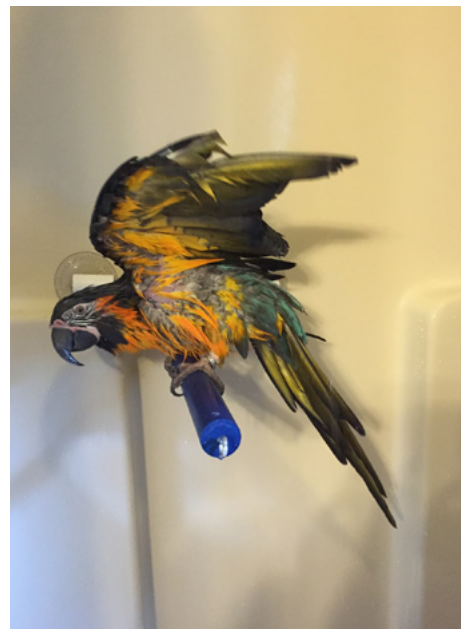


HOW TO INTRODUCE BATHING TO YOUR BIRD

Introduction

Bathing is an essential activity for your bird to help keep their feathers in top condition, hydrate the skin, and provide an enjoyable and enriching experience. While preening helps to distribute oils and powder down over the feathers, bathing helps to remove dirt and excess powder down. A bird without access to bathing opportunities may develop dry flaky skin, especially on the feet, which may contribute to feather-destructive behaviors.



Ways to Offer Bathing Opportunities

Not every bird enjoys bathing the same way. Some birds prefer a shallow bowl that mimics a puddle while others enjoy a full shower simulating rainfall. If your bird has never bathed before, they may be initially wary of the experience. Go slow and gauge your bird's reaction to best ensure they are enjoying the experience. A bird that is comfortable with a bath will often fluff its feathers, open its wings, and embrace the water! Here are a few different ways you can offer bathing opportunities for your bird:

- Offer a shallow saucer or tray filled 1-2 inches with water. It can be helpful to place your hands or fingertips in the water to entice them to join.
- Gently spritz a fine mist with a handheld spray bottle upwards to allow the water to fall like raindrops, rather than spraying the bird directly.
- Bring your bird into the shower with you and allow them to slowly become accustomed to the indirect spray. A suction cup perch attached to the shower wall can also be a helpful aid. Note: Do not leave unattended.
- Clip a large edible piece of vegetation such as a kale leaf inside their cage that has been rinsed with water and allow it to drip onto your bird.
- Pay attention to your bird's normal activities. Do they always bathe themselves when it is raining, or when you are running the vacuum? You may be able to use this to your advantage and place them near your preferred bathing receptacle or have someone run the vacuum while you spritz them.



Visit aav.org or find us on Facebook at facebook.com/aavonline

HOW TO INTRODUCE BATHING TO YOUR BIRD

How Frequently Should My Bird Be Bathed?

Bathing frequency depends on the individual bird and its natural habitat. In general, parrots should be given the opportunity to bathe a few times per week. Parrots originating from rainforest environments (Amazons, macaws, conures) require more frequent bathing (daily) than parrots from drier climates (Old World species such as grey parrots, cockatoos, cockatiels, budgerigars). In some cases, an increase in bathing frequency can trigger unwanted reproductive-driven hormonal behaviors. This may need to be adjusted on an individual basis. Consult with your avian veterinarian if you have questions or concerns about your bird.

Do I Need to Dry My Bird?

Generally, no, it is not necessary to dry your bird off. They will shake off any excess water and will immediately get to work on preening themselves. However, some birds may appreciate being gently patted dry with a towel. Bathing should be offered in the morning or at minimum several hours before bed to allow for adequate dry-off time.

Other Considerations

Avoid keeping wet birds in rooms that are cold or drafty. Remember, heating elements such as hair dryers (which can cause burns) and room heaters, especially when new, may have a polytetrafluoroethylene (e.g., Teflon™) coating which can be toxic to your bird. Some veterinarians advocate the use of radiant heating panels, ceramic heat bulbs, or other supplemental heating elements to be used in cooler areas – make sure to keep all wires and electrical elements safe from curious beaks, measure the temperatures your bird is exposed to with a temperature gun or temperature probe, and that you bird has adequate room choose its own preferred temperature zone during the drying process. Don't be alarmed if your bird's feathers appear a different color when wet. For most species of birds this is a normal alteration in the refraction of light and should return to normal once they are dry. If your bird has any kind of illness, please consult with your avian veterinarian before bathing them.

What If My Bird Fears Bathing?

Some birds are fearful of new experiences or may have had a negative experience with certain bathing methods (spray bottles). Go slow and do not force bathing if they exhibit signs of fear or stress such as running, flying away, flattening of the feathers, or vocalizing. If your bird has a flock mate, they may learn to accept bathing by watching conspecifics enjoy the process. Some birds choose to bathe in their water bowls – in this case, offer multiple water bowls and clean them as they become dirty. It is important to never use a spray bottle as a form of punishment as this may incite a negative association with bathing. If a bird is already fearful of bathing, you may need to work on positive reinforcement exercises to overcome this phobia or offer a different type of bathing opportunity. While beyond the scope of this handout, this could be as simple as moving the bottle closer into the enclosure and offering treats when it is present. It is important to stop any training prior to signs of stress. Always allow your bird the opportunity to end the training session on a good note.



HOW TO INTRODUCE BATHING TO YOUR BIRD



Safety

With all the benefits of bathing, it is important to keep your bird's health and safety in mind. It is important to never place a bird in a covered container or in a container with water deeper than they can stand in. Only offer clean, fresh, lukewarm water for bathing. Be sure to change the water if it becomes dirty. Do not add any soaps, detergent, or other additives as these can destroy feather waterproofing abilities or pose a toxic risk if ingested. Do not bathe your bird if it is cold, or if they are sick.

Remember to be patient and persistent in helping your bird to begin reap the rewards and enjoyment of this natural and healthful activity!

References

Harrison, G. J., & Lightfoot, T. (2006). Clinical avian medicine (Vol. 1). Spix Pub.

Special Thanks: Handout written by Grace Gallentine, DVM. Photos provided by Salina Locke, DVM, DABVP (Avian Practice), Cert AqV, and Grace Gallentine, DVM.

AAV: Setting a Standard in Avian Care Since 1980

Avian medicine is a distinct and very specialized field that requires extensive training, advanced skills, and facilities specifically designed and equipped to treat and hospitalize birds. The Association of Avian Veterinarians was established to provide veterinarians with this special education, and to keep them up to date with the latest information on bird health. The AAV holds an annual conference on avian medicine and publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery*. AAV also makes annual contributions toward avian conservation and sponsors studies advancing the understanding of avian medicine.

For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis*
- Veterinary Care for Your Pet Bird*
- Basic Care for Companion Birds*
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Caring for Backyard Chickens
- Digital Scales
- Feather Loss
- Foraging for Parrots*
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Managing Chronic Egg-laying in Your Pet Bird
- Signs of Illness in Companion Birds*
- Ultraviolet Lighting for Companion Birds
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Veterinarian?*
- Zoonotic Diseases in Backyard Poultry*



Scan to view these handouts and more on AAV's Bird Owner Resources page!

*Available in multiple languages. All others are available in English only at this time.

Online Resources

Follow AAV on Facebook (www.facebook.com/aavonline) for great tips and the latest news for pet bird owners. You can also find us on Twitter (@aavonline) and YouTube!

Our website, www.aav.org, offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!



Visit aav.org or find us on Facebook at facebook.com/aavonline

© 2024 | Association of Avian Veterinarians
1802 Antioch Church Road, Watkinsville, GA 30677