

# Avian First Aid

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217-328-4143 [www.allcreatureAH.com](http://www.allcreatureAH.com)

## *Avian First Aid Kit*

- Towels
- Droppers or syringes
- Sports drink or Pedialyte
- Cloth tape
- Self-adhesive flexible bandage
- Sock
- Pipe insulation foam
- Styptic powder or cream
- Antiseptic solution (Betadine or Nolvasan)
- Heated hospital cage
- Thermometer for cage
- Carrier
- Scale
- Pepto-Bismol
- Feeding tube (advanced aviculturists trained in tube feeding)

## *Important Numbers*

- All Creatures Animal Hospital  
**217-328-4143**
- Animal Emergency Clinic of Champaign County  
**217-359-1977**
- National Animal Poison Control  
**1-888-426-4435**
- A consultation fee will be applied.

## An Ounce of Prevention

It is very important when starting this discussion, to emphasize that none of the information contained within substitutes for professional assistance by a qualified avian veterinarian. The costs of such care must be budgeted by the responsible pet owner or breeder. First aid procedures are intended to provide necessary support for a bird until this can be accomplished.

The other issue that must be discussed is the fact that the majority of "emergency" cases seen in birds are not really emergencies. They are birds that have been sick for weeks or months but have been ignored or unnoticed until they are critical. Close observation of birds combined with regular veterinary examinations and

lab evaluation will catch nearly all of these problems at a time when the success of treatment will be higher and the cost of treatment will be lower.

In addition, many of the physical injuries and poisonings that are encountered in birds can be prevented. If birds are kept caged when unsupervised, their wings are kept trimmed, and their nails kept trimmed, most of these events would not occur. Leg bands can be hazardous, especially if they do not fit well. If they are necessary, make sure they are well fitted and placed properly. Birds should be tamed and accustomed to the routines of the household. Leaving a night-light on, especially for lutino cockatiels will help reduce night

panics. Cage covering procedures should be consistent. Turning off ceiling fans and covering mirrors and windows when a bird is flying in the house is advisable. Birds should be separated from other animals and other types of birds (many birds will bite the toes of other birds). Birds should not be allowed access to toxic plants, painted surfaces, or other toxins. Overheating cooking oils or dry non-stick pans may emit toxic fumes. No one should ever smoke around a bird. Birds should be removed from the area when any painting or other projects are occurring.

By following these guidelines 90% of bird emergencies could be avoided.

## Plan for the Unexpected

The time to find an avian veterinarian is not when an emergency occurs. Establishing a relationship with an experienced avian veterinarian and a medical record for the bird are very important. The bird owner should find out the procedures for emergency care after hours.

After hours care is more expensive and some practices will refer emergencies to an emergency clinic. If these factors are known, there will be no surprises.

In the event of injury or illness, owners can improve the odds for their birds if

they are prepared for immediate care. It helps to have a first aid kit available. Listed below are some measures that can be taken to stabilize birds with a variety of emergency problems. General recommendations are difficult to make but the key is to do no harm.

# Determining the Problem

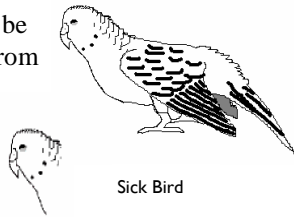
Bird owners should make a habit of examining their birds. While they may not have the training to interpret the results, this process can be valuable in determining when a problem is present.



Healthy Bird

If it is never done until the bird is sick, it will be difficult to determine what is normal and what is not.

The bird should be examined first from a distance, either on a perch or in the cage. A healthy bird should

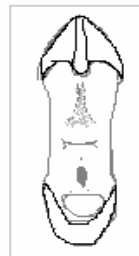


Sick Bird

be alert, have a straight, upright posture, tight smooth plumage and move without difficulty. The breathing should be effortless, and tail bobbing or open mouth breathing are considered abnormal. Birds that fall asleep in the exam room, are ruffled, or have droopy wings or tail are probably very ill and immediate veterinary attention is recommended. In birds like this, great care must be taken to avoid excessive stress.

The hands on physical exam should be thorough, systematic, and rapid. Magnification and illumination are valuable in detecting subtle problems. After catching the bird using a paper or cloth towel, the bird is restrained. The head, wings and feet must be controlled without restricting the movement of the sternum. Some well-socialized birds can be examined without restraint.

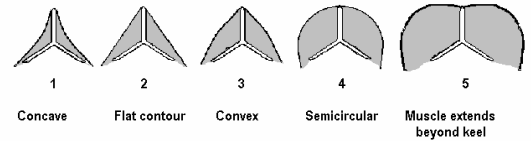
The eyes, ears, nostrils can quickly be examined for swelling, discharges or other abnormalities. The mouth may be examined by using a speculum of some type. Hemostats, dowels, or specially made avian mouth specula may be used.



OROPHARYNX

Alternately, two pieces of gauze can be used to hold the mouth of the bird open. In some birds, the upper beak can be lightly tapped and they will open the mouth. The key is to look for anything that is different from normal. Trauma to the beak and tongue are relatively common and are easily noticed. The crop should be felt and can be further examined by spreading the feathers. The trachea is examined by listening for abnormal breathing sounds. The breast should be palpated to evaluate the body condition of the bird. The

author uses a body scoring system to standardize the description. A body score of 3.0-4.0 is ideal. Below 3 is too thin and above 4 is obese. The abdomen is felt for any swelling. Normally, in the adult bird, the abdomen is flat or slightly concave, curving inward at the back edge of the keel. It is difficult to make a distinction between the many possible causes of abdominal

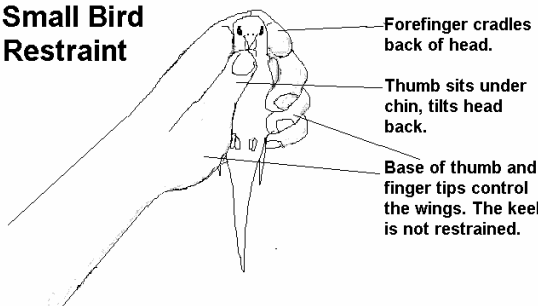


Body Condition Scores

Representation of transverse section of the sternum and pectoral musculature.

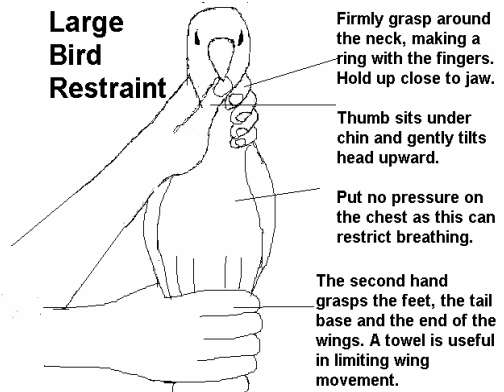
enlargement by examination alone. The veterinarian may recommend x-rays, or ultrasound in these cases. Sometimes a needle will be used to remove fluid from the abdomen for analysis and to make breathing easier. The vent or cloacal orifice is then examined. Pasting of this area with feces or urates may be an indication of kidney disease, intestinal problems, or abdominal swelling. Cloacal papillomas are common in New World parrots and often require eversion of the cloaca for detection. The feet are examined for worn areas on the soles which may be an indication of nutritional imbalances or physical wear. Sandpaper covers on perches and concrete perches contribute to this problem. The joints of the wings and legs are examined for swelling and moved to detect stiffness or pain. Throughout the examination, the feathers and skin of each area is examined. If a scale is available, the bird should be weighed. With practice, the entire physical exam can be accomplished in less than five minutes and results in little stress to the bird

## Small Bird Restraint



Forefinger cradles back of head.  
 Thumb sits under chin, tilts head back.  
 Base of thumb and finger tips control the wings. The keel is not restrained.

## Large Bird Restraint



Firmly grasp around the neck, making a ring with the fingers. Hold up close to jaw.  
 Thumb sits under chin and gently tilts head upward.  
 Put no pressure on the chest as this can restrict breathing.  
 The second hand grasps the feet, the tail base and the end of the wings. A towel is useful in limiting wing movement.

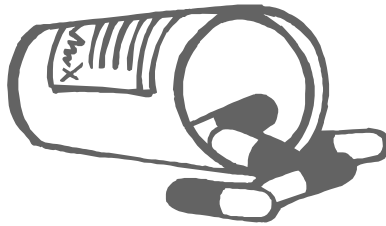
## Things to Avoid

Many recommendations published in bird books or on the internet are potentially harmful and should be avoided.

First, any oily substance applied to the skin, orally, or in the cloaca should be avoided. These oils severely damage feathers and can irritate the intestinal tract.

Second, force feeding birds is extremely hazardous.

Trying to feed a bird with a syringe can cause the bird to inhale or aspirate the food, with fatal consequences. Veterinarians force-feed



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birds with a feeding tube. This can be learned by advanced aviculturists but takes much practice to do safely.

Third, do not remove blood feathers. Improper removal of blood feather remnants can cause worse hemorrhage than was occurring before. The veterinarian has means of controlling this bleeding if it occurs.

Fourth, do not use styptic powder on the skin or feather follicles. These products work by causing a chemical burn. This is safe for nails or beak tips, but can cause serious skin damage in other

cases. Be very careful to avoid letting the bird swallow any of the styptic as esophageal burns are serious problems.

Lastly, do not give over-the-counter antibiotics. These products are usually so old that most common bacteria are resistant to them. They are also usually used in the drinking water which can discourage drinking.

While home care can be life saving in some cases, far too often well-meaning owners cause more harm than good. Professional veterinary care should never be delayed.

## After Hours

At All Creatures Animal Hospital we understand that birds don't always get sick or injured at the most convenient time.

In the interest of making emergency care available at all times of the day or night, Dr. Welle has trained the doctors and staff of the Animal Emergency Clinic of Champaign County to handle critical needs for

sick or injured birds.

An emergency clinic's role is to support and sustain patients for 12-48 hours until they can see their primary care veterinarian.

Often all that is needed is some fluid therapy, nutritional support to allow a

bird to survive this time period.

The bird can be brought back to All Creatures for a final diagnosis and continuing care.

*Animal Emergency Clinic of  
Champaign County  
217-359-1977*

This arrangement allows the best of both worlds: 24-hour care and awake, alert veterinarians in the daytime.

## Daytime Emergencies

Don't let the sun set on a sick bird. This is our recommendation and our policy. If your bird is sick or injured, we'll make time for an appointment.

With birds' ability to mask the signs of illness, the onset



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of any noticeable signs may occur when the problem has reached a critical level.

It is unwise to adopt a "wait and see" approach. When you call our clinic, describe the signs that you have noted, and we will let you know if

this is a critical problem or whether you could wait a day or two.

# A Pound of Cure

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Signs</b>	<b>Action</b>
Aint Doin' Right (ADR)	Ruffled feathers Sleeping more Decreased appetite Weight loss (body score 1-2) Decreased activity	Arrange for vet visit ASAP Place in warm cage (85F) Make food and water accessible Avoid stressing
Bleeding	Blood noted in cage Blood noted on bird Blood in droppings	Identify source of bleeding Apply pressure to site of bleeding Apply styptic if nail or beak Do not pull out blood feather Apply bandage if foot or leg is cut Contact vet if blood in droppings If mutilating, apply pipe foam collar
Bite wounds	History of fight or attack Puncture wounds Missing feathers Bruising	Arrange for vet visit ASAP Must get antibiotics Apply pressure to wounds Gently clean wounds with antiseptic Keep warm
Broken bones	Not using a leg Drooped wing Exposed bone	Restrict activity Apply a sock "jacket" if wing Bring to vet for treatment
Droppings abnormal	Diarhea-dark portion loose Polyuria-clear urine increased Green urine-white part turns green	Check closely for other problems Arrange a vet visit for diagnosis Pepto-bismol for diarrhea (1 drop for each 30 grams)
Egg binding	Straining Sitting on cage bottom Abdominal swelling Laying eggs before	Get to a vet Keep warm Provide plenty of fluids Do not get wet or apply oils Provide supplemental calcium
Lumps, bumps, protrusions	Any abnormal tissue swelling	Depends on the type If tissue protruding-immediate vet visit Protect from injury Next available vet visit
Not eating	Food not disappearing Whitish, chalky droppings Frantic behavior Weakness	Immediate vet visit Provide clear fluid by dropper Provide familiar foods Hand feed if a baby Tube feed if trained to do so
Respiratory distress	Wheezing Coughing Holding head back Passing out	Avoid handling! Keep dark, quiet, and humid Get to vet for oxygen treatment The problem is then treated
Seizuring	Twitching Loss of consciousness Wing flapping Spinning Falling off of perch	Pad the cage or put in a box Keep cool Time the seizure See vet-usually there is a serious underlying problem
Head trauma	Flew into object Various levels of incoordination Pupils not the same size	Keep cool, dark, and quiet If no improvement in 10-15 min, call vet
Vomiting	Pumping of neck Mucus matting of head feathers Pools of vomited material Soft, "squishy", crop	Offer water in small volumes Remove any new foods If occurs more than once, see vet