

W.A.E.S.

Wasatch Avian Education Society

April 2019

### President's Message

Dear All,

We have a very interesting change of pace for our April meeting. Professor Jessica Cleeves, who is the Program Manager for The Center of Science and Mathematics Education at the University of Utah, and also the Outreach Director for the Dark Sky Project, is going to come speak to us about the difficulties migrating birds have because of the way we light up the sky after dark around our cities. This is something I had not thought much about, and am very anxious to learn more. I hope to see you all there for a bit of fun, and a bit of science!

Chase Kimball, President.

**\*Please Note** –There will be a board meeting at **6:30** before our regular meeting begins at 7:00 pm.

April showers bring May flowers. They may also signal some changes in your bird's behavior. The following article provides some useful information on how to recognize and manage some of these temporary disruptions to you and your bird's normal routine.

### Monthly Meeting

April 13, 2019

7:00 pm

**Salt Lake County  
Complex**

2001 S. State Street

Room N1100

(North Building)

Our meetings are free and open to the public. Come meet other parrot enthusiasts.

Refreshments & Raffle Table

Come see what our volunteer

Flock is all about.

## Curbing Hormonal Behavior In Parrots

### Hormonal Behavior in Parrots

Did you know that one of the main reasons bird rescues are overcrowded is because of hormonal behavior in parrots? Statistics suggest that almost every parrot will have at least five different homes before they find a permanent family



or they often die prematurely. In general, bird sanctuaries claim they receive, on average, an

astounding 1,500 calls every year from bird owners who wish to give up their pets. What's even more telling is that of those sanctuaries, they claim that they can only accept up to 30 birds a year—even though they continue to get at least four calls every day from those who cannot care for their birds.

When people are faced with hormonal behavior in parrots such as nesting, [feather plucking](#), biting, or screaming, the owners tend to feel

overwhelmed and often frustrated because they don't fully understand why their parrot is doing these things. As you read through this newsletter, I'll explain to you what these particular hormonal behaviors in parrots mean and what you can do to help stop your bird from doing it. Also, you'll learn how these behaviors could be a result of something that you cause, even if you never realized it!

### **What Does Hormonal Behavior in Parrots Look Like?**

Hormonal behavior in parrots is a natural thing, although for some parrots, it can be a bit more challenging to deal with than others. During these times, parrot owners may experience excitable, impulsive birds, aggression (especially between the ages of 5 and 12 years old), and some owners may even experience their beloved bird ditching them and preferring another family member! Some hormonal signs your bird may exhibit include:

- The bird acts sexual when you pet them on their back or wings
- The bird pulls out its feathers on the chest or between its legs
- The bird will regurgitate its food frequently
- The bird will crouch down with its wings dropped, panting heavily
- The bird will search for a nesting site and begin to shred paper to build said nest
- The bird is extremely protective of the chosen nesting site and may show aggression
- The bird becomes a lot more vocal

Female birds may prefer cuttlebone and other sources of calcium, and foods chock full of protein.

### **Causes for Hormonal Behavior In Parrots**

We've all experienced a hormonal shift in our personalities from time to time. Ladies, we have the fortunate experience of going through it once a month, much to the male populations chagrin. But we can make it through these twists and turns without too much of a problem. Luckily as a parrot owner, you'll only have to experience a hormonal parrot once, maybe twice a year. Just remember that it's completely natural!

Wild parrots tend to experience normal hormonal behavior for a period of a couple of weeks each year, which is usually considered seasonal behavior. These few weeks of hormonal behavior in parrots is usually triggered by the seasons, more specifically, daylight. But it isn't just the daylight that can set those hormones ablaze. Artificial light can also cause the birds reproductive organs to grow and cause a surge in hormonal activity. You see, in a household situation, you're going to need to adapt your behavior and lifestyle so as to not to induce hormonal surges.

Parrots often exhibit hormonal behavior when they have access to suitable nesting materials and a place to build said nest. These sites could include paper, a favorite blanket or piece of clothing, ribbons, or even a toy they are particularly fond of and begin to shred. If you've noticed that your parrot may be hiding, it could actually be searching for that nesting spot. If you see them scoping out areas behind furniture cushions, in boxes, or some place that is dark and secluded, you will want to nip it in the bud and prevent them from staking claim to those spots.

Other causes that can trigger hormonal behavior in parrots include finding a potential "mate" (it could be you, another bird, or even a toy or an object), the food it eats (food that is high in fat and protein encourages breeding), and petting near the vet or the bird's backside (the bird can interpret this to be sexual petting).

## How to Deal with Hormonal Behavior in Parrots

When it comes to trying to deal with these behaviors, you have to remember that it is in your bird's make up to behave this way. You don't want to discipline your bird whenever they exhibit these behaviors. Instead, there are some things that you can do to minimize the behavior.

1 – **Use a [T-Perch](#) to train your parrot.** When your bird is hormonal, you don't really want to get too up close and personal with it, because they could become aggressive and bite you—hard. Like the name suggests, the perch looks like a T and it can be used to get your parrot down from high places. Simply put the top of the perch to your parrot's chest and say "up" or "step up", and this will make them get onto the perch. From here, you can easily move your parrot to a lower spot or even put it in or out of its cage.

2 – **Decrease your parrot's exposure to light.** As a rule, your bird requires at least 11 to 13 hours of complete darkness every night. You'll want to make sure the room your bird is in can be completely dark, and if you cannot darken the room sufficiently, you will want to put a dark blanket or cover on the cage.

3 – **Change your parrot's diet.** When your bird becomes hormonal, you'll want to avoid giving it starchy foods and even high calorie/high fat foods. These types of foods can send signals to the bird that it is the right time to start having babies. Many respected breeders also note that warm, cooked foods may induce hormonal surges. When it comes to your hormonal parrot's diet, reduce starchy high protein foods such as breads, corn, potatoes, beans, nuts, cheeses or meats.

Instead Feed:

- Wheat Germ
- Hemp Seed
- Fresh vegetables
- Few fruits

4 – **Entertain Your Bird.** When you give your **parrot toys** and activities that will distract it from its urges, you'll find that the behavior will probably subside. You'll want to provide your bird with activities that will encourage foraging, like putting bird-safe pesticide-free twigs, sticks, and leaves from safe plants in the cage. You can supply chunks of wood, newspaper and phone books so that your bird can focus on chewing to release the built up sexual energy. Flying is also a great way for your parrot to release that energy too.

5 - **Remove Anything That Can Be Construed As A Nest Box Or Nesting Materials.** This might include any Bird Snugglies, boxes or paper bags that your bird crawls into. Don't allow your bird to crawl around on the floor and hide under furniture.

6 - **Be Aware Of How You Pet Your Bird.** Your bird believes that full body petting is sexual so when you pet it, like one might pet a dog or cat, it simply makes your parrot hormonal and invites "bad behavior." It is safe to pet your parrot's head, high neck, around its beak and its ears. Feet are okay to pet, too.



## Hormonal Behavior in Parrots that Leads to Rehoming

Now that we've discussed what normal hormonal behavior in parrots consist of, let's discuss harmful hormonal behavior in parrots that often lead to rehoming. There are three hormonal behaviors that are the most common cause owners to want to give up their parrots. These are:

- Feather Plucking
- Screaming
- Biting

### Feather Plucking

For many parrot owners, seeing your parrot pulling out their feathers (or feather plucking) can be quite alarming. Before you start to panic and pull out your own hair, take your bird to an avian veterinarian to clear your parrot of health concerns. Once the vet cleared your parrot of medical concerns, you will want to understand a few things about this behavior.

Feather plucking can be caused by environmental changes, like moving its cage, getting another pet, they could have dry skin, or being placed near a window where they can see predatory birds. If none of these changes occurred, next look at its routine. Maybe you got a new job and are exposing the bird to more light than normal, or you've changed how often you give it attention. If everything has stayed the same, then it may be safe to say the feather plucking is, in fact due to hormones.

In general, feather plucking is a sad but common problem for birds who are kept in captivity. The birds are often faced with stressors that their free brethren do not experience because they have the ability to focus their energy on staying alive and reproducing. If your bird consistently plucks out their feathers, there are ways you can treat and prevent this behavior.

In extreme cases of feather plucking, you can use [bird collars](#) to prevent the bird from hurting itself, however it is not entirely recommended because it doesn't get to the root of the problem and it can also agitate the bird even more.



Suppose your bird is plucking out of boredom, it is up to you to provide some kind of stimulation to occupy and entertain the bird—whether you spend more time with your bird or you give it foraging and play activities to keep it occupied.

### Screaming

Sure, parrots are very social flock animals and they will communicate to one another with sometimes loud vocalizations throughout the day, but they should not be screaming nonstop. There's only so much a person can take before they get fed up and want to shout or punish the bird. This is strongly discouraged because it doesn't understand punishments and these negative actions will only be seen as aggression, which could make matters worse! You're bird will stop trusting you.

Instead of lashing out, first, make sure that your bird is alright—it has plenty of food and water, is not stuck in a toy or trapped somewhere. After all, its constant screaming could be its way of alarming you that it is in

distress or wants your attention. If everything is okay, try talking back to the bird with a soft whistle or ignore it. If the parrot responds appropriately in a positive manner, reward its good behavior immediately. This will encourage your bird to focus on the positive behavior for attention rather than screaming.

Of course, if your bird is hormonal, you can curb the hormonal behavior by giving it activities that will refocus the pent up energy. As mentioned above, foraging activities and giving it opportunities to play and socialize on a [bird stand](#) is a great way to help your bird. Talk to it in a normal voice and pay attention to it when it is using an "inside voice."

Just keep in mind that for a parrot, height is considered a sign of dominance. If your parrot is allowed to be on top of a cage or even on your shoulder, it may act out as a sign of dominance and power. Of course, you don't want your bird to be too low because it will feel vulnerable or frightened. The ideal height for dealing with your bird is about chest to abdomen height.

## **Biting**

If you've ever been bitten by your bird, even if on accident, you know that it hurts! It's amazing how much power they have with their tiny beaks! Even though parrots are typically prey animals, your bird should never bite you, but sometimes accidents do happen. Most birds give warnings in the form of body language before they actually take the lunge. It is up to you to learn to read a bird's body language. Often times, they will bite because they are afraid of something, whether it is excessive stimuli or a perceived threat like an animal they see outside or on the television. Hormonal birds, though, tend to be more impulsive. Like screaming, you do not want to punish the behavior because the meaning will be lost on them. If you are dealing with a parrot that is biting, you definitely want to correct the behavior, regardless if it is due to hormonal behavior or not.

While it is more difficult to prevent hormonal biting, it is recommended to avoid getting too close to your bird lest it take a bite at you. Never allow a hormonal parrot near your face. Keep your young children away from a hormonal parrot, too. But, if your bird isn't feeling hormonal and is biting, there are some ways that you can prevent your bird from biting you. One of the most effective ways of dealing with a bird who bites is by leaving it alone; however, if your bird is a habitual biter, or it has experienced some kind of abuse or trauma in the past, then you may want to seek outside help.

Avian behavioral consultants or even your vet can help you treat the biting. It will take a lot of work and time to help your bird overcome their biting habits—especially if your bird experienced abuse or trauma because they remember mistreatment, regardless of the person who hurt them. And boy, do they hold grudges.

Your first instinct may be to show your bird who is boss and that you are in control. That's not how birds work. Believe it or not, birds recognize respect and they can easily stop trusting you if you try to enforce dominance over them. After all, parrots are kept as companions and aren't your typical "pet". No matter what kind of biter your bird is, it will give you signs prior to the bite. They will use some sort of body language like their tail will flair, they'll stare at you with pinning eyes, or their feathers will ruffle. Of course, no two bird's body languages will be the same. Just take notice of changes in your bird so you can keep yourself protected.

## **In Closing**

Hopefully, you have a better understanding of the different kinds of hormonal behavior in parrots and you'll feel more confident when you are dealing with your bird. I'm a firm believer that a properly educated bird

owner is the first step to prevent parrots from being put in sanctuaries and being moved from home to home. It is no small feat to take on a parrot as a pet, as many of the birds will outlive their owners. After all, with the proper care, your parrot can be the most (appropriately) affectionate pet you've ever had.

Many Thanks to Diane Burroughs, who granted permission for us to reprint this article here. She is the founder of BirdSupplies.com, a website and store well worth the visit for bird owners!



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