



## Keeping Your Parrot Healthy: Health Checks

### Introduction

Pet owners are used to taking their dogs and cats to the veterinarian for an annual check-up. Regular testing for birds is even more important, because symptoms of disease in birds can be much more subtle. Health checks are recommended for newly purchased birds (this will safeguard the existing birds in the household, as well as ensure the new arrival is free of disease), and at least annually for all other psittacine birds. Newly purchased birds should undergo a period of quarantine before being introduced to the resident birds.

### Consultation

Your bird's health consultation starts with a behavioural check-over, assessing and discussing any problems and long-term expectations. An ongoing behavioural plan is developed. The consultation then continues with a physical examination of your bird, a weight check and a nail trim. The droppings are examined, and the bird is wormed (if required). Wing trimming is also discussed (and performed if indicated). It is recommended to do some blood testing – the actual level of testing is individually assessed and discussed during the examination.

### Faecal Examination

All consultations involve an examination of the droppings. The droppings are checked in two ways: a wet smear, which reveals worm eggs and flagellates and gives an idea of the digestive efficiency; and a gram stain, which assesses the bacterial population numbers and distribution.

If there are indications for further testing, we will discuss those at the time of consultation. Additional diagnostic tests are described below:

### Blood Testing

Haematology is the examination of the red and white cells present in a bird's blood. Haematological testing will reveal anaemia, early viral and bacterial infections, and chronic diseases; often before the bird itself looks sick. Additionally, regular testing will establish a 'baseline' for your bird, against which any future changes can be compared.

Biochemical testing is done if any abnormalities are detected in the haematological or physical examination. Biochemical testing assesses the function of, and any damage to, internal organs including the liver, kidneys and pancreas.

### Psittacosis Testing

Some form of psittacosis testing is strongly advised for all new parrot examinations. The type of testing will vary with the individual circumstance, but usually involves antibody titres, PCR testing of blood, or a combination of the two. This testing is often repeated at the second annual health check, to ensure there have been no changes in infection state. Subsequently, this test is only repeated if the bird has been exposed to potential infection, or requires preventative testing for legal reasons.

### Circovirus (Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease)

This is a highly infectious viral disease of parrots, with different species manifesting different types of disease. Clinical disease in cockatoos is usually progressive and fatal, and therefore it is highly recommended to test all young cockatoos. Lorikeets tend to have more subtle signs of circoviral infection, and can act as a source of infection for other birds. Testing of lorikeets is often advisable. Testing is also recommended for birds with suspicious clinical signs and for households with existing birds who may be at risk.

### Other Viral Testing

Other viral testing is done on an individual basis, after discussing with the owner the varying quarantine needs of the household, and the likelihood of disease.

### Sex Determination

The sex of your bird can be determined by a specific DNA blood test, or via a surgical procedure involving an anesthetic to look at the reproductive organs inside the bird. We can discuss the most appropriate method with you during the consultation.

### Feeding Your Bird

For most parrots, we recommend that pellets be 80% of the total diet, with the remainder being vegetables, fruits and a small amount of nuts and seeds. Cockatiels should be fed no more than 60% pelleted diet. Please see our Feeding handout discussing ways to convert your bird onto a pelleted diet.

Recommended vegetables include corn, capsicum, zucchini, broccoli, squash, tomatoes, sweet potato, pumpkin, carrot, beans, peas, other pulses. Vegetables should make up approximately 10-15% of the diet. AVOID celery, iceberg lettuce, excessively watery fruits (these are not toxic, but are too dilute to be truly nutritious).

Recommended fruits include kiwi, strawberries, blueberries, grapes, small amounts of apple, melons and stone fruits (but remove the stones first). Fruits should make up no more than 5% of the diet.

**NEVER FEED AVOCADO, ONION, RHUBARB OR GARLIC (THESE CAN ALL BE TOXIC).**

