

CHRONIC EGG LAYING IN BIRDS

Continuous egg laying in pet birds can be a significant problem leading to life threatening conditions such as depletion of calcium, egg binding (eggs stuck in the reproductive tract) and behavioural problems such as aggression. The most common birds involved are cockatiels and budgerigars but any species can get into a chronic cycle of egg laying.

The trigger for this behaviour is the increasing light exposure (natural or otherwise) which the bird perceives as the arrival of spring. This causes an increase in the reproductive hormones natural during the breeding season – triggering egg production. Birds will lay eggs every 48 hours until a full clutch is reached (the number of eggs in a clutch varies from species to species). If left alone many birds will go broody and sit on the eggs. This should be encouraged temporarily as it keeps them occupied and stops them laying eggs for another month.

IS IT A PROBLEM?

- Continuous laying is a problem as these birds can quickly deplete their calcium reserves, especially if on a deficient seed based diet. This can lead to deficiency causing egg binding, seizing or fractures. This is an emergency and is fatal if left.

HOW TO DEAL WITH PERSISTENT LAYERS

- **Provide a UV-b light** - Birds require UV light for multiple reasons one of the most important of which is to regulate their calcium and vitamin D levels. This must be provided with a special bird UV lamp because glass windows do not allow the UV light from the sun into the house. These can be bought online or in specialist pet stores and veterinary clinics. A good review of bird lighting can be found on the Arcadia website www.arcadia-bird.com/uv-lighting/. A bird lamp should be fitted above the cage to reflect light downwards as a bright light hitting the side of the bird can cause eye irritation.
- **Improve the diet** - Seed is very deficient in vitamins and minerals such as calcium, vitamin D and vitamin A. Birds should be gradually changed over to a complete pelleted diet, such as Harrisons. This should comprise approximately 80% of the diet, with the remainder made up of fresh vegetables, fruit (for larger parrot species) and a very small number of high quality nuts and seeds as treats/training rewards. Dietary change may be recommended after the bird has finished laying its current clutch and a dietary supplement may be recommended during this time.
- **Reduce day length** - Reducing the day length can make the bird think it is winter and reduce the reproductive drive then it may stop the bird producing eggs. This can be achieved by covering the cage for 12 – 14 hours a day with a cover that will prevent any light getting through. Modifying any behavioural aspects, such as excessive pair bonding can also help.
- **Disrupt the routine** – Moving the cage to a new location or taking out the nesting materials can disrupt the laying cycle and discourage further egg production.
- **Medical and surgical Interventions** - Medical or surgical therapy can be used to reduce egg laying in combination with these other interventions. Medical therapy consists of a wide variety of drugs designed to reduce the hormone output from the bird's ovary. This has traditionally been either as drops administered daily or by injection. More recently an implant has become available which can last for several months and help control the problem. Alternatively surgical therapy may be recommended to remove the oviduct and prevent egg laying.