What to do About Problem Feather Picking

Drs. Foster & Smith Educational Staff

Is your bird picking himself bald? Of all the bird questions we receive, questions about feather picking are the most common. Feather picking problems occur when natural preening behavior goes awry and becomes an obsession.

Medical issues such as disease, parasites, hormonal changes, poor nutrition, or allergies can all contribute to picking problems, so your first stop should be your veterinarian. Beyond that, several non-medical situations can also cause feather picking:

- Anxiety related to:
  - Changes in the environment – either real or perceived by the bird
  - Any household stress
  - Change in or lack of attention
- Boredom
- Inadequate early care (from previous owners)

To work toward a solution, try any of the following ideas to enhance your bird's quality of life:

Encourage independent play with foraging toys to occupy your bird's time and give him a challenge.

Eliminate anything your bird may be afraid of such as a menacing lamp, views of perceived predators like outside birds, and other frights.

Remove toxins (i.e. cigarettes, candles, and Teflon pans) from your bird's environment.

Frequently clean your bird's cage and accessories to minimize allergens. Be sure to use bird-safe cleaners.

Keep your bird's skin hydrated with proper indoor humidity or regular use of a mister.

Spend time with your bird each day, so he will not have to resort to attention-seeking behaviors; if he plucks for attention, leave the room, then come back and offer a reward when he exhibits positive behavior.

Make life happier: increase cage size, change toys frequently, and set up playstands in a variety of places.

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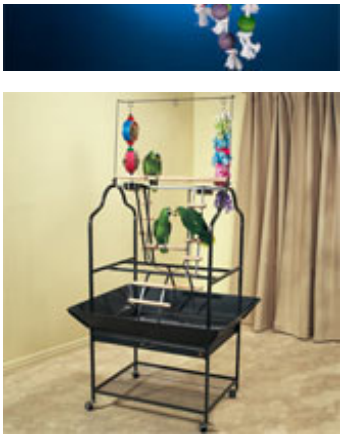
If feather picking behavior does not have a medical cause as diagnosed by your veterinarian, work with your veterinarian or animal behaviorist to identify other possible causes. Then, institute a plan that may include any of the above changes to take your bird from an obsessive picker to a calm, happy companion.



Learn more about bird stress: Bird Stress Checklist »

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