



Living with Macaws

E-book on the Feathered Family: All about Macaws Health

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About Macaws and their Health

You have been thinking of keeping a pet in your house since your children left home. Finally, you have decided on a Macaw. After intense research about the ideal living conditions a Macaw needs, the kind of food it requires and a good insight into your lifestyle, you have brought a new member home. What you want now is derive pure joy and laughter from the Macaw's ability to talk and mimic your speech and perform wonderful tricks. What you must try to find out is this: Is your Macaw 'ready' to bond with you?

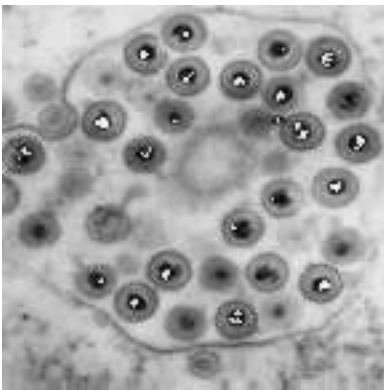
Since most Macaw maladies are air-borne, methods of prevention from contamination are not always effective. It is advisable to seek professional advice as soon as you sense a problem. However, as we all know, diseases and illnesses are not planned. You never know when you find your cuty bird struck down by some infection. At such times, professional medical assistance may be just beyond the impossible. This means you it is your responsibility to identify and diagnose the problem and look for the remedy. This is a handy guide to help you learn about the possible causes of your Macaw's illnesses. Being knowledgeable about diseases, illnesses and their remedies help you manage emergencies better. And, knowledge is wealth. There's no harm knowing more and more!



Affecting Diseases, Illness and Remedies

Most viruses that communicate diseases to Macaws are fatal, as shown by studies throughout avian medicinal history. Some of the common illnesses include:

Pacheco's Virus



Pacheco Macaw disease (PPD) is very contagious, causing more death among birds than any other avian disease. PPD is caused by a herpes virus, which occurs naturally in South America. The incubation period is 5 to 14 days and death usually occurs without any apparent symptom of illness. Death is due to rapid and severe liver damage. In some cases, a brilliant yellow to green diarrhea and vomiting are seen as symptoms. At terminal stages, neurological disorders may become apparent. Some Macaws are not directly affected. They are known to be carriers of the germs too. Other species of the animal kingdom are suspected to be carriers of this virus. Keeping carrier species away and proper quarantine methods of new birds are the only practical control methods.

Remedy

There are very few known and definite cures for this disease and, since birds



that fall victim to it often succumb fairly quickly, treatment is not usually effective. Nonetheless, the treatment generally favored is the oral administration of an anti viral drug called Acyclovir every eight hours. But, it is expensive and birds don't take to it easily. That is nothing strange. Try feeding bitter medicines to your child, especially when he is sick. The Macaw's behavior is not too different.

However, man is out of this carrier-infected cycle. Sadly, we cannot help our feathered friends out of this illness. It is one of those tricky things in life that come unnoticed and take away death with it.

Polyomavirus



Polyoma affects only baby or young birds. Adult birds develop natural resistance to the disease. There are a number of symptoms attributed to this virus, including the nebulous concepts of "chronic sub-clinical illness" and "carrier birds". Improved sanitation and breeding techniques have produced healthier birds. These birds don't ever develop overt diseases if exposed to Polyoma Virus. This disease, like most diseases, helps your bird to develop natural immunity against the particular germ. This explains why only young birds contract it and not the adults. The disease caused by the Polyoma Virus is surrounded by myths. However, what is seldom said is that the birds that die suddenly are nestlings, or, more rarely, fledglings. By the time they have fledged and developed into young birds suitable to leave the aviary, they are no longer at risk. Cases where an adult bird might develop this disease is rare. This would happen in a bird that is already immuno-suppressed.



Remedy

A proper vaccination would save so many baby Macaws. And this is one of the major research projects. However, nothing definite has been found as yet, although some very promising facts and results have come to light. Let us be hopeful that we don't have to lose our Macaw babies for very long now. Some bio-chemical product is surely on its way to save the darlings!

A bird with Polyoma should not be neglected and thrown out of the house. That will break its heart. A bird that is Polyoma positive can be kept in a household which doesn't maintain any other birds. What you should be careful is this. Don't allow people who have recently visited pet stores enter your house. I know this can be difficult but try and explain to them. If they love Macaws as much as you do, they will understand. This is because pet stores are Poly risk areas and further contamination may prove fatal.

Beak and Feather Syndrome



It is commonly accepted that PBFDS affects only Cockatoos. There is, however, little truth in that. Spread by feather dust and dried feces, Macaws infected with PBFDS show abnormal growth of new feathers. The new-fanged shafts look swollen and gnarled. Macaws have beaks that are black and shiny. This disease makes their beaks dusty and dull with feather dust. Although dust bunches are not formed in young Macaws, the older ones usually get them. In the absence of tufts, the possibility of Beak and Feather Syndrome increases. Another common PBFDS symptom is the growth abnormality of the beak. Some Macaws may have long beaks that eventually



break off. At its progressive stage, this PBFDS disease can cause paralysis and eventual death.

Recent medical tests show positive results in diagnosing this disease even in carriers, which eventually spread to younger lots. A Macaw is susceptible to such infection in its tender age and is more likely to succumb than its older family members. It has been observed that older Macaws are usually unaffected by this disease. It is therefore believed it is contracted only by younger Macaws. However, there is no scientific proof supporting this belief. There is currently no known cure for this disease because of which prevention and proper maintenance are vital.

Remedy

There is no cure for this disease and it eventually leads to either death or in the case of adult birds, they become carriers and infect other birds. There are two unkind methods of dealing with Macaws that have contracted this disease. Infected birds are either isolated or (this is the most inhuman way, I am sure) destroyed. This action may be termed "mercy killing". However, many birds have been known to fight off the infection and emerge infection-free. After repeated tests it has been observed that some birds develop a natural immunity and go on to live normal lives without any signs of illness or the ability to pass on the disease.

Wasting Disease

This is prevalent among Macaws of all breeds. A highly contagious disease, Wasting Disease does not spread as quickly as does Pacheco's. Wasting Disease is hard to reckon since it lies dormant for years, until hosts are on a move.

Studies on Macaws have shown the severe impact of the wasting disease on the nervous system. The same is extended to all of the major organs triggering seizures, paralysis and tremors, and, more often than not, heart



attacks. There is no known medication available for Wasting Disease, but changing the food patterns of the Macaws by including easily digestible diet supplements may prolong the life of the victim. The name itself suggests the final outcome. However, close attention and unconditional love for your Macaw will surely prolong its stay in your world.

Papilloma

Papilloma causes a growth in the vent area or sometimes in the mouth or throat of the infected bird. This may appear somewhat like a common wart and can actually be treated in a similar fashion. This isn't a fatal virus but it can cause death by blocking the throat or vent areas. This can cause choking as the air passage gets narrower with the increase in size of the wart. This can also cause other physiological problems for the bird.

Remedy

Laser surgery can easily remove such growths. Removal of the infected area is the best treatment for birds in such cases.

Psittacosis

Psittacosis (i.e. Macaw fever, chlamydiosis) reflects the virulence of the organism and can affect Macaws of any age. However, young birds are more susceptible to infectious diseases because of the immaturity of their immune systems. A highly virulent, deadly strain of chlamydiosis can cause death with few or no symptoms at all. Psittacosis may cause respiratory disorders such as sneezing; nasal discharge, conjunctivitis, sinusitis, pneumonia, and air sacculitis. It may also cause your Macaw to excrete lime-green watery droppings indicating kidney and liver malfunction as well. In rare cases, neurological problems including paralysis, tremors and seizures may be seen as symptoms. If your Macaws and/or cockatiels suffer from chronic respiratory infections, psittacosis should be considered as a possible and probable cause.



Remedy

Tetracyclines are the usual drugs administered. At present, doxycycline is the most recommended medicine. The medication should be administered either orally or by injection. Medicines mixed in the drinking water may not be adequately effective. This is because that amount of water may not be wholly consumed. This will, in turn, not be sufficient for the amount needed in the blood. The usual course of treatment is 45 days. Cages and aviaries should be disinfected during the course of treatment. Your Macaw stops shedding within 48 hours after initiating treatment. Chlamydia is also contagious to people and can cause high fever and pneumonia. Clean environment will help prevent spread of these bacteria.

E-coli



A point of much controversy is the normal flora of psittacine birds. It is commonly believed that the flora should consist only of Gram-positive bacteria such as Bacillus, Lactobacillus, Staphylococcus and Streptococcus. Gram-negative bacteria are considered to be abnormal in seed-eating birds. However, healthy birds are continually being found to carry various species of Gram-negative bacteria, especially of the group known as coliforms. These bacteria, most notably, E.coli, are normal in the gut of mammals. They are, however, capable of causing diseases and ultimately death when a carrier bird becomes stressed, or if the bacteria make their way into the bloodstream, respiratory system, reproductive system, or are found in very large numbers in the gut. Many Macaws are known to have died due to the activities of E.coli in their guts.



Remedy

Culture and antibiotic susceptibility testing are mandatory for proper treatment of these infections. An experienced clinician's advice is necessary to determine if these bacteria are the disease causing agents or merely a secondary infection. Coliforms will take advantage of a compromised bird. This is to say these bacteria thrive in an already sick bird. While they may not always be the primary cause of disease, they are very often the ultimate cause of the death of your Macaw. Coliform infections are very common, especially in the gut and respiratory system. Significantly, in most cases, these are due to poor hygiene and environmental contamination. So a clean environment will save the birds from the disease.

Your role in protecting your Macaw from E.coli infection is to do the following. Keep the cage as clean as possible, both from inside and outside. Keep your house clean in general. This will protect your house and your Macaw's cage safe from bacteria infection. Do your best and leave the rest to God.

Gout

Gout is the result of the calcification of the kidneys. It is seen most commonly in Blue and Gold Macaw babies between the age of 4-8 weeks. There are many theories explaining the occurrence of gout in baby Macaws. It is possible that some baby Macaws are more sensitive to an improper balance of calcium in a formulated diet than others. Gout is an entirely diet related problem. When the formulated diet has an improper amount of calcium, it can lead to gout. Depending on the metabolism and sensitivity of each baby, all babies on the same formula may or may not show evidence of kidney damage. Unfortunately, babies that develop gout have seldom survived.

The symptoms of this illness in the beginning stages are very difficult to identify and most often go unnoticed until it is too late to act. The first signs



are not so alarming. Slight dehydration and occasional regurgitating after feedings are the first signs, which are often overlooked as normal. To the observant feeder, the baby may appear slightly smaller. A baby with a bacterial infection may show the same symptoms, but will not regurgitate all of its food, under normal circumstances. Blood test reports will generally show high levels of urates in the blood. As the diseased condition advances, the dehydration problem will become more apparent. The skin on the chest will appear more and more wrinkled with the facial patch shrinking and wrinkling with the passing days. The baby will begin to regurgitate everything in its crop and will not even retain fluids. From the time the symptoms become threatening, they become obvious to any onlooker. Unfortunately, these are the last hours of your Macaw's life. It won't give you a day's time. A necropsy will show completely calcified kidneys.

Remedy

As a preventive, baby Macaws should always be kept well hydrated. Give plenty of water to your Macaws. This will keep the kidneys flushed and won't allow calcification. When a 4-8 week old baby suddenly looks smaller, dehydrated and starts regurgitating formula, mark it as the first signs of gout. Immediate increase in the amount of water in the to flush the kidneys, and using Probenecid/ Colchicine for the kidneys will save your bird's life and your heart! Give Allopurinol to remove urates from the blood. This may save the baby, if started from the first signs of gout. Do you realize now the effort needed to take care of your feathered baby?

Macaw Pox

Avian poxvirus infection is the most common and the deadliest viral disease contracted by Macaws. All Macaw species are susceptible to it and it causes total damage. In most cases, Macaws exhibit the wet form of pox in which the mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth, gullet, crop and upper and lower



respiratory systems are affected. Biting insects can spread the disease or direct contact with infected birds or contaminated surfaces may aggravate the painful condition. Pox in Macaws is highly contagious and spreads rapidly through a susceptible group.

The mortality rate of birds infected with Macaw pox is usually high and those which survive, carry the marks, both external and internal, for life. Scars in the form of de-pigmentation and distortions on the roof of the mouth and eyelids, corneas, nostrils and areas of lamination on the beak are quite common. The Macaw, otherwise one of nature's prime beauties, is scarred and nobody feels more about it than the Macaw itself. If you bond well with your Macaw, you will be able to feel its depression. It may not be happy again.

Remedy

High levels of Vitamin A (10,000 units per week given by injection) and intensive love and care are the only forms of treatment available to restore your Macaw's health and vitality. Antibiotics are necessary in severe cases to control secondary bacterial infections. Good nursing care must include forced feeding, by inserting a feeding tube into the crop. As you can understand, your Macaw will be weak and it will be in no mood to eat. So, gentle but firm force is essential. The mucous-thickened eyes should be treated with a solution of Mercurochrome in the eye wash solution. This is prepared by adding 1 ounce of 2% Mercurochrome to 4 ounces of eye wash solution. An ophthalmic preparation of chloramphenicol should be added to the eye after washing. See to it that the feathers don't get oily. Scabs should be left intact in order to prevent further damage to the eye, but should be lifted at one corner, tenderly please, to allow medication of the eye. Make sure your Macaw co-operates with you while you are treating its scars. Say sweet-nothings to encourage it and relieve it from its pain.



Aspergillosis

This is an airborne disease that leads to pulmonary infection. It is accompanied with fever, cough, and chest pain. Aspergella, the disease causing fungus, as well as other fungi, grow readily in damp and dark conditions with poor ventilation. Thus encrusted fecal matter, damp feed, dirty feeding utensils and food that falls through cage grates all encourage mold growth. Surprisingly, there is a high occurrence of aspergillosis in birds in the southwest, although the weather is dry and not conducive to fungal replication. Scientists suspect that the low humidity, coupled with the dusty environment, interferes with the normal mucous secretion in the respiratory tracts of the birds and makes them susceptible to mycosis.

In its acute form, it may result in anorexia, dyspnoea, or even sudden death. Other symptoms include white mucoid exudation, marked congestion of the lungs and air sacs, and pneumonic nodules. In the chronic state, dyspnoea, voice change, lethargy, depression, emaciation, polydipsia, and polyuria are the visible and physiological changes. The respiratory tract is majorly affected even before signs of illness become apparent. Ataxia and paralysis may occur if the central nervous system gets affected. Cleanliness is probably the only way out of this situation.

Remedy

Once a bird is diagnosed with aspergillosis, a qualified avian veterinarian should institute appropriate treatment. Fluconazole and itraconazole are the first choices for treatment of fungal infections in the respiratory system. There are new medications available in the market that kill bacteria and fungus in the sinus cavity on contact.

Salmonellosis

Salmonella infection is the most serious bacterial infection psittacines can



ever contract. It results in a high mortality rate among Macaws and otherwise, a high incidences of carriers. While the acute stage of the disease can be treated with antibiotics, this practice often results in asymptomatic carriers. Therefore, this method is not really advisable. These carriers will often become septicaemic following a stressful event and die eventually. It is a common problem in birds from Guyana and Surinam. Blue-headed Pionus from this area should be under observation. If your Macaw has been infected, please be patient and give more time to it. This will ease its agony and unease.

Remedy

Screening of new birds by fecal culture may be helpful to cure Salmonella infections if the bird is shedding. However, shedding is intermittent and may occur only during times of illness. No infected bird should be added to a breeding collection due to the danger of spread. If the Macaw in question is a valuable breeding bird, the pair should be held in permanent isolation and the eggs should be artificially incubated and the chicks hand-raised. While transmission of Salmonella is well known in chickens, this has not been reported in psittacines. Three negative cultures during the quarantine period should relieve some apprehension.

Sinusitis

Macaws and colds, Sinusitis, or chronic respiratory disease go hand in hand. Whenever you think of keeping a Macaw or if you have one already, remember to keep medicines for colds and respiratory diseases handy. The real cause of sinusitis is unknown, but it is probably the result of a complex of diseases. It can be highly infectious or can tag along as a chronic infection without contaminating other birds. Several organisms have been suspected as the real culprit behind the occurrence of Sinusitis, the most notable being the mycoplasmas. This hasn't been confirmed though. Viruses causing respiratory disorders and homophiles may also be involved.



Remedy

Secondary infection with coliforms, proteus, and pseudomonas are common. These complicate the treatment process. Culture and sensitivity testing have brought some success stories home. Treatment for Mycoplasma in conjunction with treatment for secondary bacterial invaders looks like one probable solution. It is very important to initiate appropriate treatment in the early stages of the disease rather than trying several home remedies. Meanwhile, treatment for the disease may go out of hand and no cure may be possible. Vitamin A should be supplemented at the rate of 10,000 units per bird per week. If there is no satisfactory response noted within a few days, then seeking professional assistance remains as the only option. Untreated cases may result in abscess formation in the sinuses, pneumonia and air sac infections.

Pseudomonas and proteus

Pseudomonas and proteus infections may occur in a variety of Macaw organ systems including the upper and lower respiratory system, eyes, and digestive system. Pseudomonas is a common contaminant of sour food. While the healthy bird can easily fend off small amounts, infections secondary to other illnesses are a potential threat. This disease also spreads through poor hygienic conditions and a dirty environment.

Remedy

Culture and antibiotic susceptibility testing are imperative for longer therapy, especially in the case of Pseudomonas, which is resistant to most of the commonly available antibiotics.

Molting

Molting is stressful for your Macaw. When new feathers begin to appear, many birds feel uncomfortable and, at times, get irritable and less active.



New feathers have a waxy, protective, keratin cuticle that the bird removes when preening. During re-growth of feathers, birds spend a lot of time preening and act as if they are "itchy". Owing to the discomfort, Macaws tend to preen their feathers. That is why white chunks of the keratin cuticle become visible on their bodies which are often mistaken for dandruff.

Remedy

During the molting period it is important to reduce stress. Good nutrition and vitamin supplements are essential. Frequent baths and adequate rest are also helpful. If the bird causes damage to the feathers or skin, then get your Macaw checked by the vet as soon as possible.

Punctate Keratitis

This eye disease, of unknown etiology, is seen in some Macaw species. It is common among Macaws which are imported from Central America with the Amazons. It causes a temporary disruption to the surface of the cornea of the eye resulting in blinking and watering of the eyes.

Remedy

In most cases it subsides without any treatment. However, a low percentage of the birds will develop a sinusitis along with the eye lesions. For complete recovery, these birds require antibiotic treatment to minimize the infection caused by the secondary bacteria. It has been suggested that a virus is the main pathogen behind this eye infection.

Tracheitis

A severe form of tracheitis of suspected viral origin has been observed in Macaws imported from Central America. It is seen among Macaws imported with the Amazons. It is presumed that herpes virus causes it. The disease



has a prolonged course of suffering and more often than not, Macaws who contract Tracheitis do not make it. Death occurs primarily due to pneumonia and caseous plugs that form in the primary bronchi.

Remedy

Unfortunately, no treatment is available and the prognosis is very poor. The only way you can help is support it and show how important it is to you. Show total love to relieve it of its pain.

Runny Nose or Nasal Discharge

The most common of all nasal discharges is due to the laxity of Vitamin-A in the diet of the Macaws. This deficiency can be corrected by increasing the food quantities that are rich in vitamins and mineral contents. Remember, a proportionate amount of all the nutrients in the diet is the fundamental practice that prevents health problems in Macaws. You can also use antibiotic nasal drops under a vet's supervision to clear the nasal passage when Macaws have a runny nose.

Shelter from 12 most common injuries

Broken Blood Feather

The simplest and the most painless way to fix a broken blood feather is to pull the feathers out. To fully understand the condition, let us see why it happens in the first place. When not fully formed, a blood feather splits and the shaft works as a straw emitting blood, which gushes out without stinting. It is very difficult to arrest the bleeding. Restore the pulled-off feather carefully with pliers, underneath the wing, and drag it straight out without



causing injury to the feather follicle. The best remedy, however, is to pull out the feather. The feather shaft should be held securely with pliers about 1-2 inches from the wing, and pulled straight out so the feather follicle is not damaged or torn. See to it that the shaft is not broken close to the wing lest it cannot be removed. After a feather is pulled, growth of a new feather will usually be visible within 2 weeks.

While clipping a bird's wings, do not clip feathers that are still enclosed in the shaft, or those that still have traces of blood in them. Postpone clipping feathers till they are fully grown.

Constricted Toe

It is mostly seen among baby Macaws. Constricted toe is generally caused by low humidity in the brooder or nest box. Layers of skin that look like scales cover the toes of your Macaw. Low humidity may cause a ring of skin layers to dry and this in turn may begin to contract. As this condition advances, it cuts off the circulation of blood to the end of the toe. If the constriction is not removed, the constricted part of the toe will completely dry up and fall off.

Don't try removing it if you are not an expert. This may cause excessive bleeding and lead to secondary infection. If the constricting skin is visible, try to soften it with a quality skin cream. When that part is adequately soft, remove it very carefully. Removal of the constriction will save the toe of your feathered baby.

If you are unsure of what you are doing or what should be done, please have an avian vet take care of the problem. If you are looking for a pet, do not be discouraged by part or all of a toe missing. Think of it as one less nail to clip! And please don't think you have an ugly Macaw at home. Love it as you would a complete one and enjoy its company everyday of your life.



Crop Burn

Crop burn is one very common and (thankfully) the most preventable of all of the maladies. Feeding food that is so hot that it literally burns the inside to the crop causes it. Crop burn is most easily recognized in babies that do not yet have their crops covered with feathers. A day or so after the accident (you did not think it was one!), you will see a white patch through the skin of the crop. This is a blister that has been caused by the burn. If the food is piping hot, it can actually burn a hole through the crop and the outer layer of skin. Depending on the severity of the burn, digestion of food will become slow and becomes an ideal seat for infection to set in. A hole, burned through the crop, will have to be sutured. Have a heart. Don't give steaming food to your feathered baby. Think. Would you give something as hot to your own child?

Most often, crop burn occurs when food has been re-warmed in a microwave oven, and was not checked for hot spots. Here again, applying common sense will prevent this accident in the future. Would you warm a baby's bottle without checking the temperature on your wrist? Treat your Macaw like your own child. A Macaw is sensitive to the same things that your child is sensitive to. When it is necessary to re-warm food for a baby Macaw, you should always remember to stir it with your finger to check for hot spots. If it is too hot for your finger, it is certainly too hot for the baby. Another necessary process is to empty the crop of any undigested food, at least once every 24 hours, so that souring and bacterial infection do not set in. Only an empty crop will be able to digest fresh food properly.

If you suspect that your baby's crop has got blisters due to burns, look for immediate medical attention. Unattended, crop burn can, and usually will, be fatal.



Crop Punctures

Two things lead to crop punctures. Carelessness and/or inexperience in tube feeding. Tube feeding is, as the name suggests, a method of feeding in which the food is pumped into the crop through a tube that has been inserted into the esophagus to reach the crop. If the tube is pushed too far and the baby jumps, the tube must have punctured the crop membrane and pricked the outer skin to make it jump. After this, food entering the crop will leak out of the puncture. The only way to stop this leakage is to suture the inner and outer layers of the crop and skin. Antibiotics must be administered to prevent infection. If left unattended, infection will set in, and the baby will starve to death because the crop will no longer hold food. Be more careful while tube feeding your baby. Treat your baby Macaw as your own child. Try to look how far the tube has gone with your mind's eye. A sense of the bird's anatomy will help you in the future.

Tube feeding should be used only as the last resort for babies that will not swallow food without choking and coughing. For a baby that will not eat until and unless a tube is pushed into its system, this method of feeding is the best. Moreover, it will also prevent aspiration. However, it may cause other problems. If it is not an emergency, feeding the baby with a tube should be done only by experienced people.



Dehydration

Your Macaw may get dehydrated at any age, any time. This condition may be dependent on many factors. How will you make out if your Macaw is dehydrated or not? If you notice a reddening of the skin and the loss of



elasticity, you will know your bird is dehydrated. Healthy skin is otherwise supple. When it is lightly pinched and then released, it will almost immediately go back into place. Dehydrated skin will remain wrinkled in the pinched position.

In hand feeding baby Macaws, dehydration may occur due to lack of sufficient water in the hand feeding formula, or, by a bacterial infection that slows down digestion. In Macaws, irrespective of age, any kidney infection or bacterial attack causing a problem in digestion may dehydrate your bird.

What caused the dehydration is of great significance for treatment, but the most important thing to do is to hydrate the bird as soon as possible. In some cases, a shot of Ringers' solution may be given under the skin. Under normal circumstances, the body will immediately absorb this liquid. In hand feeding babies, Ringers' solution or Pedialyte should be fed for a couple of feedings instead of the regular formula. Baby apple juice, being a natural diuretic, will also help digestion and the hydration process. If your baby is dehydrated, the fluid is more crucial to his survival than food. Keep his feeding formula very fluid until you see his color changing to the normal flesh color. If the formula is too thick, its system will absorb the fluid and leave most of the food in the crop to sour and cake. This will only complicate the present condition. The main concern is to hydrate your bird until it gets back its health. Then look into the matter and find out the source of the dehydration.

Stretched Crop

A stretched crop is a condition seen in hand fed baby Macaws. It is caused by trying to feed a baby more than it can take at one go. This leads to overfilling and stretching of the muscles of the crop. The crop skin and muscles have a natural elasticity that assist in the digestion of food. Owing to the elastic nature, the crop retains its shape after the food proceeds to the next organ in the digestion process. When empty, the crop should be flat. If



the crop is overfilled to the point of stretching the skin and muscles, it will hang onto the breastbone, and a portion of the food will remain in the part of the crop that has outstretched to the breastbone. It will look like a deflated balloon. If left unrectified, the food rotting in the crop will develop bacteria, which will slow the digestive process even more, causing weight loss and may cause death.

If your baby's crop gets stretched, you can help correct the problem by making a "crop bra" for him. Depending on the size of the baby, it is made with a wide gauze bandage or a strip of towel or rag. The wide area in the middle should be long and wide enough to support his crop. The strips should be long enough to bind it completely. The upper strips should be fastened, or tied around the back of his neck, above his wings, and the lower strips should be under his wings and around his back.

The crop bra should be worn by the baby until his crop muscles are strong enough to empty his crop on their own. Until then, the crop should be emptied completely by you, and cleaned with warm water, every 24 hours.

Splay Leg

Splay leg is a condition that is seen in very young babies that are not strong enough to hold their legs together on a slippery surface. Keeping the baby in a container that is not well cushioned generally causes it. It may so happen that the surface under the cushion is so smooth that he cannot get his footing. His legs will spread out to the sides and very soon he will not be able to hold them straight at all. If this condition is not corrected at an early stage, it may become permanent because the bones will gradually harden.

Splay leg can be corrected when it is detected early. If the legs are spread under the baby at such a distance that allows it to stand erect, then the disorder can be corrected in less than a week. The time required to correct a



splay leg will depend on the severity of the condition and the age of the chick. It is also important to change the conditions that caused the problem to avoid future recurrences.

Depending on the size of the baby, the legs may be held together with gauze tape, a strip of cloth, or connected rings through which his feet will pass comfortably. Whatever you use, make sure that nothing is so constrictive so as to hinder proper blood circulation. If this happens, you may save his legs but lose his feet in the bargain. Once his legs regain their original strength and stay under him, remove the supports. If the splay leg condition is not corrected, the baby's legs will grow out to the sides, and he will never be able to stand normally.

Ruptured Air Sac

If your Macaw has ruptured its air sac, it can take from a few days to a couple of weeks for it to heal, depending on the age of the bird. In such a condition, the air must be allowed to escape from under the skin so that the crop and other organs can function normally. How does one do this? An incision is made in the skin and a tube inserted and kept in place to allow drainage of the air. The tube keeps the opening in the skin alive. Otherwise, the incision will begin to heal in a matter of a couple of hours. The tube is taped to hold it in place. After the air sac is healed, the tube is removed and the incision heals on its own. After less than a week, the scab from the incision falls off without leaving one scar. The baby recovers beautifully, and returns to its own world of colors. After a few weeks, you will not be able to tell anything from its development in body and mind.

In an older bird, the drainage has to be done in a way that the bird cannot remove the tube. Often, two incisions are made to make a loop of a string or a tube that is folded and taped on the ends to keep the drainage holes open.



Ultimately, what stands is this. Whether your feathered family friend is a baby or an adult, do not undertake to make these incisions on your own. Call an avian vet to do the needful. Your inexperienced hands will do more harm than good. Secondary infections can be best avoided if a vet takes the responsibility of curing your Macaw's ruptured air sac.

Sour Crop and Slow Crop

These conditions are seen only in a Macaw baby that is still hand fed. Each is responsible for the other. A baby's crop must empty completely at least once in a day. If the crop takes time to empty, the soft food in the crop will begin to rot and "sour". A sour crop will slow down the digestion process and therefore cause a slow crop. A slow crop may occur due to a number of problems. Emptying a crop can be done in either of the following ways. One method of cleaning the crop is to insert a feeding tube as used in aquariums. The other method is complex. It involves turning the bird upside down and massaging the crop to push food out of the mouth through the oesophagus. The latter method is risky because it may aspirate the baby if it breathes food into the lungs in panic. The worst thing about a slow crop is the growing possibility of bacterial infection. Be careful when you are inserting a tube into your bird's oesophagus. Using force instead of skill may lead to a puncture in the oesophagus. That will be dangerous for the baby. If you are unsure of emptying the crop yourself, please contact an avian vet or a breeder to do the needful. What you can do to avoid a slow crop is to make sure the bird empties its crop on a regular basis. Further, try and find out if something is wrong with the food, the bird's health or its temperament.

Slipped Tendon

This problem is seen in very young babies. A slipped tendon is best defined as this. It is a condition in which the tendon that normally fits into the groove at the heel of the foot slips to the side of the heel. When the tendon contracts



it causes the foot to turn to the side and the toes to clench. It looks as if the baby is walking on the side of his foot.

You can correct this problem in less than 2 weeks. What you need to do is this. Secure the baby's feet on a piece of tape, much like making it stand on a sticky mousetrap. If it is a little older, the tendon may be surgically pinned in the correct position until it enlarges in the groove in the heel to retain placement on its own. If the condition is not recognized in its early stages and when your feathered family friend is still young, the tendon may shorten keeping the baby's foot turned to the side permanently. If the condition is corrected, there will be no side effects. And your bundle of nature's colors will walk straight into your heart with no hobble!

Crooked, or Scissors, Beak

In this condition, the upper mandible is not properly aligned to the lower mandible and does not close properly over it. Often, improper feeding techniques may lead to such a state but heredity cannot be ruled out either. Sometimes, heredity has no role to play in the formation of crooked beaks. Babies that had no consistent lineage can also develop such beaks. In such cases, heredity plays no part in the formation of scissors beak. This condition has often been seen in Macaw babies that tend to clamp the top mandible tightly over the lower one during the feeding motion. Continual misuse leads to the development of a groove in the lower mandible that the upper mandible begins to rest in. The cleft that the upper mandible rests in is located on the under side of the upper mandible. With time, the upper mandible begins to curve to one side as it rests in this groove, and the lower mandible grows longer on the opposite side. Regardless of the cause or the age of the bird, this condition can be corrected with persistent trimming of the upper and lower mandibles.



Split Sternum

Split sternum is the outcome of an accident. As a Macaw owner, you should be responsible for its safety. It is a term to describe the splitting of the skin on the breast by the breastbone (scientific name of which is the sternum). This injury occurs when a Macaw falls from a t-stand or a cage to a hard floor, such as a ceramic tiled floor. A clipped Macaw, especially one that has been severely clipped, cannot avoid a fall with no access to its wings. If he falls from the cage-top on his breastbone, it may, and, in most cases, will sever the skin on his chest causing it to split open. In such a case, the skin on the bird's chest has to be sutured. He should be immediately taken to an avian vet. And please don't try stitching it up yourself!

To prevent this injury, never allow a clipped or a very young Macaw to reach the cage top or t-stand hung above a hard-surfaced floor.

Dealing with Disabilities

Like in human babies born with disabilities, symptoms do not become immediately evident; similarly your Macaw may be born with, or develops a disability that will not be immediately obvious. Loss of sight is a common disability among adult Macaws, which means, you have to arrange a whole lot of things (such as toys, seeds etc.) in the coop at easily accessible locations. Provide textured toys or those that make noise. But do not rotate them. A little common sense goes a long way in ensuring that your Macaw can manage his disability. Love it even more to show it is cared for as much as its friends who have eyesight. For example, while working out with a sightless Macaw, allow him to play, jump and do whatever it feels like, on the



floor, under your guardianship. Let it know it is not alone and it is not helpless. A cared for but disabled Macaw will feel less handicapped if you dote on it and encourage it all the time.

When Problems Become Evident

A major reason why you should be as well-informed as possible about your bird when you buy it from its previous owner or the breeder is this. The medical and the behavioral histories will help you solve its behavioral problems that it may exhibit at present. An owner might tell you that he is giving up his Macaw because of the bird's persisting glass-shattering screams. If you have been an owner of Macaws for some years now, loud and sometimes intolerable screams are no longer surprises for you. However, if you are planning to get a Macaw for the first time in your life, please be realistic and practical. Don't have very high expectations regarding the time required by your Macaw to become a perfect mimic and how soon you will be able to share memorable moments with your pet. If your second-hand Macaw has serious problems that are way beyond your understanding, consult an avian behavior consultant. Since every species has a separate constitution, it is not necessary that any two Macaws of the same breed will show similar reactions to similar medication techniques. However, any unexplained behavior should not be related to behavioral disorders. Habits like feather picking may have physiological causes such as poor nutrition, allergic reactions, and environmental factors, and may not be behavioral patterns at all.

The First Two Weeks

The first two weeks of a life with your Macaw will determine whether or not the two of you will be able to make or break the relationship. Although Macaws are social birds, like their human family members, they too take time



to adjust to new environments. Also, if you have brought a second-hand Macaw, it might have behavioral problems already. Things become difficult when the previous owner hadn't been honest with you. In more cases than one, he must have told you the Macaw is in the pink of perfection state. Before you attempt to build a relationship with your Macaw, assess his fear levels and evident disabilities. In case of an older Macaw, you must remember that the experiences he has gone through in the early years of his life will have shaped his personality. It would help to check:

1. Macaw's apprehensions before administering medicines
2. Acquaint yourself with its physical disabilities that were left unattended at its previous home.
3. Keep an eye on the Macaw to mark any abrupt change in behavior.
4. Have you noticed any anxiety related to diet and eating patterns in the Macaw?
5. Pay attention to the sociability of the Macaw. Does it love company or prefers to be left alone?.

Resolving Residual Food Anxieties

Always pay attention to the Macaw's behavior and see if it shows anxiety for food and other necessities. How will you know your Macaw has some problems? The usual symptoms include repetitive calling, begging and exhibiting anxiety especially when food is plentiful. Since Macaws are inbred creatures, they are indispensable to "regression wean". This makes you indebted to feed it from hand or spoon. This also triggers a familial bonding between the two of you. In addition, it helps build a sense of reassurance in the Macaw about its safety. Ensure that your nervous and/or poorly socialized Macaw eats a healthy diet. Supplementing his diet with an essential fatty acid oil blend (you can buy it from a health food store) will not only give him a shiny, gorgeous plumage, but also boost his brain function.



Sufficient EFAs in the diet are essential to help him learn new things.

Healing your Pet

Just as Reiki is related to all curative practices, it is highly effective in healing animals as well as human beings. Did you know that animals accept Reiki more readily than human beings? This is because they do not possess mental, emotional or intellectual blocks that are typical of human beings. There are alternative therapeutic measures such as acupuncture, homeopathy, herbal and flower remedies that your Macaw will be comfortable with. Acupuncture practices, however, are relatively new for Macaws. Again, it is the best treatment for arthritis. So, instead of administering antibiotics to your Macaw that has developed a gout, give it a Chinese preventive course to heal better (with no side-effects).

Homeopathy treatment is also an effective method of treating your pet, especially in cases of psychological or behavioral problems, such as feather plucking sessions. Since homeopathy is always free of after effects, many pet lovers find it to be a safer way of treating their Macaws.

In case your new Macaw becomes aggressive with its neighbour and has often been violent, 'Chinese flower treatment' is the best practice to help overcome its fear or anxieties and make it adaptable to its new environment. Often referred to as 'Aromatic Bach treatment', this therapy generally raises the level of confidence in Macaws and eases out similar stress problems. Moreover, herbs, spices and other Oriental food ingredients, known to have beneficial impact on Macaws, should be included in your Macaw's diet. Aviculturists have secretly added these herbal solutions to the Macaw diet to keep birds hale and hearty. Unfortunately, these herbal treatments have lost to the new scientifically engineered medicines because of the lack of adequate publicity in the form of books, magazines etc.



In the face of man-made wonders, we tend to forget that nature's antidotes are more helpful in curing multiple maladies and that they actually help in building up immunity among Macaws. However, for a healthy Macaw it is essential to take proper care of its diet. A healthy pet is more likely to fight diseases and thereby stay around longer to make you laugh, keep you entertained and give you a life full of colors and pleasant surprises!



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