How to Take Care of Your Bird's Beak

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Who says opposable thumbs are required? If you've ever seen your bird tear into a toy, delicately pick her favorite nuggets from her food dish, or climb down the cage bars upside down, you'd realize that a bird's "essential thumb" is her beak. A bird's beak is used for tasks small and large, from preening a single feather to defending her territory.

a note on trimming beaks

See an avian veterinarian if you suspect that your bird's beak is growing unevenly. Your avian veterinarian can determine the reason for the problem as well as trim it to prevent

signs of a healthy beak

A healthy bird has a healthy beak. And a healthy beak means that your bird will be using it to eat, play, and chew. If your bird's beak is hurting him in some way, he will avoid using it. Signs that your bird's beak is in tip-top shape include:

- Smooth, symmetrical appearance
- No peeling or unusual textures (although a cockatoo's beak will normally have a powdery appearance)
- No discolored areas
- The upper beak should align with the lower beak

Check with your regular avian veterinarian to see if the tip of your bird's beak is as short as it should be (that is, normal for her

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problems with eating or preening. Beak trimming is best performed by a veterinarian, unless you have considerable experience. If a beak is trimmed too short, it will cause the bird pain, will bleed, and may make it difficult or impossible for a bird to eat.

particular species).

signs of an unhealthy beak

The most common beak abnormalities include:

OVERGROWN BEAK: This condition may occur when the upper beak or lower beak grows too long. The upper beak overgrows far more often than the lower beak. An overgrown beak can be the result of health problems including trauma, developmental abnormalities, nutritional imbalances, polyomavirus-like infections (finches), or liver disease (especially in budgies).

SCISSORS BEAK: This condition happens when the upper beak grows to one side of the lower beak, and it is a developmental abnormality that occurs most commonly in cockatoos and macaws. It is thought to be caused by improper temperature during artificial incubation, genetics, incorrect feeding techniques, nutritional imbalances, trauma, or infections.

"PARROT BEAK": This condition takes place when the tip of the upper beak rests on or inside the lower beak. This developmental abnormality is most commonly seen in cockatoos. The cause of this condition is unknown but may include genetics, improper incubation, and hand-feeding techniques.

at-home beak care

Beak care is critical for the overall health of the bird. The beak is the entry for food and water and is used for climbing and playing. Fortunately, with the variety of products on the market made specifically for caged birds, as well as the large amount of information available, you can ensure your bird is getting all the nutrients she needs and be aware of any problems.

Some at-home care includes:

- Great nutrition – a premium pelleted food and plenty of fresh vegetables.
- Offering your bird chew toys – you name it, any toy that a bird has to work at chewing will help keep her beak trim. These include build-your-own toys. You can alternate mineral pieces with rope, wooden blocks, plastic beads, and natural coconut pieces. The more toys your bird has to chew, the more she'll chew. Be sure to rotate toys often to prevent boredom.
- Give your bird a conditioning perch she can rub her beak against. This wiping action will help keep the beak clean.
- Hide food treats in a wooden toy, which will require the bird to chew to remove the treat.

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Your bird's beak, like our all-important opposable thumb, makes it possible for her to perform daily actions that affect her well being. Make sure this essential part of her anatomy is in the best shape possible, and it will go a long way towards keeping her happy and healthy.

We Recommend

ZuPreem AvianMaintenance FruitBlend is a nutritious food that is highly digestible.	Roudybush provides excellent daily nutrition.	Bird Kabobs make ideal chew toys.	Safety Pumice Perchsmart design features real pumice on sides to trim claws and condition beaks.

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