

Feather Destructive Behavior

Feather destructive behavior represents a range of actions from excessive preening to feather plucking or feather picking to self-mutilation. The cause of feather destructive behavior is not really understood, but is often believed to be caused by multiple problems that may be psychological and/or medical. Picking may also begin as a medical problem and then persist as a habit.

A wide range of medical problems have been linked to feather picking including:

- Nutritional deficiencies
- Endoparasitism
- Systemic disease including liver disease
- Allergies may be suspected, but are difficult to confirm in avian patients
- Ectoparasites such as mites are a rare cause of feather picking
- Although inflammation of the feather follicles (folliculitis) and skin (dermatitis) is a frequent finding, it is usually secondary to the feather destructive behavior

Behavioral or psychological causes of feather picking may include:

- Boredom or lack of stimulation
- Stress: Stress can mean very different things for different birds. Overstimulation in the form of noise and activity may initiate plucking in a nervous bird, while a sedate, quiet environment may be stressful for another bird.
- Separation anxiety
- Sexual frustration

Feather destructive behavior may also be exacerbated by environmental factors such as low humidity or lack of exposure to natural sunlight.

Your veterinarian will want to

...obtain detailed information about your bird's behavior and its home life

...perform a medical diagnostic work-up to rule out medical causes of feather picking

References

Blanchard S. Teaching basic skills. *Companion Parrot Handbook*. PBIC, Inc.; Alameda, CA., 1999.

Lightfoot T, Nacewicz CL. Psittacine behavior. In: Bays TB, Lightfoot T, Mayer J (eds). *Exotic Pet Behavior*. Saunders; St. Louis, Missouri, 2006. Pp. 81-87.

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