



### **Yearly Check Ups for Birds**

Birds benefit greatly from regular veterinary check ups. Since birds commonly mask signs of illness for as long as possible, a regular yearly veterinary exam is important to help detect problems early, and to establish a normal “baseline” for your bird. At the Avian and Exotic Animal Hospital we recommend the following as a part of your bird’s yearly check up:

1. **Complete physical examination by an experienced avian veterinarian.** The “hands-on” approach is a critical part of determining your bird’s condition and identifying changes that subtly occur that you, the owner, may not notice.
2. **Accurate measurement of your bird’s weight.** A drop in weight can be a very early indicator of illness, long before other signs of illness appear.
3. **Fecal cytology.** A microscopic examination of a swab from your bird’s feces can detect unusual bacteria, yeast or other fungal organisms, red or white blood cells, parasites and other abnormalities.
4. **Choanal cytology.** By examining a sample obtained from the choana; the passageway into the cervical and cephalic air sacs, a general assessment can be made as to the health of the respiratory system and can be used as a way to identify early health concerns.
5. **Hematocrit and total serum solids.** A single drop of blood collected from your bird allows us to estimate protein levels and detect anemia, another early indicator of illness.
6. **White blood cell morphology and differential.** Microscope analysis is performed on a portion of the drop of blood collected.

If any abnormalities are detected, additional testing can be done immediately to pinpoint your bird’s medical problem so that treatment can begin as soon as possible. The following actual examples from cases seen over the last few years may help illustrate the benefits of yearly exams for birds:

1. A three year old female cockatiel presented for yearly check up and it is discovered she has lost nearly 15 grams from her previous weight, and has lost breast muscle mass. She is also mildly anemic. Her drastic weight loss was not

apparent to her owners since feathers conceal thinness. Her behavior at home is completely normal. Additional testing reveal a bacterial infection and antibiotics are prescribed at once.

2. Three Amazon parrots present for their yearly check ups. All three are found to have significant yeast infections although they appear completely normal. The birds are started on yeast medication at once.
3. An Amazon parrot presented for yearly check up has gained nearly 80 grams since last year and is quite obese. It is revealed that the spouse of the bird's owner "feels sorry for the bird" and has been giving him large amounts of sunflower seeds. The owners are encouraged to get the bird's diet back on track, and obesity related disease is hopefully prevented.