

# Evaluating Neglect, Abuse, Suffering, and Illness in Parrots and Other Captive Exotic Birds

Parrots and other exotic birds often suffer in ways not readily recognized as mistreatment or neglect. The following signs – both visible and not so visible – may indicate that the physical condition of the bird and the surrounding environment warrant further investigation or intervention.

*Note: Items covered in this evaluation sheet do not reflect legal requirements.*

## THE ENVIRONMENT



► Indoor breeding facility - birds lack fresh air, sunlight or freedom of movement.



► Overcrowding in pet shop



► Filthy cage, contaminated water, and lack of food

### Conspicuous Signs

- Housing too small to allow birds to move freely about, to hop, jump or fully extend their wings in all directions
- Overcrowding; birds unable to roost without physical contact or harassment from other birds
- Inappropriately sized perches, or no perches at all
- Perches, cage bars, and grates encrusted with feces, mold, and debris
- Rotting food or lack of food appropriate to the species
- Contaminated water, or no water at all
- Unsanitary cages; excessive moisture or dust; presence of insects, including maggots, flies, or roaches
- Exposure to toxic fumes, chemicals, or strong odors, or to lead or other hazardous materials
- Exposure to extreme temperatures, (below 60° F or above 85° F), rain or drafts; lack of shade from direct sunlight
- Lack of ventilation
- Live or dead rodents in or around cages
- Dead birds (these should be removed for necropsy)
- Excessively bright lighting; insufficient natural or artificial light

### Less Conspicuous Signs

- Excessive confinement
  - Kept in cage 24/7
  - No access to out-of-cage exercise
  - Barren cage
  - No access to free flight in a safe area
- Lack of socialization
  - Isolated from like-species companionship
  - Kept alone without human contact

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## THE BIRD

### Signs of Discomfort, Stress, or Fear

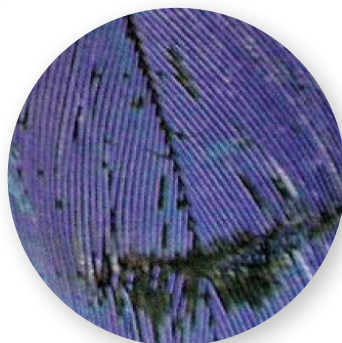
- Repetitive, functionless behaviors: pacing, biting on cage bars, head bobbing, constant rocking back and forth, or walking in circles
- Excessive vocalization: screaming; repetitive chirps or alarm calls
- Unbroken silence
- Fear behaviors: cowering, crouching, trembling or lunging; thrashing against cage bars
- Apathy or excessive sleeping; lack of motion
- Attempts to retreat when approached by a casual observer
- Aggression towards people or other birds
- Hyperactivity and anxiety; hissing, panting; fanned tail, wings held away from body, or raised head feathers
- Injury, feather destruction, or self-mutilation



Overgrown  
nails and beaks



Extensive feather loss,  
unhealed wounds,  
eye damage – all signs  
of long-term neglect



Darkened bars on feathers,  
often a sign of malnutrition  
or prolonged stress

## Signs of Neglect

**Overgrown  
beaks or nails**

**Ragged, soiled,  
or missing feathers**

**Dull or matted plumage;  
darkened “bars” on feathers**

**Abrasions, calluses,  
ulcerations; broken  
or missing toenails;  
swollen joints**

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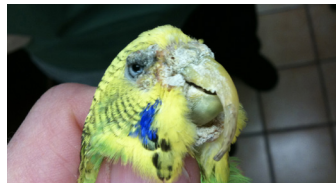
Birds experiencing any of the following conditions, or any combination of these symptoms, require immediate medical attention.



## Signs of Illness or Injury

*Use this list to check off and keep track of any conditions the bird may have.*

- ☐ Respiratory distress: difficulty breathing, gasping, or excessive wheezing or sneezing; prolonged open-mouth breathing with tail flicks accompanying each breath
- ☐ Discharge, redness, or inflammation around nasal area, eyes, or mouth
- ☐ Protrusions or wet or soiled feathers around bird's bottom
- ☐ Injuries: open wounds, sores; animal bites
- ☐ Excessive scratching, irritated red skin, scaly lesions, or missing feather patches (possible sign of lice or mites)
- ☐ Lethargy; extreme physical weakness
- ☐ Fluffed-up feathers; shivering
- ☐ Vomiting, or gagging to expel
- ☐ Bleeding, skin lacerations, swelling, or masses
- ☐ Lameness or dragging a wing or a leg
- ☐ Inability to perch or walk
- ☐ Bloody, bright green, or extremely watery or formless feces; yellow, rusty brown, tarry black, or malodorous
- ☐ Protruding bones
- ☐ Lying prone at the bottom of cage or enclosure; grasping on cage bars to maintain balance
- ☐ Distended or bloated abdomen



► *Knemidocoptes - scaly face and leg mites*



► *Paresis from heavy metal poisoning*



► *Self-mutilating Cockatoo – immediate medical attention required*



► *Swollen nasal cavity, a sign of sinus infection*

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