



Medical Center for Birds

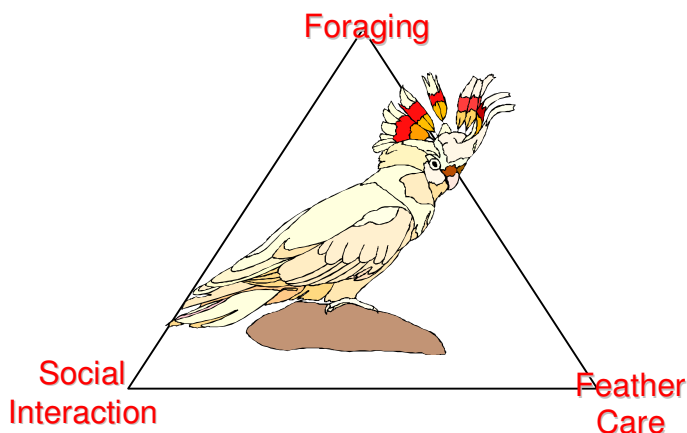
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Behavioral – Origin Feather Picking

Once it has been determined that there is not an obvious organic problem requiring address, the REAL job of behavioral modification and enhancement begins. In general, the more acute the problem, the better the odds of success. The parrot that has been pulling its feathers for ten years is not a good candidate, prognostically, to return to normal plumage. The real focus, in spite of the apparent and heartbreaking feather damage, needs to be on the behavior and the mind of the bird, NOT the plumage.



- ☐ Take the time to assure that perceived stability and security are present in this bird's lifestyle at home. Fear from interacting with humans and fear of falling due to inadequate perching materials or an inappropriate wing trim can lead to displacement feather damaging behaviors. Seek to rule out and/or eliminate these types of factors should they be present.
- ☐ Try to identify triggering events or sequences of events that have a role in the manifestation of feather damaging behavior. A bird that only damages its feathers when you are present, when you are absent, or when other environmental changes occur is giving us clues that should be investigated. Should there be identifiable triggers, then the real work can start: Why do these events cause such a displacement stress behavior? What can be done to teach the bird to accept some of these things? Should this bird learn to accept all of those triggering environmental events?
- ☐ Fortify basic training. Deficits in the basics make it challenging to effectively enrich and guide more normal behaviors.
- ☐ Enhance "normal" feather care through gentle misting, and also by providing other items that can be groomed in addition to your bird's feathers.
- ☐ Enrich and enhance social interaction – in a proper manner. Correct social interaction that is engaging, stimulating, and changing is essential for mental health and well-being.
- ☐ Enrich and enhance foraging activities. Some of these activities can be combined with others in your presence, and others should be encouraged in your absence. TEACH the bird to do these things. Assume nothing beyond the likelihood that your bird is unfamiliar or even afraid of these new things!
- ☐ If there is a reproductively-pair bonded interaction present between one person and the bird, work to alter this towards a more normal flock and social interaction. For every pair bond enrichment behavior you are working to decrease, there should be several new interactive behaviors that the bird is being taught to do that can fill the void. Leave no behavioral voids by removing activities or interaction without effective replacement with others or enhancement of existing behaviors!
- ☐ Remember to keep your focus on the mind and lifestyle of your pet bird – not the feathers. They are merely a distraction from what you really are working on! A changing, expanding and improving mind, augmented behavioral interactions with and without you present, is the goal. A decrease in feather damaging behavior hopefully the result.
- ☐ Work most aggressively to balance the lifestyle of your bird by focusing on social interaction and foraging behaviors, predominately.
- ☐ Followup. Regular communication and followup evaluations are essential. Behavior does not usually change perfectly after one single action plan is set. Things change, and we need to change with them if we are to optimize our probability of success.