Bird Health Tip: How to Check Droppings

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The fast, free, and easy health exam

Since birds are closer to the wild state than most other pets, they are good at masking signs of illness. Unfortunately, this may delay diagnosis of problems, so bird owners must be creative in observing their bird's condition. One quick health indicator is a bird's droppings. Daily inspection of cage papers can tell you if your bird is stressed or becoming ill, alerting you in timely fashion to the need for corrective care.

The digestive system of your bird is physically simple and efficient. From consumption to elimination, the digestive process takes less than a day; thus droppings can provide you with information you can correlate with recent meals, activities, or events. Become familiar with the appearance of your bird's normal droppings, and if something is amiss, you can quickly spot abnormalities and bring them to your veterinarian's attention, if necessary.

Droppings have three components: feces, urine, and urates. These are combined at the end of the bird's digestive and urinary tracts and are usually evacuated together as one dropping. Changes in any one of the components can offer clues to your bird's condition. Droppings should be inspected for color, texture, moisture content, and number. Droppings age quickly, though, and as they age, they intermingle, making them more difficult to inspect correctly.

What is Normal?

The droppings of each species vary. Factors such as diet and age also come into play. Frequent elimination is normal - inspection of droppings over

Cage liners:
The material used to line

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several days will define what is normal for your particular bird.

The dropping should be odorless. Normal qualities should include:

- **Feces** should be firm and dark brown or green in color, depending upon the species of bird and the diet. If the staple diet is seed, feces will be green; while if the staple diet is pelleted food, it will take on the color of the pellets. When feces dry, they often look black.
- **Urine** should be clear.
- **Urates** should be creamy-white, opaque, and almost chalky in appearance.

the cage will make a huge difference in your ability to "read" droppings. Avoid coarse bedding, since it makes observing droppings nearly impossible. Either use our Cage Liners or smooth, unprinted newsprint paper. Either are inexpensive, hygienic, and will neither alter the color of the droppings nor absorb them.

Budgerigars (parakeets) normally produce 35-50 droppings per day, while larger birds produce less. Nectar-feeding birds, such as lories and lorikeets, will have large numbers of more liquid-like droppings.

What is Abnormal?

You need to be able to distinguish between a temporary change and, for example, a bout of diarrhea. Also, watch for changes in color, volume, consistency, and number of droppings. Some abnormal signs include:

- **Feces** light in color, mustard yellow, rusty brown, or containing blood
- Unusually large **feces** or feces that are coarse-textured, watery, or mushy
- **Feces** that contain undigested food or have a foul odor
- **Urine** with any color at all
- **Urates** that are yellow or green
- Any significant increase or decrease in the number of droppings

To avoid misinterpreting signs, take your bird's recent meals into account. Blueberries or beets will significantly alter feces color. A diet high in moisture, such as fruits and vegetables, will increase urine output.

Unfortunately, all droppings do not end up conveniently on the bottom of the cage. To remove droppings from cloths, walls, carpeting, cages, perches, and toys, we recommend Poop-Off, a nontoxic, biodegradeable cleaner.

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Other Symptoms of Illness

If changes in droppings do occur, be on the lookout for other telltale signs such as:

- Lethargy
- Not eating
- Sitting low or huddled with or without ruffled feathers
- Rattled, wheezy, or open-mouth breathing

If your bird exhibits any of these symptoms, contact your avian veterinarian immediately. If you need to take your bird in for an exam, be sure to bring along the cage papers, so the veterinarian can examine the droppings, as well.

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