

Many parrots are latent carriers of Chlamydia, which can cause psittacosis or “parrot fever.” In the acute form of the disease, your bird becomes seriously ill with respiratory or gastrointestinal signs. Most infected birds don’t appear very ill but over the years may have poor feathering, reduced activity, and general health problems. Occasionally people catch this disease from their birds, requiring medical care. Newer technology has provided accurate tests to detect Chlamydia. The ***Chlamydia FA or Chlamydia DNA-PCR*** will detect the germ in the portals of your bird if it is currently shedding Chlamydia. Blood testing (CBC and chemistries) may show signs of infection by this (or another) organism in case your bird is not shedding at the time of sampling.

BIOPSY

A biopsy is a tissue sample, usually taken by a surgical procedure. The sample is then examined by a pathologist specializing in pet bird diseases. The most common biopsy is the skin and feather follicle biopsy, which is useful to assess the bird with feather disorders.

X-RAY

X-ray exams of birds will show visible changes in organ sizes and shapes. Because of avian air sacs, we can see much more in a bird xray. For best results we prefer to brief administer gas anesthesia to perform the study

ENDOSCOPY

Advances in technology allow us to perform minor internal surgical and biopsy procedures in a bird while viewing on a video monitor

ULTRASOUND

Ultrasound is particularly useful in the pet bird when abnormal fluid accumulations or organ enlargement occurs. In addition, ultrasound provides useful information in the pet bird with suspected reproductive tract disease.

POST MORTEM EXAMINATION

It is always best to prevent and detect problems before they happen. Without proper care, birds can die unexpectedly. The complete post mortem examination will often determine the cause of death and tell whether other birds are at risk. Unfortunately, even the most experienced veterinarian can’t determine the cause of death from doing the gross exam (having a look). Diagnosis requires that samples are tested in the laboratory. Whenever possible, refrigerate, but do not freeze the body . Contact us immediately, as the post mortem should be performed by your veterinarian or the lab within 24-36 hours for best results.

Diagnostic Testing of The Pet Bird

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LABORATORY TESTS ARE VERY IMPORTANT FOR YOUR PET OR AVIARY BIRD

Veterinarians who are experienced with bird care and treatment realize that it is very difficult to tell if a bird is really healthy from a physical examination alone. Birds are able to hide signs of illness until they are very ill. Unfortunately, this is when many bird owners realize that their pet is not well. It is so common for a veterinarian to examine a bird who “has always been healthy” and is now fighting for its life. Your veterinarian will probably agree with you that your bird is ill, but because signs of illness are non-specific, an exact diagnosis is difficult after observation of these “sick bird signs.”

The most expert avian veterinarian can only guess as to the exact cause of a bird illness without the information provided by lab tests. Guessing can risk the bird’s life and is a false economy. If you decide the treatment is not working and then request the recommended tests after therapy was started, the tests may not provide the right information and can be much harder for your veterinarian to interpret.

Laboratory tests and other diagnostics (x-ray, ultrasound, endoscopy) are valuable and essential for three main situations:

1. During a post-purchase examination or periodic well bird checkup.

2. Whenever a bird appears ill to determine the exact cause and the proper treatment.
3. During the recheck visit to determine if the treatment worked and the bird has actually returned to full health.

TAKING THE TEST SAMPLES

Most laboratory samples can be collected with little discomfort to your pet bird. Blood tests require very small quantities of blood. Other tests may require the use of a swab to sample the throat, the vent, or the stool. Your veterinarian can explain the need for anesthesia in some procedures such as skin biopsies.

BLOOD TESTING

The avian blood panel is always the most important test to determine your pet’s health status. The blood panel includes a complete blood count and a chemistry profile. The complete blood count can often determine if your bird is sick, how long it has been sick, and the type and severity of the illness. Blood tests can tell your veterinarian that your bird is healthy. The chemistry panel looks at the health status of your bird’s internal organs including the kidney, liver, heart, and pancreas.

GRAM STAIN

The gram stain is a rapid and useful test to assess the bacteria in your bird’s

system. Microscopic exam of the gram stain can give a general idea when the bacteria is normal and in proper amounts. The gram stain is particularly useful for avian gastric yeasts and spirochetosis in small birds

BACTERIAL CULTURE AND ANTIBIOTIC SENSITIVITY

The culture is much more sensitive than the gram stain. Even a small number of “bad” bacteria can be detected. Various chemical tests in the laboratory will determine the exact name (*E coli*, *Salmonella*, *Pseudomonas* etc.) and the best drugs to choose for successful therapy.

PARASITE IDENTIFICATION

Intestinal parasites, with a few exceptions, are uncommon in pet birds. *Giardia*, a common problem in cockatiels, lovebirds, and budgerigars, can be difficult to detect in the veterinary hospital. There are special laboratory techniques to assist your veterinarian in finding this parasite.

CHLAMYDIA TESTING

Chlamydophila (Chlamydia) psittaci is a virus-like bacteria which can live inside your pet bird’s body cells.