

FEATHER DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOR IN BIRDS

Feather destructive behavior, or “plucking”, is a behavior in birds in which repetitive, predictable plucking of feathers occurs with no apparent function. It is notably different from normal preening behavior, and may result in large featherless patches of skin and even traumatized tissue. Common sites for feather plucking include the chest, legs, and under the wings.



COMMON CAUSES

There are numerous potential causes of feather destructive behavior. The most common causes are listed below:

- Infectious disease (bacterial, viral, fungal, or parasitic)
- Malnutrition and poor diet
- Other disease or injury causing pain and stress
- Environmental stressors (noises, odors, other pets, houseguests, or recent travel)
- Lack of enrichment in the form of interactive toys and socialization
- Lack of adequate sleep

Because an underlying illness or an environmental stressor is often the cause of plucking, it is critical to provide a thorough history to your veterinarian and to perform a minimum database of diagnostic tests.

WHAT TO EXPECT

We require a thorough history when you bring in your pet bird for a feather plucking consultation. We will be sending you a history form to fill out and email back to us in advance of your scheduled appointment. This will provide critical information to guide our physical examination and choice of diagnostic tests.

Your consultation with the veterinarian usually takes around one hour. We begin by reviewing the history in detail. Then, we conduct a thorough physical examination to determine the extent of plucking and to look for any other signs of illness or injury. A minimum database of diagnostic tests will be performed. This includes testing the feces for parasites and abnormal bacterial growth, a complete blood count to look for evidence of infection and inflammation, and blood chemistries to evaluate organ function.

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

The goal of the history, examination, and diagnostic testing is to pinpoint a medical or environmental cause of feather destructive behavior. Once identified, any medical conditions may be treated appropriately. The environment can be modified if needed, and additional enrichment and socialization can be prioritized. In some cases in which an underlying cause is not identified, a consultation with a veterinary behaviorist will be advised. Some patients may require behavioral modification or psychoactive drugs.