

Veterinary Viewpoints

edited by Amy Worell, D.M.V.
Woodland Hills, California

Editor's Note: The AFA is very pleased to present a new series of columns called Veterinary Viewpoints, edited by Amy Worell, D.V.M. Dr. Worell was graduated from Auburn University with a D.V.M. degree, with honors. She has practiced in southern California for the last six years where she sees a large number of avian patients. She has a special interest in pediatrics and nutrition and, as an aviculturist, is currently working with nine species of cockatoos, African gray parrots, scarlet macaws, and pionus parrots. Dr. Worell is active in a number of professional associations and is a frequent lecturer on avian medicine.

A unique thing about Veterinary Viewpoints is that a number of veterinarians are consulted and a broad spectrum of viewpoints are presented. You won't get just one veterinarian's opinion. No single vet can know all about everything so Dr. Worell will solicit answers from various vets. This way we hope to get the best answers from the best people on any given subject.

If there is anything you'd like to know about avian medicine, nutrition, even husbandry or anything else, please send your questions to Veterinary Viewpoints, P.O. Box 1568, Redondo Beach, Ca 90278.

Question: I have a moustache keet that is stout, full chested and, for the most part, healthy. He sings, plays, and has all the freedom he wants. But, he has no tail feathers and he is bald on the top of his head. I have mite protectors in all of my birds' cages so I do not think it is mites. What could be the problem?

My moustache keet's diet consists of Topper small hookbill seed mix, a variety of fruits and vegetables, supplemented with cod liver oil, wheat germ, and vitamins. I try to get him to eat Lafeber's pellets, but he will all but starve before he will eat them. Once in



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awhile, he will eat the pellets from my hand. In spite of what I think is a fairly balanced diet, Tig will eat his droppings. He eats lots of his droppings. I have heard that some birds do this because of lack of one of the B vitamins. The Topper mix is supposed to have all the B vitamins that birds need. What is Tig missing in his diet and how can I break him of this habit?

D. Davidson, North Carolina

Answer: Loss of feathers can be due to many different reasons, including removal by a mate or other bird, self-mutilation such as picking or rubbing, and malnutrition. If the feather follicles become permanently damaged from whatever the cause, there may be no regrowth of feathers in those areas.

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Infestation with external parasites (mites) is a less common reason for feather loss than many others. In fact, the mite protectors that are commonly used for mite prevention contain paradichlorobenzene which is the active ingredient in moth balls. Therefore, these may be potentially harmful to the bird and should not be used. In clinical situations of ectoparasite infestation, these mite protectors seem to be ineffective. I suggest a physical exam by a nearby avian veterinarian to help resolve this feather loss.

Birds occasionally will ingest their own droppings. There is no one reason for this abnormal behavior, but it is not considered to be due to a lack of any nutrient, including the B vitamins. Often this problem is considered behavioral rather than as a deficiency in diet or environment. I suggest a cage with a wire bottom so that droppings fall through, *away* from the easy access of the bird. Daily cleaning of the wire or mesh cage bottom would also be advisable.

Question: How can I eliminate air sac mites from finches?

T. Ludwig, Nebraska

Answer: A number of methods have been in vogue in the past, including the "shake and bake" method, which uses insecticidal powder in a paper bag with the bird and shaking the two together, the use of "no pest strips" hung near the cage, and insecticidal products mixed directly into the seed mixture. None of these have proven to be effective in ridding the bird of the air sac mites. The development of the anti-parasitic drug, Ivermectin[®], has supplied us with the most effective treatment to date. This product, combined with good husbandry (that is, not bringing infected birds into the collection), is the treatment of choice at this time.

James Harris, D.V.M.

Air sac mites are parasites that actually live in the trachea, bronchi, and air sacs of certain birds. Birds reported to be affected by this parasite include conures, lorries, finches and canaries. Of these, Gouldian finches and canaries are the more commonly affected birds. Clinical signs may include dyspnea (difficult breathing), a characteristic "clicking" sound, and general signs of malaise. Ivermectin[®] can be used for treatment of the mites on an individual bird basis, by using either the oral

route or by intramuscular injection. Both routes of administration appear to be equally efficacious, and some veterinarians may prefer the oral route as occasional toxic reactions have been reported following IM injection. There have been deaths reported with the use of the equine product Equalan[®] in orange-cheeked waxbill finches. (Ivermectin is the name of the product, while Equalan[®] is the trade or marketable name. This product is no longer available, rather the product is now under several names, including Ivomec[®]).

Amy Worell, D.V.M.

Question: Can you recommend a good product for avian worm control, for all types and species of worms, with the recommended dosages?

A. Fairbrother, Maine

Answer: Unfortunately, a "panacea" anthelmintic, or deworming medication, is not available for all internal/external parasites of birds. The vast numbers of parasites, the differences in modes or transmission and life cycles, and environmental contamination, make the outlook for a "wonder dewormer" quite bleak. In addition, some parasites may be difficult to eliminate with the use of a number of available products. These might include the intestinal parasites, Giardia and Capillaria. Further, a certain parasitocidal product may be effective in one species, but not in others. For example, piperzine, a readily available over-the-counter deworming medication, is considered effective for roundworms in both poultry and pigeons, but not in psittacines. Thus, a simple solution for a complex problem is not available.

Preventing infection and reinfection in the bird's environment is extremely important and can be planned for when building or redesigning a cage or aviary. Ideally, birds should be housed in enclosures made entirely of metal or wire, rather than wood. This is important as wood can *never* be entirely sanitized or disinfected, as can wire. Enclosures should, ideally, be raised off the ground or, if walk-in aviaries are desired, cement or other non-porous material should be used. These steps are important to prevent exposure to parasites, to allow thorough disinfection of the enclosure, and interrupt the life cycles of certain parasites.

If parasites are suspected in your birds, an exam by an avian veterinarian, including examination of fresh feces, is necessary. ●