

# Bird Doctor Housecalls

*www.birddoctorhousecalls.com* 916-933-BIRD

Alan M. Fudge, DVM, Dip ABVP-Certified in Avian Practice  
Veterinary Care for Birds, Reptiles, Exotics, and Fish  
PO Box 5647 El Dorado Hills, CA 95762

## Keeping Your Bird Healthy

(rev. 1-03)

Birds are very hardy creatures and can remain longtime companions if a few steps are taken to maintain their health. These include four basic areas: **1) feeding a balanced diet, 2) proper sanitation, 3) learning to recognize possible signs of illness 4) behavior management, and 5) regular veterinary examinations**

Feeding a proper diet assures that your bird receives all nutrients necessary for resistance to disease, colorful feathering, and good spirits. In most parrots, the seed-and-fruit-only diet will result in a life span of just 5-10 years! Seed diets fed to birds are most often deficient in adequate **protein, vitamins, and minerals** and provide excessive fat calories. Insist that your feathered friend accept new foods. With healthy birds, you can safely remove the regular food items for up to 12 hours while offering new foods.

Bird owners can help prevent infectious disease in many ways. "Drafts" do not cause disease; however, bacteria can. The fear of drafts is so common, many birds live in poorly ventilated environments. Covering a cage is not necessary if a home is maintained at a constant temperature (65-78 degrees). Bacteria and fungi which can grow in the bird's environment (cage, water dish, food dish, perches, toys, cage litter) can multiply and cause illness in birds with reduced resistance. These items should be regularly washed, then disinfected.

Behavior management principles are important to start at an early age with your feathered friend. Prevention is more successful than dealing with a problem (chewing, biting, screaming etc) after the fact. The

The Bird Doctor can help you with information on how to make your bird a "Good Citizen" and protect it from harm.

### Disinfection in the Bird's Environment

*Prevent buildup of potentially harmful bacteria, which can cause serious infections. Infections may cause general sick bird signs, respiratory signs, or diarrhea.*

1. Replace perches 2-4 times a year. It is impossible to properly disinfect wooden perches, although these offer the best support for birds' feet.
2. **Wash and Disinfect** feed and water dishes daily. First, wash with dish soap or in the dishwasher. Second, disinfect with either chlorine bleach (1 cup per gallon strength) or disinfectant from our office. Soak with one of these for 30 minutes, then rinse thoroughly. It is best to have several sets of dishes, so that one set is ready to use every morning.
3. Cages should be periodically washed and disinfected. You may sponge or spray on the disinfectant, rinsing the cage off in the shower.
4. Avoid use of cage litter- use paper instead.

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Learn to recognize signs of illness in your bird. Birds naturally try to mask signs of illness to look less appealing to predators. Small changes in appearance or behavior can be very important. A veterinary examination should be scheduled at the onset of any of the following:

### Signs of Illness in the Pet Bird

Fluffing or sleeping in daytime    Poor feathering  
Decreases in talking or singing    Body swellings  
Discharges from the nose or eyes  
Sneezing or wheezing    Lack of new feather  
Changes in feather color    Rapidly growing beaks  
Changes in quantity or quality of droppings  
(the white part should always stay white).

The **Bird Doctor** is one of about 70 veterinary practices in the U.S. with Board-Certified Avian Veterinary Specialists. Established in 1980, we also provide diagnostic laboratory services to over 400 veterinary clinics (as *California Avian Laboratory*) in the U.S.

Housecalls by Appointment- parts of Sacramento, Placer and El Dorado Counties (916) 933-BIRD

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## Feeding Your Pet Bird For Health

(rev 1-03)

**Strategy for all Birds:** Increase quality protein, vitamins, minerals, and reduce fat. People food should be limited because birds will choose the wrong things (mostly fats and starches)

**Foods in this column 10-20% of calories fed (and should be only tidbits/side dishes):**

**Seeds and Nuts:** Should make up less than 20% of the larger parrot (conure and other large species) diet. Should make up less than 20% of the budgie, cockatiel, or lovebird diet. Seeds contain excessive fat and are deficient in many nutrients.

**Larger parrots:** sunflower, safflower, peanut, millet, oats, canary, walnut, pecan, brazil, almond (this nut is low-fat and high in calcium!)

**Smaller parrots:** sunflower, safflower, millets, canary, rapeseed, niger (1-2 tsp/wk maximum)

**Cereal Grains and Starches:** These are well-liked but are only empty calories and should be limited: wheat, rice, barley, corn, oats, crackers, bread, breakfast cereail, pasta, banana, and potato

**Nutritional Produce:** broccoli, Brussel's sprouts, cabbage, cauliflower; kale, collards, carrots, yams, sweet potatoes, winter squash, peas, parsley, peppers (especially the seeds), lima beans, and string beans, mango, papaya

**Quality Protein:** Dairy products such as cheese, cottage cheese, yogurt; soy products, and eggs (boiled or scrambled). The downside of animal proteins are the fat content of these foods, so they should be fed sparingly.

The book: *Birds For Dummies* provides the most up to date information on care, feeding, handling, and behavior management for your cherished avian pet!

**Formulated diets should make up 80-90+% of your bird's caloric intake:**

**Formulated Diets (pellets and extruded products):** These products attempt to offer a complete diet when fed alone. We strongly recommend that one of these diets are fed primarily: **Harrison's(HBD)**, Roudybush, Zupreem, Pretty Bird, Exact, or CeeDee (for canaries). We will provide conversion tips on your invoice.

**Caution:** some brands fed exclusively (100% of calories) to some species or individuals may not perform properly. Increased urine output can be a sign of kidney problems.

**Treats:** Birds enjoy these foods, although they **do not provide any nutritional benefits** (American fruits): apples, grapes, peaches, pears; celery, Millet spray, seed sticks, seed bells (not nutritious)

**Vitamins and Minerals:** These are absolutely essential for long term health Offer a cuttlebone to small birds. Vitamin-mineral powders placed on seed do not get into the bird. "Vitamin-enriched" seed typically fails to deliver the nutrients to the bird. When mixed well into soft foods, vitamins may work. **We don't recommend vitamins if formulated diet fed at 80-90% of the total calories**

**Grit(Gravel):** We do not consider this product to be necessary in the cage bird diet. They **do not need** grit/gravel to aid digestion. In fact, occasionally birds will get blockages from eating too much.

The **Bird Doctor** recommends veterinary examinations twice a year to assure the health status of your pet bird. Birds hide signs of illness; many of the cases seen by our clinic involve very ill birds in critical condition due to lack of preventative care. We also recommend that parrots be microchipped for identification and recovery purposes. To schedule an appointment, please call us at **(916) 933-BIRD (933-2473)**