The Importance of Annual Wellness Exams for Birds

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

We all know that preventing disease or catching it in its early stages is far better than treating it once it has had time to progress to a more severe stage. Preventive health care on a regular basis will help you do just that, and save you and your pet needless suffering and a larger financial burden. Just as annual physical exams are recommended for humans, they are recommended for our pets as well.

Even our cars get regular tune-ups!

Each bird should be examined and their husbandry and diet reviewed by a veterinarian at least once a year. Young and geriatric birds, and those showing signs of disease often need more frequent exams.

History

During the annual physical exam you should review these aspects of your bird's husbandry, diet, and health with your veterinarian:

- How long you've owned the bird
- Where you purchased the bird
- What other animals you have in your household; if they are cagemates; and what is their health status
- Housing, including cage size and type, type of substrate on the bottom of the cage, types of perches, and cage accessories
- If and how often the bird leaves the cage, and if the bird goes outside
- Cage hygiene - frequency of cleaning and cleaning supplies used
- Environmental temperature
- Light sources and frequency of bulb changes
- Relative humidity of the cage, and water/humidity sources
- Typical diet including brand names and where the food is purchased; what and how much is offered and what and how much is eaten; feeding frequency
- Description of the bird's droppings - color, amount, and consistency(bring cage papers with you)
- Use of medications - type, brand name, and dose
- Use of nutritional supplements (vitamins, minerals, grit) - type, brand name, and amount
- Use of pesticides, grooming products, or any other treatments - type, brand name, and dose
- Exposure to other birds (at shows, boarding, traveling)
- Exposure to potential toxins (cleaning supplies, second hand smoke, heavy metals, pesticides)
- Sex of the bird and reproductive history
- Any behavioral changes
- Molting history
- Any medical problems noted (discharges, changes in droppings, history of ingesting foreign objects, injuries, lumps or bumps, etc.)

Do not be surprised if your veterinarian spends more time talking with you than he/she does examining your bird. Most diseases in birds are related to husbandry and nutritional problems, so it is vital that these be reviewed with you carefully. During your discussions, be sure to ask any questions you may have regarding your bird's health and care. Now is the time to learn from your veterinarian's expertise.

Veterinary examination and testing

Usually the veterinary examination will include:

- Recording of the weight of the bird
- Observation of the bird's posture, movement, and attitude
- Observation of the bird's droppings
- Physical examination including feathers and skin, eyes, nares, beak, oral cavity, ears, limbs, feet, wings, bones, vent, and tail
- Palpation of the breast muscles, abdomen, and cloaca
- Ausculation of the heart, air sacs, and lungs and observation of breathing
- Complete blood count (CBC) and blood chemistry profile
- In addition, a beak, wing, and nail trim may be performed, if needed

Depending upon the origin, age, species, and general condition of the bird, as well as previous testing history, the following tests may also be recommended:

- Psittacosis (parrot fever)
- Psittacine beak and feather disease
- Polyomavirus
- Gram stain, floatation and direct smear of the droppings

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- Culture and sensitivity of the cloacal (fecal) and choanal (throat) areas
- Radiographs (x-rays)
- Plasma protein electrophoresis (EPH)

Vaccines

Vaccines for polyomavirus and Pacheco's disease may be administered to young birds or to birds in aviaries where the diseases may occur. Consult your veterinarian to determine if these vaccinations are appropriate for your bird.

Summary

By providing your veterinarian with as much information as possible, and having your bird examined regularly, you can help your bird remain in top condition, healthy, and happy. Remember, prevention is key!

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