



THE CENTER FOR

BIRD & EXOTIC ANIMAL MEDICINE

Stress and the Veterinary Visit

Tips on how to make the Veterinary exam a more pleasant and less stressful experience for you and your bird

In years past it was not uncommon for veterinarians unfamiliar with birds to attempt to handle them using techniques that caused fear and anxiety for the birds. These included the use of gloves, and simply grabbing birds quickly and forcefully to reduce the risk of being bitten. This generally resulted in a stressful fear response that was almost guaranteed to reoccur each time the bird visited the veterinary hospital.

We now know that it is possible to handle nearly all pet birds in such a way to reduce stress and result in an experience that ranges from pleasant to only mildly annoying. This does not happen without work on the part of the owner and the veterinary staff. Training the bird to accept handling must be practiced regularly for the entire lifetime of the pet. Gentle handling on the part of the veterinary staff is often doomed to failure without regular effort on the part of the owner.

Using positive reinforcement and practice you should be able to train your bird to:

- Willingly enter the carrier to come to the veterinarian
- Willingly step onto the scale to be weighed
- Willingly leave you to step onto the hand of veterinary staff
- Accept towel restraint without fear

Entering the carrier:

- ~ The transport carrier or box should not be used only when the bird has to go to the veterinarian, or it will become associated with veterinary visits.
- ~ Young birds should regularly be placed into the carrier and rewarded, and occasionally be taken places in it the bird finds enjoyable or rewarding.
- ~ Let the bird occasionally find food treats or toys inside the carrier.
- ~ Older birds that are fearful of or resist going into the carrier must be conditioned to accept the carrier.

***Tips include:**

- Reward the bird for standing on top of or near the carrier at first
- Train the bird to respond to a target that is placed closer and closer to the carrier, and eventually in the carrier. (See "Target Training")

Standing on the scale:

- ~ Practice at home with a portable perch that is similar in size and shape to our perch.
- ~ Alternatively, bring your portable perch to the veterinary exam to set onto our scale.
- ~ If birds are fearful of portable perches, work at home to overcome this before the vet visit.
- ~ It is important that all birds be able to sit quietly on a perch when placed there.