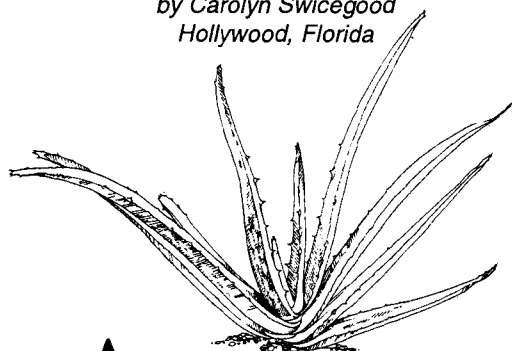


Aloe for Birdkeepers

Avian Pharmacy in a Leaf

by Carolyn Swicegood
Hollywood, Florida



Allopathic medicine is barely a century old, but the practice of using plant remedies such as *Aloe vera* can be traced back to ancient civilizations. *Aloe vera*, a succulent member of the lily and onion family, was used to treat a variety of health problems. There is a valuable lesson in this ancient wisdom for aviculturists who prefer using natural preventive remedies and treatments for their birds whenever feasible. *Aloe vera*, also known as the "burn plant," possesses powerful healing properties that are beneficial to both birds and their caregivers.

There are hundreds of species of *Aloe* but *Aloe Barbadosensis* (still commonly known as *Aloe vera* – which term we will use here) is the species most frequently used for healing. It contains a wound hormone that accelerates healing of injured surfaces such as skin, nails, and feathers. *Aloe vera* has proven to be beneficial as a topical treatment for minor wounds and burns. When taken internally, it improves immune function, detoxifies, and promotes general healing. Scientists have found that *Aloe vera* gel is useful as an astringent, an anti-inflammatory agent, a natural antibiotic, a coagulating agent, and a pain inhibitor. No other plant can claim as many healing properties as *Aloe vera*, which truly is a "pharmacy in a leaf."

Aloe vera can be useful to bird-

keepers in the following ways:

- *It promotes the healing of wounds and prevents infection.

- *It is a safe and natural analgesic.

- *Aloe spray discourages feather destruction.

- *It stimulates the immune system making it an effective preventive remedy.

- *It can be used as a coagulating agent for the treatment of broken nails and blood feathers.

- *Aloe detoxifying formula can save lives when conventional treatments fail.

Aloe for Healing Wounds

The prevention of infections that sometimes result from skin wounds is important to a bird's health. Aviculturists should consider the natural medicinal benefits that *Aloe vera* provides as a remedy for such abrasions. Aloe penetrates all the skin layers, which helps to account for its healing properties when treating burns, cuts, scrapes, abrasions, and other skin problems. It draws infection out of wounds as it helps to regenerate healthy tissue. Aloe contains fatty acids that have anti-inflammatory properties, as well as the wound healing hormones, Auxins and Gibberellins. *Aloe vera* also has antibacterial, antiviral, and antifungal properties that are effective defenses against a broad range of microbes. The *Aloe vera* plant produces at least six antiseptic agents: lupeol, salicylic acid, urea nitrogen, cinnamonic acid, phenols, and sulphur. All of these are recognized as antiseptics because they kill or control molds and other fungi, as well as bacteria and viruses.

Extensive research since the 1930s has shown that *Aloe vera* gel has the ability not only to heal wounds, but also to treat ulcers and burns by putting a protective coating on the affected areas and speeding up the rate of healing.

Aloe as an Analgesic

It seems to be a well-kept secret that *Aloe vera* is an effective pain

killer. The lupeol, salicylic acid and magnesium in Aloe have strong analgesic properties with no known side effects, making it helpful to both birds and their caregivers. Aloe spray is an excellent analgesic for birds because it does not require hands-on application. Tame birds might allow the owner to apply Aloe gel or other medications directly to their wounds, but birds that are not so tame or birds that are upset can be treated more easily with Aloe spray. Consequently, Aloe is one of the most valuable items in the Avian first aid kit. George's Aloe Spray by Warren Laboratories is available in many health food stores in a reusable eight-ounce spray pump bottle for about \$5.00. You can easily make your own spray by purchasing additive-free, steam-distilled Aloe juice (not gel) and an inexpensive spray bottle. Steam-distilled Aloe does not require dilution or refrigeration and will stay fresh for months.

All birds bite and all birdkeepers eventually are bitten. The only effective painkiller for a crushing bite is *Aloe vera* gel. To treat a bird bite on a finger, fill a rubber finger cot with Aloe gel and wear it on the finger for as long as the pain-killing benefits are needed. Five minutes usually is sufficient to stop the pain, but it can be used for as long as needed. Aloe also helps to coagulate blood in injured tissue and minimize swelling and bruising. If you have older *Aloe vera* plants with large leaves, you also can cut open a leaf and wrap it around an injured finger. To treat bite wounds on other parts of the body, spread a generous amount of *Aloe vera* gel on the wound as often as needed to control pain. Aloe preparations are sold in pharmacies, supermarkets, and department stores. Read labels and look for the highest Aloe content with the fewest additives.

Aloe for Feather Destruction

A popular use of *Aloe vera* is a topical spray to soothe the irritated skin of birds that engage in feather plucking. Dramatic results can be

obtained with this protocol when used on parrots that destroy their feathers due to itchy skin. Even in cases of psychological plucking, Aloe spray can slow down feather destruction because damp feathers seem to discourage plucking. Feeding our birds *Aloe vera* also can help to prevent feather destruction. Its effectiveness is due mainly to magnesium lactate, a chemical known to inhibit the release of histamines responsible for skin irritation and itching. I use George's Aloe Spray but one can use a clean, new pump spray bottle filled with steam-distilled Aloe. Distilled Aloe contains no additives. Research indicates that steam distillation destroys the mucopolysaccharides which are considered to be the main active ingredient of *Aloe vera*, useful when it is taken internally. However, when used as a spray, the steam-distilled *Aloe vera* seems to be just as effective.

Aloe as an Immunostimulant

Aloe's beneficial effects on the avian immune system makes it a great preventive remedy. Aloe contains at least twenty amino acids, nine enzymes, many polysaccharides, small amounts of vitamins and minerals, trace elements, growth stimulators, and naturally occurring electrolytes. Extensive Russian research has shown that *Aloe vera* successfully removes toxins from the body and acts as a boost to the immune system. *Aloe vera* contains an immune-stimulating complex, galactomannan, a class of polysaccharides that acts as an anti-inflammatory and increases cellular membrane fluidity and permeability.

Galactomannan apparently binds to a receptor site and activates macrophages, which are the cells that control the immune system. The macrophages secrete infection-fighting agents. With at least 23 polypeptides (immune stimulators), Aloe helps to control a broad spectrum of immune system disorders.

If you grow the *Aloe barbadensis* plant, your birds will enjoy several thin slices of the largest stalks of the Aloe plant as a treat when they appear lethargic and in need of an energy boost. Pure Aloe juice added to dry food or to drinking water in the ratio of one part Aloe juice to three parts pure water also can make a positive difference in the energy level of birds.

Aloe Stops the Bleeding of Broken Nails and Blood Feathers

For many years, styptic powder – known to birdkeepers by several brand names – was considered the treatment of choice for birds' broken toenails or blood feathers. However, some deaths have occurred when blood feather follicles or open wounds were treated with styptic powder. In less severe cases, it has caused tissue death at the site of application. Cornstarch, flour, and powdered sugar are natural products that are just as effective for stopping bleeding. Unlike styptic powder, they are non-toxic. Of all these natural substances, cornstarch is my top choice. When the dry substance is combined with *Aloe vera* gel, it is even more effective. Aloe not only helps to stop bleeding, it helps the dry medium (such as corn starch) to adhere to the


bleeding nail or feather follicle. It also has anti-bacterial properties that can prevent infection, and best of all (from a bird's point of view) it stops pain quickly. One can make a paste of *Aloe vera* gel and cornstarch to apply to a broken nail or feather follicle, or Aloe gel can be applied directly to the nail or feather follicle before applying the cornstarch.

Besides the danger of styptic powder causing tissue burn or toxicity, there is an additional danger of birds and their owners inhaling the powder which is a toxic irritant to the respiratory system. I no longer keep styptic powder in my avian first aid kit. Cornstarch and Aloe are much safer and are just as effective as styptic powder. Why keep something around that a birdsitter might mistakenly use on your birds' skin and cause a painful burn when Aloe combined with cornstarch works just as well? If you do not feel secure without a styptic product for your birds, remember that it is strictly for broken nails, and not broken blood feathers or skin wounds.

Aloe Detoxifying Formula can Save Birds' Lives

Any time that a bird appears to be seriously ill, a veterinarian should be consulted. Sometimes bird illnesses defy diagnosis and do not respond to traditional treatments. In the event that professionals give up and send a bird home to await the inevitable, there is an *Aloe vera* remedy that has saved the lives of numerous birds that did not respond to professional help.

In my years of birdkeeping, my




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Michael J. Dee
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small flock of *Eclectus* parrots has been amazingly healthy except for one *Eclectus* hen who became severely ill several years ago. She was treated by two excellent veterinarians who tried everything in their power to restore her to health. They finally gave up due to a lack of response to traditional treatments, which included tissue biopsies, exploratory surgery, and a host of medications. Once she was sent home without hope of recovery, there was nothing to lose by trying alternative remedies.

I turned to health food stores in search of help. One of the veterinarians told me that the sick hen had liver damage so I chose a natural remedy for this condition. It was a product called "Aloe Detoxifying Formula," a concentrate of *Aloe vera* and liver-cleansing herbs including milk thistle which often is prescribed for liver problems. This was several years ago and the formula at that time was: double-strength *Aloe vera* gel (200:1) with *Aloe vera* pulp, milk thistle, burdock, dandelion, echinacea, green tea, red clover and blue cohosh. Because all of the ingredients were non-toxic and since there was no protocol for treating birds with it, I simply gave the ailing hen all the formula that I could get into her. I added it to her drinking water and she drank more than she had in weeks. I added it to her bird bread and other dry foods and she also ate more than she had eaten since the beginning of her illness.

The hen's general demeanor and her energy level changed quickly and dramatically, which was more than I had dared to hope for. She

started to perch again and to notice her surroundings. She quickly recovered so completely that when one of her vets did a recheck of her blood two weeks later, he said that if he had not drawn the blood himself, he would not have believed the results. Her liver values had returned to 100% normal! This beautiful hen has produced many healthy chicks since then, and she has never again been ill. Although the cause of her illness was never identified, I have no doubt that the Aloe Detoxifying formula was responsible for her recovery.

Since I did not really expect a successful outcome from the treatment, I did not record the details, such as the amount of the detox formula that she was given. Since then, several vets and breeders have used this formula to save newly hatched chicks that failed to thrive. The brand name of the product that I used is Naturade and they still make this product, although the formula now also contains 100 mg. of Arabinogalactan, a naturally occurring polysaccharide (sugar) derived from the Larch tree. It has been shown to promote beneficial bacteria while reducing pathogenic bacteria in the digestive tract of animals. The formula still contains all of the original ingredients. Many birdkeepers consider Aloe Detoxifying formula an important part of their first aid kit, and many veterinarians now use the product for their avian patients.

If I were stranded on that proverbial desert island with my birds and could have only one first aid item, the choice would be easy. *Aloe vera* is the next best thing to a magic potion for birdkeepers. ➤

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