

# Avian Physical Exam

# Observation

- Birds more than any animal tend to hide signs of illness. Hiding their illness comes from the flock mentality; if they show signs of illness in the wild they will open themselves up to predators. When they no longer can compensate for their illness it will then be known to others. A well bird in an office call should NOT be fluffed up, closing their eyes, “tail bob”, or sitting at the bottom of the cage.

# Weight

Avian patients MUST be weighed at every visit. The only way to get an accurate weight is to use a gram scale. For friendly birds you can use a perch stand on top of the scale and for others a small basket/cage on the scale. Always zero the scale with the perch or cage on it. It is a good idea for families to purchase a scale and weigh their bird on a weekly schedule.

# Feathers

- The quality of feathers is the first thing we take note of. Is there feather loss, abnormal molting, ectoparasites, damage, stress bars or abnormal coloring? The preen gland is located on the dorsal midline of the tail feathers and needs to be examined for symmetry, inflammation or bleeding

- **Skin:** Parting the feathers in several places, closely examine the skin for flaking, redness, blood, pitting of the surface, inflammation or masses.
- **Head:** Look for symmetry, inflammation or bruising.
- **Eyes:** Look for symmetry, discharge or opaque lens. Use an ophthalmoscope for a through exam.
- **Beak:** Look for symmetry, abnormal wear, severe flaking, pitting on the surface or fractures.
- **Nares:** There is a normal structure just inside the nares called the operculum; you should NOT disturb this structure. Examine the nares for discharge, blockage, blood, inflammation or any masses.
- **Ears:** There should be no inflammation, odor or discharge.

- **Oral Cavity/Mouth:** If necessary use a beak speculum for the examination. There should be no abscesses, plaques or necrotic tissue. The glottis is located at the base of the tongue and should also be free of abscesses or epithelial plaques. The choanal slit is lined with epithelial projections called papilla. Inflamed choanal slit or lack of papilla can indicate upper respiratory infection.
- **Crop:** Crop burns, bruising or necrosis may be seen in birds that are being hand raised and are being syringe fed with food that is too hot. Foreign bodies are not common but can occur. Crop stasis or large doughy feeling crops due to undigested food can be a sign of a bacterial ingluvitis.

- **Keel Bone and Pectoral Muscle:** The edge of the keel should be able to be palpated between the rounded pectoral muscles that slope slightly to either side. If the keel bone is prominent the bird is considered underweight. Both underweight and overweight can be life threatening.
- **Wings:** Carefully check range of motion and joint integrity. Look for blood feathers, broken or missing feathers, fractures or dislocations of wings, masses, ulcers or ectoparasites.
- **Cloaca:** Observe the area for cleanliness, no accumulation of feces, no sign of dilation or prolapse of tissue, and no masses.
- **Feet/Legs:** Look for symmetry and check range of motion. Plantar erosion can be noted as pink areas at the bottom of the feet. Also check for scaly skin, ulcers, scabs, inflammation, gout, or necrotic tissue. Be sure the length of the nails is a good length for the species of bird you are examining and trim if necessary. Have the bird hold onto your finger and see how well he can grasp on.

- **Abdomen:** The caudal area of the bird is difficult to examine due to the keel bone. At times you may only be able to use a single finger to palpate underneath the keel bone. At this point check for tumors, eggs, hepatomegaly or ascities.
- **Hydration Status:** In a normal hydrated bird, the basilic vein should instantaneously refill by the time you take your finger off the vein. If the basilic vein can be seen to refill, then it is estimated the bird is approximately 5% dehydrated. If the vein requires one second to refill, then the bird is severely dehydrated or is in shock.