding, or other potential nesting material

Increase dark cycle (nighttime) to at least 14 hours

Remove male if present

Remove nest if present

Remove items or toys that stimulate sexual interest

Restrict access to dark enclosed spaces

Clip wings to reduce number of potential nest sites and discourage instinctual behavior

Limit petting to the head and, and upper body areas

Move or remodel the cage when she starts to act “nesty” – this may provide just enough stress to distract her

If she has already laid one or more eggs, allow her to lay a full clutch, 3-5 eggs (average clutch for most species) and sit them for 3 weeks or until she abandons them. This usually reduces the total number laid in a given time period

Medical Prevention of Egg laying

Environmental manipulation is sometimes impractical, unsuccessful, or just not enough. The bird may then require medical treatment to control egg laying. There are several safe, effective hormonal treatments available, which your veterinarian can tailor to your bird's needs.

If all else fails, surgery can be performed to stop egg laying. The procedure is effective in the rare cases that the bird is unresponsive to either environmental or hormonal intervention. The risk of surgery is preferable to the certain death that will result from continual laying of eggs.