

EGGLAYING IN PET BIRDS

What it means, why it matters, and what to do about it

Bay Area Bird & Exotics Hospital

☎ 415-566-4359 ✉ reception@birdandexoticsvet.com

Excessive egg laying is a time-bomb situation. A bird in peak health on an ideal diet may sustain up to 10–20 eggs per year without serious harm — beyond that, consequences are inevitable regardless of how the bird looks. For a bird on a seed-based diet or with an underlying health problem, any egg laying at all is dangerous.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

- Female birds can lay eggs without a male present — these eggs are infertile and will not hatch even if incubated. This surprises many owners.
- This can occur in any species but is most common in **cockatiels, lovebirds, budgies, canaries, and finches**
- Egg laying can begin anywhere from 5 months to over 10 years of age — age is not a reliable predictor
- In the wild, egg laying is a natural seasonal process. In pet birds, it can become a compulsion that drains vital nutrients and leads to life-threatening complications including **egg binding** and **yolk peritonitis**.
- **Every egg laying bird should be examined** by an avian veterinarian — to screen for underlying disease, establish a sound nutritional program, and develop a prevention plan
- We keep birds in an eternal spring – good temperatures, no wind or rain, no predators, plenty of food that is often high in fat. We aren't going to change these factors so we have to work on others



ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS

- Certain environmental factors predispose pet birds to lay eggs — correcting these will often reduce or eliminate the behavior

Factors That Encourage Egg laying	Ways to Discourage Egg laying
High-fat seed diet	Convert to a low-fat formulated diet (pellets)
Access to a nest box or nesting material	Remove nest box; place a wire grate in the cage bottom to prevent access to bedding or paper
Access to dark, enclosed spaces	Restrict access to dark enclosed spaces throughout the home – this includes inside closets or drawers, under furniture, under hair or clothes or even under bedclothes!
Presence or sound of a male bird	Remove or separate from male birds and any items or toys that stimulate sexual interest
Allowing free flight	Clip wings to reduce potential nest sites and discourage instinctual nesting behavior

Petting the lower back or abdomen	Limit petting to the head, neck, and upper body only – no inappropriate touching!
Removing eggs immediately after laying	Allow a full clutch of 3–5 eggs and let her sit on them for 3 weeks or until she abandons them — this reduces total eggs laid
Stable, familiar cage environment	Move or remodel the cage when she begins acting “nesty” — mild disruption can distract from nesting behavior



MEDICAL PREVENTION

- Environmental management is the first line of intervention — but it is sometimes impractical, insufficient, or unsuccessful on its own
- Hormonal treatments include Lupron (leuprolide acetate) and deslorelin acetate (must be imported). Both these hormones work by overstimulating the reproductive tract so it shuts itself down. You can even see more eggs produced as a result!
- Lupron – an injection that usually takes 5-7 days to work. This only stays in the body a few weeks but 1 injection may be all your bird needs.
- Deslorelin – an implant requiring anesthesia. This may take 2-3 weeks or even longer to have an effect and appears to last about 6 months on average.
- Neither of these treatments will work if there is a stimulus back home (a bonded male, a nest box...)
- If hormonal treatment is ineffective, surgery can be performed to permanently stop egg-laying — the procedure is highly effective and reserved for cases unresponsive to other intervention as it is not without risk

The risk of surgical intervention is preferable to the certain decline that results from uncontrolled chronic egg-laying. If your bird is a persistent layer, this conversation is worth having with your veterinarian sooner rather than later.

Questions? We’ve heard weirder ones. Call us.

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