



Emotional Trauma and Shock: the Subtle Killer

The young woman was walking to the mailbox for the umpteenth time, strolling down her driveway with Jenny, her pet Jenday Conure on her shoulder. Suddenly, there was a loud roar from the street and the parrot took off at full speed right into the side of a large delivery truck. The woman rushed to the pavement where Jenny lay motionless. Panic stricken and weeping, she believed her pet was dead. In tears, she buried it.

Checking the nest box, one breeder discovered the two-week-old Red-fronted Kakariki babies cold, dirty, unfed and apparently dead. As the remains of the box were being scraped into the trash can, the keeper happened to look down and see a leg clinch. Scooping up the failing chick, it was fed a drop of electrolyte every hour for 24 hours and brought literally back to life!

Physical mishap and heat loss are just two of the many instances which may cause our pets or breeder birds to go into shock — one of the body's ways of preparing for death. In fact, avian species have such an active shock mechanism that sometimes a bird literally seems to "give up on life."

Canaries, for example, are noted for going into shock or heart failure when netted and held for toenail clipping.

The message of this report is *don't give up hope*. Begin treatment of your pet immediately and sustain your efforts until well after you are convinced the bird has truly died.

Tens if not hundreds of our domesticated feathered friends can be saved each year in this country by such endeavors!

My pet Sun Conure was a feisty two-year-old who always loved to fly around the bird room in the store and coax some of the larger parrots into

screaming matches. One day, I noticed him just out of reach of "Rebel", a large male imported African Grey Parrot. The next instant, the Sun's teasing screeches were cut short and I turned to see him flutter to the floor. He wobbled once and fell off the sand box into the aisle.

I reached him just in time to see his eyes roll up in their sockets. He went limp. A telltale loss of feathers showed where the Grey had reached over and bit the conure through the neck. Shock took hold and I believed he had died. I bundled him up in a towel with his head out and rocked him, gently stroked his head, talked in his ear. No response, eyes shut, heart beat and breathing were not noticeable. I went to the bathroom and got one drop of lukewarm water to put in his lower

mandible. Still no reaction. "Come on, baby. Come back to me," I urged. Four minutes went by. Abruptly, the pet Sun Conure came to with a screech. He bit my finger very hard and bolted from the towel in flight. Though there was blood seeping from his nostrils, when I recovered him he was out of shock. He had obviously lost all track of time between being bit and coming awake. (Incidentally, we ended up treating the internal bleeding with an emergency medicine prepared by a local herbalist in weak tea form for normal treatment of bleeding ulcers. The pet Sun was fine in a few days).

As I look back, the most dangerous time was when this parrot was still in shock. His circulation and body functions had shut down to the barest

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minimum.

Dr. Chuck Galvin, an experienced avian vet with Veterinary Hospital of Ignacio, California, explained that shock is a general term for the physical state brought on by many different factors: trauma such as a cat attack or flying into a window pane, emotional stress such as a stranger handling a pet or a hand gripping finches, anemia due to blood loss or malnutrition, infections and the toxic state they create inside the body, and thermal loss due to cold.

"We treated an eclectus parrot that flew away and ended up in a cold stream," Galvin remembered. "It was unconscious and in shock. We gave it warmth and put it in a padded area in case it thrashed when it awoke. It took over half an hour to return to normal."

It is important for bird owners to not panic and to treat shock carefully, Dr. Galvin emphasized. Place the bird in a warm (about 85°F), quiet place. To do the least is sometimes the smartest. Do not be in a hurry to rush the bird off to the vet.

Be aware that a significant amount of fluids can actually drown a bird that

is in shock. Use only one drop for small birds, not necessarily put in the throat but on the tongue.

"There was a conure bitten by a macaw which we treated for major shock," Galvin said. "He was blind and unconscious for three days. We kept him alive with subcutaneous fluids. He recovered his sight after two weeks!"

With pet birds, owners may be counseled not to "abandon" the creature by putting it away to recover. Sit down and hold the pet. Keep it warm and talk it out of shock if possible. Keep it supported and upright. Breathing can be felt down below the keelbone or up under the wings. As long as the bird is warm, retain hope. A pet cockatiel which has flown into a glass window may be "out" for 15 or 20 minutes.

Dr. Kathleen Ramsey, of Cottonwood Veterinary Clinic, Espanola, New Mexico, has a vast knowledge of avian shock treatment with both pet birds and wilderness avian species through her work as wildlife/raptor rehabilitator. "There are many different levels of shock," Dr. Ramsey

explained. "From the stressed pet parrot who is very quiet and tucks his head, to the owl out on the highway with full cardiovascular depression and dehydration shock."

"Our experience with hand-raised birds suggests you should not put them down or they might just pass away; but with wild or imported birds, isolate them in a dark area with no external stimulation."

"Sick birds that are not eating often go into dehydration shock and have need of calories," Dr. Ramsey added. "Glucose and dextrose can be converted rapidly into calories. Electrolyte is best, Gatorade our next choice."

Dr. Ramsey specifies that many of her clients keep a small bottle of "Rescue Remedy" on hand in their avian first aid kit to aid in bringing birds out of shock. "As a veterinarian, we use straight arnica tincture," she specified. "That is the homeopathic working ingredient. Modern medicine might use a steroid, instead. But I know arnica works. We use it with great effectiveness on raptors who are in electrocution shock from high tension power lines." Rescue Remedy can be purchased at many health food stores.

Above all, it is necessary for bird owners to understand that clinical shock is not death. It can be recognized and gently but persistently treated to bring the bird back to awareness. Warmth is most important. Some sort of contact may sometimes be needed to "reach" the bird.

Aviculturists report canaries which overheated and went limp being brought around by a quick dipping of their entire body into cool water. Of course, we caution, these people are experts who know when and such a judgement can be made.

As a novice breeder or pet owner, proceed with care and love and poise; keep calm, call your vet for advice and give it your best home nursing effort. Though they may appear dead, many birds can last for a long time in shock.

And pass the word — to friends and bird clubs and anyone who has contact with aviculture or wildlife. Shock is treatable. Many of these birds may be saved.

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