



BRISBANE BIRD & EXOTICS VETERINARY SERVICE

Quality Care in Sickness and in Health



Consultation Hours:

Monday to Friday 9.00am to 12.00pm
3.00pm to 6.00pm
Saturday 9.00am to 12.00pm

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Welcome to the very first Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service newsletter! In this edition, we welcome our new veterinary nurse, Nikki, who hails from New Zealand and reintroduce our first veterinary nurse Alana. We discuss household hazards for pet birds, and we also have a colouring competition for the kids!

Welcome to Nikki, our second full time veterinary nurse! Nikki is a Certificate IV qualified veterinary nurse, who has come all the way from New Zealand to work with us. She leaves Auckland's only Avian and Exotics practice, and we are very lucky to have her on board.

A Few Words from our New Nurse

Well I survived the big move from NZ in January and have settled (I think so at least!), quite well into my new role here as veterinary nurse. Most of my work is fairly similar to what I was doing previously however the snakes will take a little getting used to as I've never dealt with them before. There are no snakes at all in New Zealand! My horse is arriving from NZ middle of March which I'm very excited about – I've been suffering from 'horse withdrawal' for the last 4 weeks! I've found myself a lovely pony club at Mount Gravatt and can't wait to start exercising 'Webster' there.



I've also adopted a new pet, a stray cockatiel from the clinic which was very unwell when it was brought into us. After nursing him back to health, 'Toby' and I had made friends and he now enjoys watching TV with me in the afternoons!



And now a word from somebody that the majority of our clients have already met —our very first nurse, Alana!

Hi, my name is Alana. I have been working at Bris-

bane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service for almost one year now, and am thoroughly enjoying working with such a variety of animals. I am currently studying Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing, and will be finished by the end of this year. I have also completed a Bachelor of Science in Zoology at the University of Queensland.

At the end of the day, I go home to my own zoo! I have 3 hand-raised Rainbow Lorikeets—Skittles, Raz and Taz—as well as Buddy, a 9 year old British budgerigar and Rascal the Indian Ringneck. Rascal is a recent addition to the family. She was brought into the clinic as a stray, and was extremely weak, underweight and anaemic. After much needed TLC, she gradually improved, and I became quickly attached. Despite several warnings from the vet that her gentle nature would not be long-lived once she felt better, she has integrated well into my menagerie. I am grateful to have been blessed with such a wonderful opportunity to work with animals, and hope to be a veterinary nurse for many years to come. Be sure to say hi if you see me around the clinic!





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Colouring Competition

Colour in the picture below, and send it back to us and you could win some great prizes!

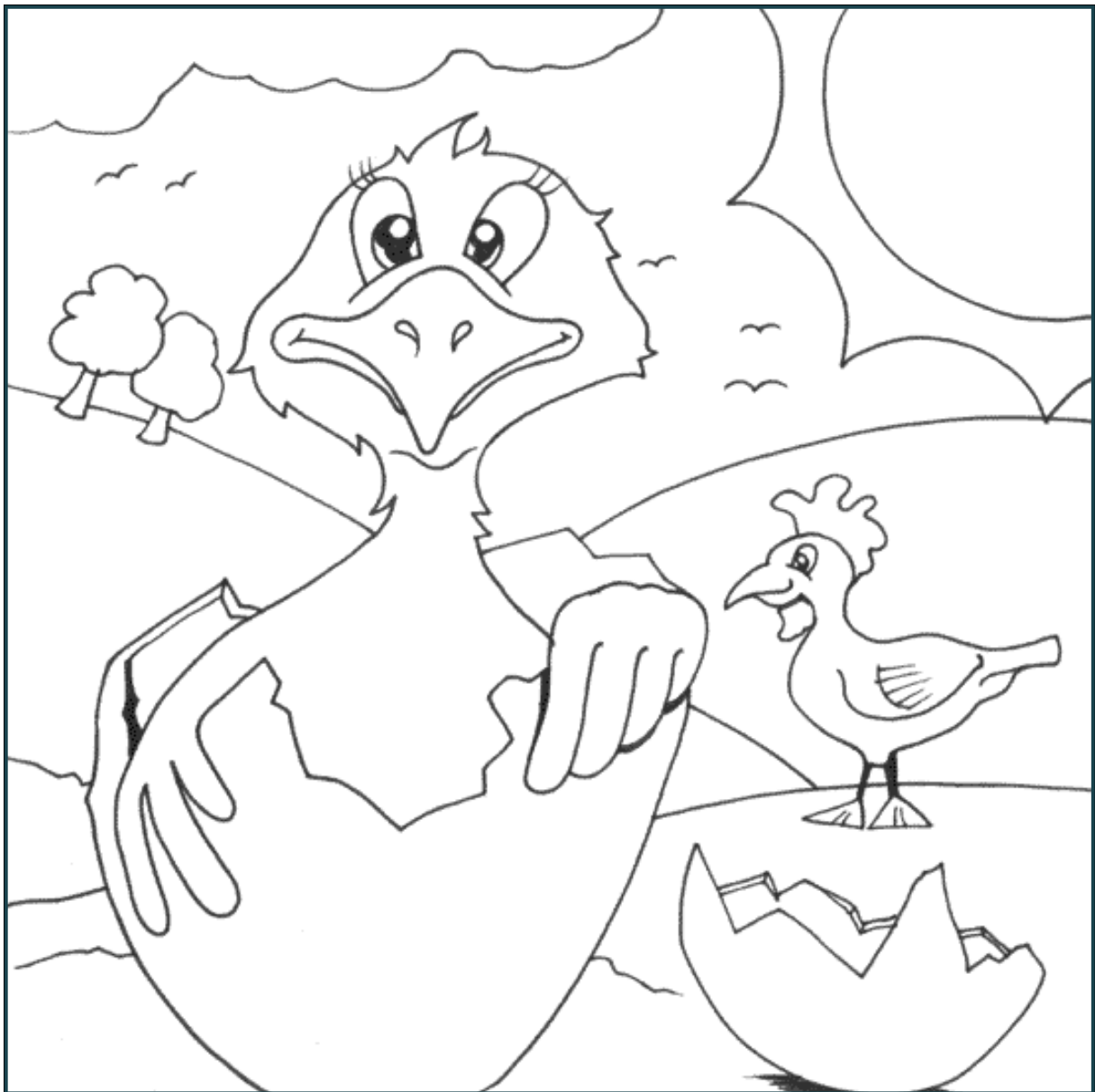
Be sure to fill in the following information:

NAME:

AGE:

PHONE NUMBER:

We will display the winning and highly commended pictures on our notice board at work. Good luck!



Keeping Your Bird Safe

We have had a number of birds presented for mishaps recently, and thought that a reminder about safe bird ownership would be timely.

Many birds are out of their cages, interacting with the family, which is marvellous. Just remember that an accidental bite from the family dog or an attack by the cat can cause a massive amount of damage to a bird. Ceiling fans are also fairly common causes of trauma, especially in summer. Trauma resulting from free flight is one reason that people wing trim their birds. The benefits of free flight include keeping fit, avoiding obesity and mental development (coordination, physical dexterity and decision making). Wing trimming is a large and controversial topic, and will be covered in future newsletters.

Birds should be put away when owners are cooking in the kitchen. Frying pans, gas cook tops and fumes are all potential areas of concern. Don't forget that burnt Teflon is EXTREMELY toxic to birds.



Feeding a range of fresh food to your bird is desirable. Do not forget that avocado, onion, garlic and rhubarb leaves are all poisonous.

While out of the cage, birds can chew at a number of common household items that can be extremely dangerous to birds.

We have reproduced our Heavy Metal Poisoning handout

on page 4 of this newsletter. To summarise; lead, zinc, copper, pewter and other heavy metals are extremely toxic when swallowed by birds. Owners should ensure that their pets cannot access heavy metals.

Other danger items are electrical cords, rat and cockroach baits, air fresheners and automatic insecticide and air freshener dispensers. While not seen in large numbers, fibre obstructions in the stomach are becoming more common.

Owners should ensure that their birds do not swallow fibres from rope toys, rope perches, happy huts or snuggle buddies. If a bird is a 'chewer', then less risky toys can be made from wood, cardboard and paper. If a bird is not a 'chewer', then you should still monitor fibre toys closely. Remove items at the first sign of wear. Some toy attachments—both metal and fibre—can occasionally get caught around toes or beaks. Again, the owner should be vigilant in ensuring that the items placed inside the cage do not pose a risk.

Leg rings can also get caught on cage furniture, causing soft tissue damage or fractures. Also, dead skin can sometimes build up inside a leg ring, causing constriction in the blood supply of the foot. Leg rings should be observed daily, and the ring removed if any restriction in movement is noted. A safer form of permanent identification is a microchip.

Birds kept outside are occasionally attacked. Often, the predator cannot be identified, but likely nocturnal culprits are rats and marauding cats. Butcher birds often attack small birds during the day. Keeping caged birds inside at night, or keeping the outside cage secure will assist. Rats can be excluded from suspended aviaries or cages by placing 'collars' on the legs of the cage. Good hygiene and regular removal of food will also assist.

Pet of the month

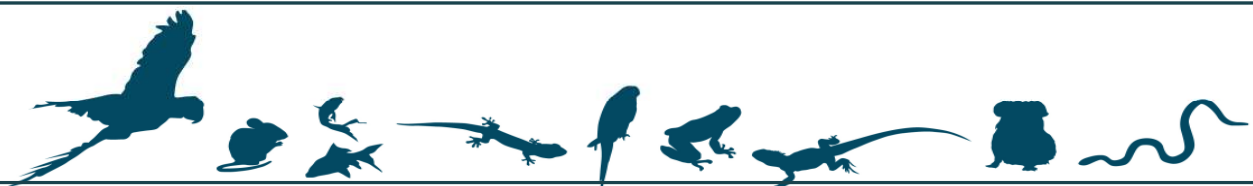
'RJ' was born 15th January this year and already has had a hard life! His two siblings both unfortunately passed away at only a few weeks of age so he was all alone. RJ was being hand raised by his owners which was going fine – until his crop movement started to slow and he started to lose weight. He was promptly brought in to see us.

We took some blood samples, examined a faecal sample and looked at fluid from his crop under the microscope. This told us he was not a well baby! He had bacterial gastroenteritis and crop stasis. He started a cocktail of medications to try and get him right.

One week later after a lot of effort and TLC from his owners, RJ was back with us. He was still underweight despite the medications and feeding – his crop was still not moving very well at all. We decided it was best to change the brand of food to one of slightly better quality to ensure he was getting the most nutrition from the tiny amount he was actually absorbing and gave him a course of injections to help get the digestive system moving.

RJ came back for a revisit one week later. He had had to start more of the injections before coming to see us, but he had gained some weight and his crop was moving more than previously. He had another mild bacterial infection (of a different sort of bacteria) which we treated with more medication but he was very bright and happy!

We have recently heard from his owners, and RJ is now gaining weight well. He loves his cuddles, and is certain to remind anybody if his dinner is late!





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Heavy Metal Toxicosis

Introduction

Heavy metals (lead, zinc, copper and arsenic) are not uncommon metals in our environment. Parrots, with their propensity for chewing of items, are at risk of ingesting levels of these metals sufficient to cause illness and sometimes even death.

Types of Heavy Metal Toxicosis

Depending on the type of heavy metal involved, the symptoms and time of treatment can vary. Lead and zinc are the most common heavy metals involved in bird toxicoses. This is due to the different behaviour of the different metals – for instance, lead is stored within the body, while zinc is not. It can be difficult to identify the exact metal (or combination of metals) involved in a particular case of toxicosis.

Symptoms

The symptoms of heavy metal toxicosis depend on the amount and the time period over which the metal has been ingested. Acute signs include sudden depression, excessive drinking, vomiting, diarrhoea, neurological signs (imbalance, falling from perch, strange behaviour) and sudden death. Chronic signs of toxicosis can include decreased immunity, failure to thrive, poor breeding performance and poor digestion.

The toxin causes damage to a number of organs, including the kidneys, the gastrointestinal tract and the nervous system.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis of heavy metal toxicosis is made by any or a combination of history, clinical signs, radiography and blood testing. Your veterinarian will question you intensively about the possibility of your bird being exposed to heavy metal, and may ask you to return home and check for any of the common items containing lead or zinc. Radiographs may show particles of heavy metal, suspended in the gut. Unfortunately, not all particles are heavy metal, and not all cases of heavy metal toxicity have particles currently visible within the bird (some cases have already absorbed the metal from the gut, and the metal is now circulating within the body). Regardless, a radiograph is useful, because if particles are identified within the gut, then treatment must continue until they have passed through.

Lastly, there are blood tests for both lead and zinc levels. These take at least 24 hours to give results, but can be useful in cases where there is no firm case of exposure.

Treatment

The treatment of this toxicosis involves twice daily injections of a drug that binds the heavy metals. This is continued for a minimum of three days. Sometimes, several days are required to completely eliminate the toxin. Birds are considered critical in the first 24 hours of treatment – sometimes the toxin has

caused so much damage that the body cannot recover. For this reason, birds are hospitalized for the duration of treatment so that they can receive supportive therapy, including fluid supplementation and other drugs to help the body cope with the side effects of toxicosis.

Sources of Lead

- Weights – curtain weights especially but also fishing and diving equipment
- Bells – check for lead clappers
- Self-righting toys
- Batteries
- Solder – check joints of metal articles, especially cage repairs.
- Lead pellets from shotgun cartridges or air-rifles
- Lead based paints, varnishes and lacquers (some lead free paints have leaded drying agents)
- Foil from over champagne and wine corks
- Electricians' cable clips
- light bulb bases
- Linoleum & Roofing Felt
- Car exhaust fumes
- Glazed ceramics and mirror backing
- Costume jewellery
- Plaster and Putty
- Leaded or stained glass windows
- Seeds for planting (coated with lead arsenate)

Sources of Zinc

- Galvanized wire, nails, clips, padlocks and feeding bowls especially when new (brushing with a wire brush and vinegar reduces, but doesn't eliminate the risk)
- "White rust" on older galvanized products
- Metal monopoly game pieces or similar
- Some coins
- 'C-Clamps' used to attach toys to cages
- Wires used as hangers for chew-sticks
- Shiny 'silver' coating on cage bars

