Feather Plucking Survey Results
Finally an Answer
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"Why is my parrot plucking?" This question, which seems to be the all-
time number one avicultural enigma, is difficult to answer, because there are
so many viable reasons. Once it has
been ascertained that no medical
cause exists and every other possible
idea has been explored, both from
experts and other bird owners, there
should be a realization that something
has been overlooked.

To find out what that something
was, with participation from people
with pluckers, a practical option pre-
sented itself in the form of a survey for
feather pluckers. It seemed to be sig-
nificantly important to try to find out
the answer to...Why does my parrot
pluck, when none of the usual reasons
fit?

The last six months of 1995, mem-
bers of The Real Macaw Parrot Club of
New Jersey and The Big Apple Bird
Club of New York, aided by volunteers
from the Internet, and others who
wished to remain anonymous, con-
tributed to a "Feather Plucking Survey"
initiated by The Real Macaw Parrot
Club newsletter. Its primary purpose
was to see if an answer could be found
on why parrots pluck. The results were
amazing and of all the reasons we
thought parrots plucked, everyone,
including veterinarians, overlooked a
reason that only surfaced when all the
data had been collated, graphed, and
compared. The following article has
the long-awaited results of that survey.

One hundred sixty-eight (168) birds
participated in the survey. Other
responses were from people who did
not have a bird that plucked, but
wished to include data that might be
helpful.

One hundred fifty-nine (159) of the
birds had been veterinarian checked,
while nine had not. The most common
treatment diagnosis was no diagnosis
of a medical problem. Veterinarian
diagnoses: 1—proventricular dilata-
tion; 1—wings clipped at too young an
age; 2—obesity; 2—nutrition related;
2—thyroid problems; 3—bacterial
infections; 3—low calcium; 3—habit;
4—yeast infections; 5—dry skin; 5—
allergies; 8—sexual frustration; 27—
behavioral, psychological, emotional,
and neurotic; 9—not checked; 93—no
diagnosis.

One of the questions on the survey
was "Why do you think your parrot
plucks?"

Some of the answers were: change
in surrounding areas, taking the bird
on vacation, abuse by previous owner,
and singling out all the birds that had
been diagnosed, I noticed some-
thing that cannot be overlooked:

After collating all the surveys
and sorting out all the birds that had
not been diagnosed, I noticed some-
thing that cannot be overlooked:

For the most part, every question
resulted in answers that, when com-
pared, zeroed each other out, but in
almost every case, the undiagnosed
bird lived in the same house with
another bird that was not just another
bird, but a bird from a different contin-
ent.

Results:
50 African Birds: 47 lived with birds
 from a different continent
55 South American Birds: 42 lived with
 birds from a different continent
35 Australian Birds: 33 lived with birds
 from a different continent
28 Island Birds: 27 lived with bird
 from a different continent
168 Birds in Survey: 149 lived with
 birds from a different contin-
ent
Of the 19 birds that did not live with another bird from a different continent, medical reasons for their plucking were either diagnosed, or other reasons were suspected by the owner. Some of the birds that lived with other birds from a different continent also had medical problems or had been misdiagnosed.

Personal case: My African Grey, Chukeigh, is now 10 years old and started plucking when she was seven. I have tried for three years to find the possible reasons for her plucking. I narrowed it down to:

• She is now sexually mature -- forget that; she shows absolutely no interest whatsoever in breeding.
• I gave up breeding canaries and they were no longer in the house -- I recently purchased two canaries especially for her, but her only interest is in imitating them.
• A veterinarian told me to stop giving her chicken bones -- I have now resumed giving them to her -- she is so glad to have them back, but she is still using her bare chest as a bib.
• A medical reason? -- She is yet checked frequently and all medical causes have been ruled out.
• Boredom? -- Not likely, she has a large cage, a multitude of toys that are changed frequently, a radio to listen to, and a household of people who are around night and day.

After looking at the results of the feather plucking survey, I realized that I had overlooked one other thing that happened when Chukeigh started plucking. That was the year that I adopted my Orange-winged Amazon. A bird from a different continent! The two birds have been in the same room together for three years and I could never understand why they hated each other. I thought that they were jealous, however, if the results of the survey are to be believed, the reason might just be terror.

Using the results of the survey, I have tried to take steps to remedy my own situation. Since giving up my Amazon is not an option, I tried to change the environment in the birdroom. Both birds have very large cages that I placed across from each other instead of side-by-side and I placed the Grey's ladders on top of her cage, which instantly gave her the higher cage. I am hoping that this will give her the confidence to think that she is the dominant bird. Guess what?? There is definitely less skin showing on her bare chest and I think she is ready to give up her old fashion statement!

I would like to thank all the people who responded to this survey and I hope the findings will help their affected birds, as well as others that are experiencing the same problem. It is important for all aviculturists to pursue these results either on their own or preferably as a group (other clubs).

(Note from the author: An important fact that is worth mentioning and should not be overlooked: There were approximately 300 other participating birds that were disqualified because some of the inconsequential questions on the survey were left blank (these were needed as a control). However, had these birds not been disqualified, the results on the scale would have shown that 99% of the birds in the survey were housed with a bird from a different continent.)