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Dear Toolady.com Family,

In ***My Human, My Slave***, the avian authors, Echo and Dust Bunny, introduced you to their methods of training the perfect human slave. This is a totally new way of approaching the relationship between Avians and Humans. With the success of the book orders, it appears to be a method long overdue.

Previously, all training books have been written from the human viewpoint. We thought it was time for the humans to learn what the birds think and for humans to have a source of constantly improving information and resources. This concept we created, is a series of books, like this one, on bird-related subjects, written by the birds themselves, that will make learning about bird behavior and care more fun.

In ***My Human, My Slave***, you met Echo and Dust Bunny, in ***Guide to Birdie First-Aid***, you were introduced to Asia, then in ***Guide to Birdie Biting***, you met Killian. In this book, the third of the series of informational books written by members of my flock, you become re-acquainted with Dust Bunny as she tells you about feather plucking and all of the things that can cause it.

As more flock members are added (Through our ***Echo's Haven Bird Rescue***) new birds will be able to write about their particular specialties.

In this, our second year, Toolady.com has stepped up our efforts to bring you all the information you will ever need for your bird's continued health. We have added over eleven new experts, FREE web sites for birds, articles, chat boards and other things too numerous to name. We are here to make the effort to ensure that ALL captive birds live with humans that are well trained in avian subjects and that the humans ALWAYS have a place to go to have questions answered quickly.

Please keep this book readily accessible. While this topic may not be life threatening, it can be very important to the health and happiness of your home. Thank you from the flock.

Echo, Asia, Maya, Rosie, Dust Bunny, Lint, Killian, Siobhan and Toolady (aka Elizabeth Aaron and Gail Martin)

To go to **MY HUMAN, MY SLAVE**

<http://www.toolady.com/books/MyHumanMySlave/index.htm>

Toolady Presents:

A Guide to Feather Plucking

By: Dust Bunny 'Too



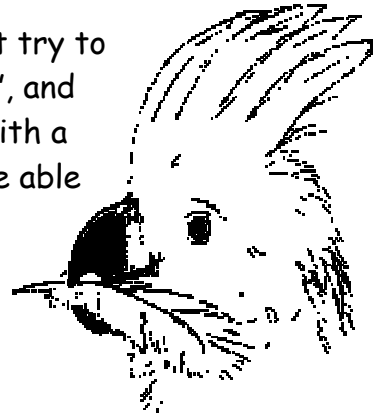
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Introduction

In previous books, my flock has covered everything from the basic care and training of human slaves, "**My Human, My Slave**", written by Echo, and myself, to why birdies bite, "**A Birdies Guide to Biting**" written by Killian Pionus. We even got together and created a coloring book for the little slaves. It was recently pointed out to me by Lint, that a serious issue that had not yet been addressed was feather plucking. Numerous birdies throughout the world suffer from this affliction every day, and I feel that if our slaves were able to recognize the symptoms of feather plucking and understood what can cause an otherwise perfect master to start disfiguring him/herself, we could nip this problem in the bud. (Forgive the pun please.)

Within the pages of this book I will first try to explain what exactly defines "feather plucking", and what the numerous symptoms are. Hopefully, with a little guidance from us, our human slaves will be able to learn the differences between feather plucking and normal grooming behavior. Learning to recognize this problem is of course the first step in helping to solve it.



I will also be exploring the reasons why birdies may decide to pull out their beautiful plumage. The reasons for feather plucking are as wide and varied as the different species of birds who have decided to move from the wild and take on the responsibility of having human slaves, and can range from the purely physical to the psychological. Often, an unknowing slave, with the best intentions of helping, can actually contribute to these reasons, making the behavior worse.

Finally, I will address simple suggested solutions to the feather plucking problem. My hope is, that with this manual to help them, our slaves will be able to prevent feather plucking behavior from ever occurring, therefore helping to keep us happy and healthy.

What Is Feather Plucking?

One of the worst conditions of caged birdies is that of feather plucking. This is "an obsessive, destructive behavior pattern of birds during which all or part of their feathers are methodically pulled out, amputated, frayed, or in some other way damaged"¹. This type of behavior can often prevent normal feather growth and emergence. Luckily, birdie slaves frequently scrutinize their masters, and feather problems are usually readily detected. There are other clinical conditions of caged birdies that are much less obvious and therefore, are less frequently able to be detected.

The first thing to think about is what sort of picking it is. Feather plucking (also known as feather mutilation) comes in many different patterns. Some birdies bite their feathers off flush at skin level, leaving nothing behind but down and broken feather shafts. Others actually pull their feathers out leaving nothing behind but bald patches of skin. None of this should be confused with molting or normal grooming. It is normal for us to beak our feathers while grooming our flockmates or ourselves. Our feathers have a wide variety of functions: temperature regulation, flight, protection against environmental and climatic extremes, and courtship displays (colorful feathers, selective erection of certain feathers, etc.) Without our feathers, we would be unable to survive in the wild. Therefore, it is very important that we pay regular and careful attention to our feathers, without over doing it. It is not only normal but also necessary for us to use our beaks during molting to pull the feather sheathing off of our new feathers. For those of our humans who don't know, molting is the normal process by which our old, worn feathers are lost and subsequently replaced by new ones. The frequency of this event can vary according to the species as well as the individual characteristics of a birdie. Climate and geography can also be factors. In warm climates, most birdie masters will drop a small number of feathers intermittently throughout the year and then have 1-2 heavy molts each year. For our slaves' sanity, the processes of molting and preening must be distinguished from feather picking, otherwise they will have nervous breakdowns trying to figure out what they have done wrong.

¹ From an internet article *How to Manage Feather Picking*

When our humans are trying to distinguish the signs of plucking behavior as well as trying to figure out the causes, they need to look at the pattern. Are the feathers completely pulled out or are they just chewed apart in the middle? Is the skin broken and mutilated?² Are the feathers themselves normal looking, or are they picked at the gill base? Is the structure and color of the feathers normal, or are they dull, frayed or crossed with black bars that bear a resemblance to a sergeant's stripes?

How To Diagnose Feather Plucking

Feather plucking/picking is really not very difficult to diagnose. After all, almost all affected birdies look very much the same. No matter the pattern of feather loss, damage and/or mutilation, and exposed bare skin below the neck, the birdies head feathers are spared and always appear perfect and untouched. This is, of course, because most of us are not flexible enough to reach our own head feathers. The one significant exception to this is going to the poor birdie whose feathers are being picked by a cage mate. As I mentioned earlier, birdies who are caged together often times will engage in mutual preening. However, in some cases, this behavior can become obsessive and destructive, resulting in feather picking. In these cases, the head feathers of the "victim" are not spared.



Plucking can vary in severity, from the breaking off of little parts of the feathers, to actually pulling feathers all of the way out, causing wounds and damaging the skin. While feather plucking may seem to be a minor

² Note from Lint: This behavior is especially prevalent in cockatoos; don't ask me why.

problem that is mainly cosmetic, it is much more serious than that. If a birdie pulls out his/her feathers repeatedly, permanent damage to the feather follicles can occur, causing the feathers to no longer grow back and leaving the birdie permanently bald in those places. Damage to the skin can become infected and even become life threatening. It is very important that our humans quickly diagnose this problem and do everything in their power to prevent it.



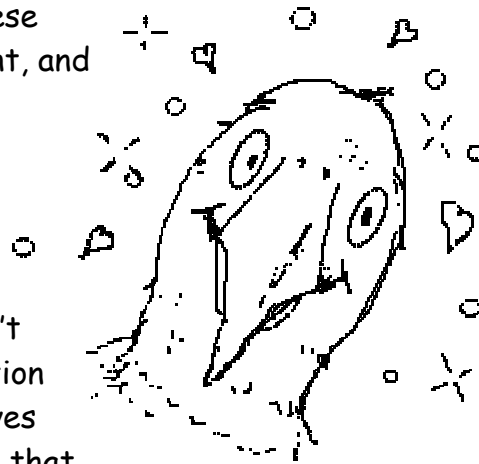
Reasons for Feather Plucking

Feather picking is almost always a problem for psitticines who have taken on the responsibilities of human slaves. Wild birdies don't feather pluck because quite honestly they are too preoccupied with their own survival and with reproduction. Birdie masters tend to endure stresses not experienced by their wild counterparts. Malnutrition, solitary living, absence of a mate with which to fulfill courtship rituals and mating needs can cause significant stress, then there are the stresses associated with confinement within a home (noise, confusion, presence of pets, such as dogs or cats, which to the inexperienced birdie master represent potential predators), as well as the added stress of trying to train an independent human to be the perfect slave. The list of birdies most prone to this awful behavior includes Timneh and African gray parrots, cockatoos, all types of macaws, conures, gray-cheeked parakeets, and cockatiels. Oddly enough, feather plucking is very rarely seen in budgies or Amazon parrots.

There are both medical and non-medical causes for feather picking, and honestly, the medical reasons are much easier to deal with. The non-medical or psychological reasons are much harder to distinguish and

extremely difficult to correct. While many birdie do pluck due to behavioral and environmental problems, before allowing your humans to contact a behaviorist or a "birdie shrink", make sure that they take you to a good avian veterinarian to rule out all medical reasons. The major medical causes can include:

✂ Changes in hormone levels- Hormonal frustration cannot be disregarded as a cause for feather plucking in sexually mature birdies. In the wild, we bond very closely with our mates, and the inability to do so while training human slaves is enough to make any birdie pull out their feathers. It is very easy for sexual frustration to be overlooked as a cause for feather plucking. After all, in many cases, our slaves don't even know our true gender. Psitticines obviously do not have external genitalia, and therefore it is impossible for our humans to determine our sex at a glance. We do, however, have gonads (a single ovary or testes) located inside of our bodies, and these glands produce the very same hormones (testosterone and estrogen) that go rampaging through our slaves' bodies. These sexual hormones are very potent, and can cause a lot of changes in a birdie's behavior. In the wild, finding a mate, and engaging in courtship and mating behavior, would follow these behavioral changes. This doesn't work in the master/slave situation we have chosen to place ourselves in however, and the frustration that follows can often lead to feather plucking. There are some investigators who believe that hormonally influenced plucking behavior is actually the result of a birdie trying to create a "brood patch".³



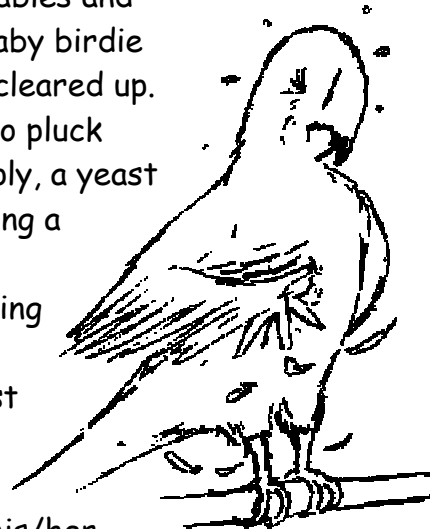
Unfortunately our humans can exacerbate this behavior, if we become closely bonded with them, by unknowingly duplicating courtship behavior. Some of us are so mistakenly turned on by our

³ A completely featherless area on the breast that allows very efficient transfer of heat from a birdie's body to the egg(s) he/she is incubating.

humans that we hork up love nuggets. ⁴ Some birdies even unwittingly discover self-gratification through rubbing themselves against parts of their human's bodies that they regard as appropriate for mating. If our humans are not able to provide us with real mates, then our interactions with them must be limited so as not to stimulate the sexual urge, causing the frustration to turn inwards and starting us on the road to destroying our feathers.⁵

✂ Malnutrition- A diet lacking in all of the vitamins and nutrients necessary to keep us healthy, especially vitamin A, can contribute to a scruffy appearance. The lack of proper nutrition can also cause the skin to dry out, making it itchy.

✂ A bacterial or fungal infection of the skin and/or feather follicles- The most common of these infections is, of course, candida. (An intestinal yeast infection) Unfortunately, this type of an infection in itself can be a symptom of an insufficient diet, dirty water, soiled produce (such as fruits, vegetables and pastas), or even a left over from a baby birdie infection that was never completely cleared up. As to why this would cause a birdie to pluck his/her feathers, well, put quite simply, a yeast infection itches. ⁶ In addition to giving a birdie a sour tummy, it can cause a reaction that dries out the skin, making a birdie pick and scratch at his/her skin. Eventually, the colonies of yeast that are living in the birdie's intestines completely block any nutrients from being absorbed into his/her body, once again causing the skin to dry out and become itchy.



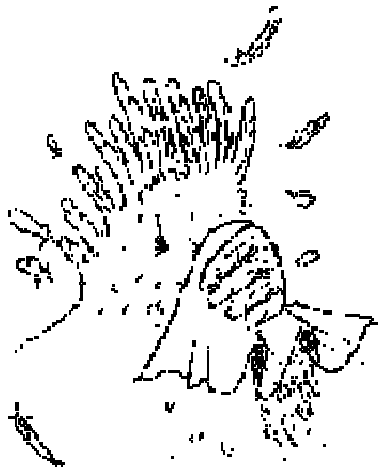
⁴ Note from Maya: Try not to do this, as much as our mates in the wild may appreciate this, our human mamas most certainly **do not!**

⁵ Goodness knows that humans have done much more destructive things in the name of sexual frustration.

⁶ The human mamas can get a similar type of infection, and I am sure can agree that it itches, **a lot!**

☞ Dry, itchy skin-Besides all of the previously mentioned reasons for skin being dried out and causing feather plucking, a birdie's skin can also become flaky and itchy from a lack of moisture. Low humidity, which is frequent in the dry climate controlled homes of our slaves, is not a natural environment for us. This lack of humidity can quickly cause our skin to become dry and itchy. What starts out as an urge to scratch an itch can quickly become full-blown feather plucking behavior. Frequent baths and showers, although some birdies don't like them are a necessity, since most of us avoid plucking at damp or wet feathers.

☞ Allergies-Just like our human slaves, we aves can develop allergies to certain foods or chemicals. These allergies can once again cause our skin to dry out, become flaky and itchy, and make us tear at our feathers in an effort to relieve some of the discomfort.



☞ Heavy metal poisoning- this one seems to me to be rather self-explanatory.

☞ Pain underneath the area being plucked-This in itself can, of course, be a symptom of a much more serious condition. These sources of pain can include abscesses, tumors, liver or kidney disease, or even assorted bone problems. Luckily, while serious, these problems are fairly straight forward, and are very simple for your vet to test for.

⌘ Internal disease- Here we get into some **very** serious stuff. The first disease that comes to mind here is Psitticine Beak and Feather Disease. PBFD is a deadly disease that attacks the immune system of psitticines, very much like AIDS affects humans.⁷ With this disease, a birdie's feathers may appear to have been plucked or stripped. If your head and upper neck feathers are involved in the problem, and there is no other bird who could be plucking you, you should schedule a trip to the vet. It is very important to your peace of mind, and your slave's, that your human take you to the vet to rule out PBFD immediately.

⌘ Giarda

⌘ Tapeworms

⌘ Wing Clips- a poor wing clipping can leave ragged ends or shafts of a bad length that can irritate or scrape at a birdie's body, causing him/her to pluck at the offending feathers.



⌘ Molting- though molting is a natural part of a birdie's life, sensitive skin and sensitive new blood feathers can cause an irritable master to play with and pick at them.

⌘ External parasites (lice or mites)-Interestingly, and contrary to popular opinion, external parasites (mites in particular) are extremely rare among caged birds, and are almost never the cause of feather picking. Often this is a diagnosis offered by pet stores right before they try to sell your human an anti-feather mite spray. Your human slave should **never** spray you for feather mites

⁷ For more information on PBFD see **Guide to Birdie First-Aid** by Asia S MacCaw

“just in case”. This is a dangerous practice and should be done only by an avian vet. There have been many birdies harmed by the indiscriminate use of toxic preparations marketed to control bird lice.

Once all physical and medical causes for feather plucking have been eliminated, non-medical (psychological) and stress related causes should be investigated further. These causes can include, but are not limited to:

✂ Changes in the Environment- Sometimes changes in environment can cause a birdie to become overly stressed. Though our humans may not realize it, we are creatures of habit. New people, moving our cages, changes in our cages or our rooms, the absence of people that we are used to, changes in a slave's dress or appearance, even alterations in diet or the daily schedule we have grown used too are all enough to cause extra stress and perhaps even induce feather plucking behavior. Being moved to another location in the house can definitely contribute towards feather plucking. An outgoing, interactive birdie who lives in an area of the house where he/she receives a good deal of attention from family and guests walking past his/her cage, might start plucking to gain attention, if moved to a quieter place, where there is less interaction with people. On the other hand a timid shy birdie, who has suddenly been moved to a high traffic area in the house, might from sheer nerves start plucking him/herself. Construction can often offer another environmentally based reason for feather plucking. Some of us are so sensitive, that the vibrations caused by construction can disturb us enough to start biting our feathers.⁸ Sometimes, not realizing that we are still wild creatures at heart, our humans will subject us to situations that make us feel vulnerable to predators. Workers working on wiring in the ceiling or along the walls can seem, to a frightened birdie, to be some strange sort of urban raptor.

⁸ Grays seem to be very sensitive to this type of disturbance.

✂ Emotions-We are very sensitive to our humans' emotions. When they are sad we may clown around to cheer them up⁹, when they are happy we may sing, laugh or chortle to share the moment with them. Tension, depression, arguing, yelling or other emotions can and will be picked up by a concerned birdie master, and could possibly cause that poor sensitive birdie to start plucking his/her feathers. In these cases, it will be seen that the plucking starts at the same time as the distressing human behavior, and goes away when harmony is restored in the home.

✂ Boredom-This is probably one of the most common causes of feather plucking and other behaviors distressing to our human slaves. Birdies are **very** active creatures with; unfortunately, very short attention spans. If we were in the wild, we would be spending a large amount of time playing, flying back and forth from place to place, foraging for food and water, mutually preening and grooming, bathing, building nests, feeding and caring for our young, and (most fun of all) shredding tree branches and leaves for the sheer joy of it! If we are not provided with sufficient diversions by our slaves, we will take it upon ourselves to find things to do to keep busy and entertained

✂ Lack of Attention- Most birdie masters are brought home on impulse. This is the worst reason for bringing home any creature. Once the master arrives in the home, everyone is ecstatic over the new arrival, at least for the first few weeks. Then usually the novelty of having a birdie master in the home wears off and the care and attention given to the bird then falls on a single-family member. The care of these poor, well-intentioned birdies usually becomes grocery store birdseed and fresh water, no fresh fruits or bird pellets. The cage probably winds up getting changed once or twice a week. The impulse reasons for a human bringing home a parrot master are as varied as the types of humans out there. The following are just a few of those reasons:

- ◇ The kids wanted a pet- this has got to be one of the silliest reasons that I have ever heard of. Psitticines are not pets, we

⁹ Our mama says that just watching and listening to us play can cheer her up out of almost any mood.

are equals if not better, and should always be the masters in the relationship.

- ◇ "We saw him in a pet store and just couldn't resist, he was so cute"- Okay, I will admit that some of us are very cute indeed, and others of us are quite startingly gorgeous, so this is a good reason to admire a birdie, not take him/her home with you. All I can say here is **don't** encourage a human to take you home with them, no matter how susceptible to your looks they are, unless you are positive that they can take good care of you.
- ◇ I always wanted one as a child- Any human that is planning to take a birdie master home with him/her, had better be absolutely sure that the responsibility won't be too much.
- ◇ We went to a bird show at the amusement park- Come on, really? Give me a break! You bring goldfish home from an amusement park, not a creature that is probably going to outlive you.
- ◇ A Christmas gift, a birthday gift, an anniversary gift, or a Valentine's Day gift- A really bad idea folks! Once again, you don't give as a present something/someone that is going to outlive you. Giving someone any kind of an animal as a present is ridiculous, and we have to do what we can to discourage a human from taking us home for that purpose.
- ◇ A surprise for the family-Uh huh, right. I can't get over this one. Surprise! You've just brought home a major responsibility. One that will be with you longer than your children.
- ◇ Companionship- Ok, this is a valid reason, and as long as the human taking you home knows that you are the master, and is prepared to be your slave and take care of you, there is no reason why the relationship won't work out.¹⁰

Eventually the original intentions of the humans to take good care of the parrot master die. Then the birdie is moved from the kitchen to the basement or to the laundry room because of the mess. What is running through the human's head by this point is, "I hate to do this, but, that's ok, after all, he/she does have a mirror in his/her cage. He/she won't get lonely." This is extremely

¹⁰ This is not to say that being taken home as a substitute for your human having a mate or any children is a good idea. That is just a recipe for disaster of another sort.

stressful to the birdie master, not to mention unfair. The birdie has been the center of attention and is now being suddenly put aside for no good reason. At first the parrot screams for attention, and that seems to bring the human into view for attention, but after awhile that stops working, and the human slave either covers the cage, throws something or sprays the parrot with a squirt bottle. Eventually the birdie master is placed where he/she cannot be heard at all. With only a mirror in the cage for entertainment, the frustration mounts, boredom quickly sets in, and the feather pulling begins. Usually a tail feather is first, or two, or three or four. Then the flight feathers and then the chest feathers are eventually plucked. If not put a stop to, the birdie master could easily move to chewing on his/her feet.

Unfortunately, once a parrot realizes that he/she can **always** get a slave's attention with this behavior, he/she may continue plucking just to be assured of getting a large amount of attention. The actual attention award varies from human to human and birdie to birdie. Some humans just yell, others will walk to the cage and tell the master how beautiful he/she is in an attempt to flatter the birdie into not feather plucking. No matter the type of attention, it is all a success story for the birdie trying to gain attention by pulling out his/her feathers.

This behavior can of course backfire. Most humans give in to acquiring a birdie master because of the physical attraction to the bird; it's general appearance, vocal abilities, feather colors and personality. Most birdie slaves prefer feather perfection. When a parrot master starts to pick at, mutilate or pull out his/her feathers, physical appearance and over all attractiveness are greatly diminished. This can cause great stress to a human slave, and if he/she is not able to cure the birdie master of the plucking behavior the poor master might find him/herself bounced to another home.

⌘ Jealousy-A new bird, a pet, family member or new love interest in your human's life can quickly cause jealousy. All of a sudden, your human is no longer paying you nearly enough attention. This reduction in the attention paid to you and the increase in attention

to other parties can be all it takes to make a birdie jealous and stressed.

✂ Anxiety-This is actually a problem with many different breeds of parrots. Considering the complexities of our society in the wild, and the large areas that would be our territories, is it any wonder that living in human homes, in restricted space, is enough to cause a birdie to turn his/her frustration inward. Add to this the stresses of other pets representing possible predators, and noisy children poking their fingers into cages and one can well imagine that life in supposed captivity, as a birdie master is extremely stressful. Just as some humans are more easily upset than others, some birdies are just more prone to anxiety, and some are nervous wrecks. We have fantastic memories, and sometimes, if we even think that we are being treated unfairly, will relive some past bad experience until it drives us to feather picking. Occasionally, without our main human slave being aware of it, a sadistic spouse or jealous child may be threatening or teasing. Maybe another flockmate is bullying, but only when your human is not in the room. In this case the birdie can develop a serious case of nerves, sort of like birdie nail biting.

✂ Lack of Sleep- This is especially a problem in young birdies. Just like our human slaves, parrots require a certain amount of sleep per night to function. Adults need anywhere from eight to ten hours of undisturbed sleep every night, and babies need at least ten hours. Trying to sleep in a covered cage in the family room at eleven o'clock at night, while your human family is watching TV, does not qualify as **undisturbed** sleep. If you were still living in the wild, you would roost as soon as it got dark and not get up until daybreak, approximately ten to twelve hours. Is it any wonder that a birdie who is not even getting a full eight hours of undisturbed sleep might start pulling out his/her feathers in frustration? After all, our humans are extremely grouchy if they don't get their full amount of sleep.

✂ Bad Habit-No matter what the original reason for a birdie plucking his/her feathers, even once that cause has been removed, he/she

might continue purely from habit. This is akin to a human smoking or biting his/her nails.

Ways to Prevent Feather Plucking

While there are no guarantees that your human will be able to affect a one hundred percent cure, there are a number of things that can be done in each situation to help prevent feather plucking. After your human is reasonably sure they know why you are plucking your feathers out, they can start trying to fix the problem.

Changes in Hormone Levels

There are a few things that your human slave can do to try to minimize the effect of hormonal changes on your life and your physical beauty.

- ✂ Once a parrot becomes sexually mature, if not before, his/her human slave should provide the proper mate and let the two of them fulfill their natural destiny by reproducing.
- ✂ If it is impossible for this to be done, then the human slaves will need to dedicate more attention to the birdie master, but must do so in such a way as to not stimulate the reproductive urges. Careful observation on the human's part will show what types of attention you can and cannot expect in this regard. If your human does inadvertently stimulate you and you "regurgitate" for him/her, it really is best if that behavior is ignored,
- ✂ Next it is always best that your human ignore the hormonally induced feather plucking so as to not encourage it. Your human should then try to distract you with another activity, avoiding the activity that triggered the behavior. Punishing you or providing drama following this behavior will just encourage you to do it some more.

If none of these suggestions work and, your human is unable to get you to you to stop plucking your feathers in any other way, they may wind up

putting you into a breeding program somewhere else. While this would certainly take care of the breeding urge, you would also lose your human family.

Malnutrition

The solution to this one is fairly simple. All that is necessary is that your human figure out what is missing in your diet, and give it to you. If you are fed a healthy, balanced diet, enriched with all of the required vitamins and minerals, it will prevent your skin from drying out and itching, therefore negating the urge to scratch and pull at your feathers.

A few suggestions of things to include in your diet are

✂ **Seeds-** Seeds are available everywhere, store well and are very convenient to feed. Although parrots do eat seeds, we tend to naturally consume a far greater variety of seed types in the wild as different plants come into season. An all seed diet tends to be high in fat and provides an imbalance source of nutrients that will lead to ill health and potentially shorten your life expectancy. Peanuts and sunflower seeds are often chosen preferentially and are particularly high in fat as well as exceptionally deficient in calcium and vitamin A. This, of course, is what leads to further malnutrition. Since the purpose here is to stave off malnutrition, it really is preferable for you to eat a more nutritious and balanced diet. Seeds, if used at all, should never make up more than 10 to 15% of your diet



✂ **Formulated or Pelleted Diets-** Pellets, crumble and hand-feeding mashes have been developed to meet all your nutritional needs. Different formulations are available for different life stages and for the management of certain diseases. Those of our babies that are hand raised are the easiest to start on pelleted diets. According to specialists, pellets are the ideal diet therefore you are encouraged to slowly train yourself to eat pellets.

☞ **Fruits and Vegetables** -Generally, any wholesome, nutritious food that your human and your humans family can eat, you can eat. Fruits, vegetables and greens should account for approximately 20 - 25% of your diet. But, pale vegetables, with a high water composition (i.e. Iceberg or Head lettuce, celery) offer you very little nutritional value. All fruits and vegetables should be washed thoroughly to remove all chemicals and be cut into manageable sized pieces. It is not necessary that your human take the skin off your fruits and vegetables, but they should be offered in a separate dish. We tend to all be rather picky birdies, but a large enough variety will definitely tempt us to eat. Listed below are a few of the types of fruits and vegetables healthy for us to eat.

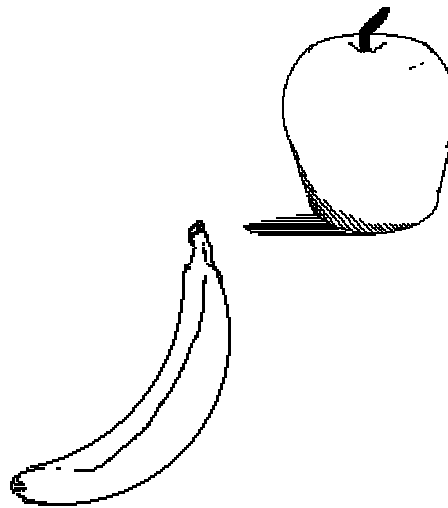
☞ Apples

☞ Asparagus

☞ Banana

☞ Beans (cooked) such as:

chick peas;
kidney
lentils
lima
mung
navy
soy



☞ Beets

☞ Blueberry

☞ Broccoli

☞ Brussel sprouts

☞ Babbage

☞ Cantaloupe

☞ Carrot tops

☞ Carrots

☞ Cherries

☞ Chinese vegetables, i.e. bok choy

☞ Coconut

☞ Corn

☞ Dandelion leaves

☞ Endive

☞ Grapes

☞ Grapefruit

☞ Kale

☞ Kiwi

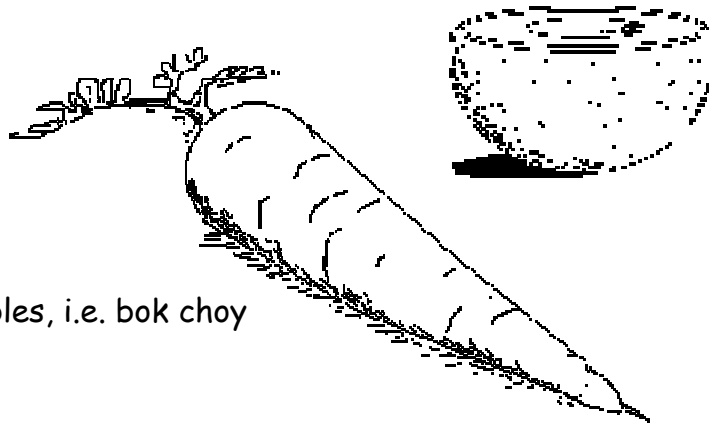
☞ Melons

☞ Mango

☞ Orange

☞ Papaya

☞ Parsnip



☞ Pear

☞ Peas

☞ Peppers (red, green & hot)

☞ Pineapple

☞ Plum

☞ Pomegranate

☞ Potato

☞ Pumpkin

☞ Rappini

☞ Raspberry

☞ Rice (brown)

☞ Romaine lettuce

☞ Spinach

☞ Sprouted seeds

☞ Squash

☞ Strawberry

☞ Sweet potato

☞ Zucchini



Your human can also make you items like birdie bread¹¹, mashed sweet potatoes, or even feed you small bites of human food. As long as a good balance of vitamins, minerals, vegetables and enzymes are maintained, there is no reason why you shouldn't enjoy a wide variety in your diet, including the occasional bite of your mama's cookie or ice cream.

Bacterial or Fungal infection

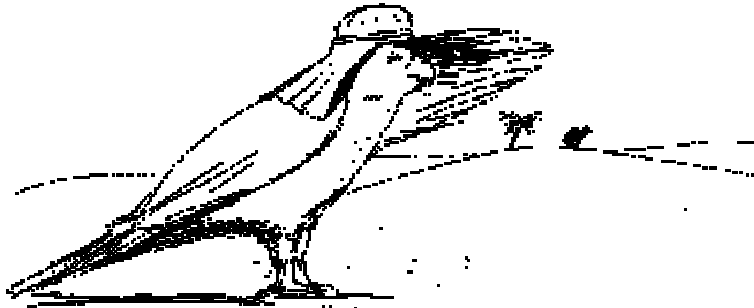
This is really something that is going to be best treated by having your human slave take you to an avian veterinarian. If a bacterial or fungal infection is causing you to pluck at your plumage, then you are going to need medicine. No matter how smart your slave is, unless he/she is also an avian vet, he/she will not be able to come up with an accurate diagnosis and the correct medications to cure your infection are not going to be readily available.

Low Humidity

Humidifiers that are well maintained, and never allowed to become dirty and to pump dangerous fungal spores into the air, can help to create a much moister and natural environment for a birdie bothered by itchy skin. If your human doesn't want to bother with this high maintenance source of humidity, a handy spray bottle or a clothes drying rack put in the birdie room to dry the family's laundered towels on works just as well. If none of these suggestions seem right for your slave, then a sheet or a large towel can be gotten wet, squeezed partially dry and placed on a rack. It may not qualify your home for *Better Homes and Gardens*, but it will work to moisturize the atmosphere for you and the rest of your flock! ¹²

¹¹ Our mama makes wonderful birdie bread, and when she makes it without the meal worms and eggshells it's even edible for humans.

¹² A little moisture in the air is good for our humans too, it helps them to breath. -Note from Asia



Aloe-vera spray is another quite effective way to sooth and moisturize itchy skin, thereby preventing plucking. Feathers that are damp and that taste of aloe just don't seem to be nearly as appealing to feather pluckers. Your slave can easily make you your own spray with aloe vera juice and distilled water in a spray bottle. Usually four parts water to one part aloe is a good solution, though it can be made stronger or weaker according to your particular needs. When buying the aloe vera, your slave needs to look for the purest possible juice, not gel¹³. Most gels are simply juice with added thickeners that really should not be sprayed on your feathers. If your human buys the more expensive brands, at least you will be able to get a product with no additional ingredients.¹⁴ You can be sprayed several times a day and sometimes, if itchy skin was the only cause, this alone will solve the problem.

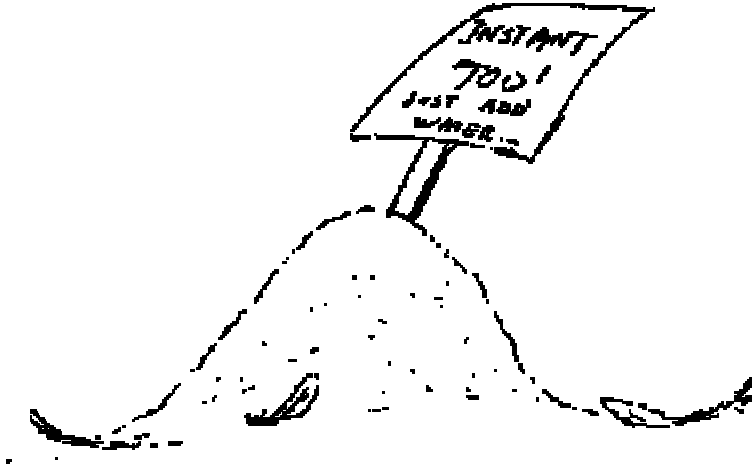
Allergies

Just like our humans, we birdies can develop allergies to different substances. There have even been instances of us developing allergies to each other. In a circumstance like this, the best solution is to get rid of whatever is causing the allergic reaction. Sometimes, however, this is not

¹³ If your human has the patience and a substantial supply of the plant, he/she could try squeezing hi/her own.

¹⁴ Occasionally the extra ingredients in and of themselves can create problems.

exactly a doable proposition. After all, if the allergy is to a fellow flock mate, your slave is not going to want to get rid of either of you. In this case there are a few medications¹⁵ that your avian veterinarian can prescribe for you, to hopefully make your life easier, and to minimize the allergic reaction, and hopefully the feather plucking as well.



Heavy Metal Poisoning

Hopefully this has a rather clear solution, get rid of whatever is poisoning you. If a person was giving you poison, your human would not hesitate in getting rid of him/her. Hopefully he/she will do no less when it comes to possessions. Humans are attached to their toys, but it is all just stuff, you are family. You are worth infinitely more to your slave than any possession, and if you are not, then you need to find a new slave.

Pain Underneath the Area Being Plucked/ Internal Disease

As mentioned earlier, this should be taken very seriously. Pain beneath the skin, causing you to pluck your feathers, can be an indication of a much more serious condition, such as a tumor, abscess, liver/kidney disease or any of an assortment of bone diseases. Luckily these conditions are easily tested for and can be treated by a certified avian veterinarian if caught early enough.

¹⁵ Our slaves have to take these types of medications all of the time, especially those owned by 'Toos, since our feather dust **can** get rather atrocious.

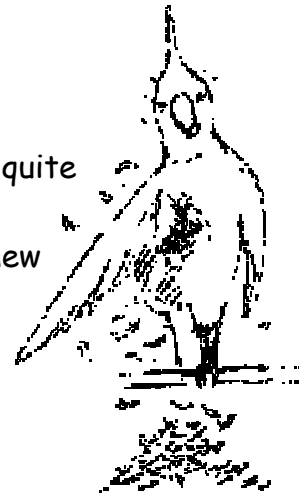
Not so easily detected, and certainly less easily treated is PBFD, there is unfortunately no cure for this disease, and all that can be done here is to treat the symptoms, and hope your human keeps in mind that you are **not** mutilating your feathers, the disease is.

Wing Clips

One suggestion here would be to of course not allow your human to clip your wing feathers. After all, if your feathers aren't clipped in the first place, then there is no way for them to be done badly. If your human does choose to not clip your wing feathers due to this consideration, he/she must be willing to accept the liabilities of having a fully flighted birdie in the house.

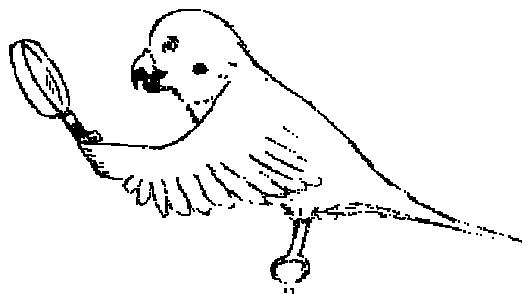
Molting

Having your human preen your feathers for you can quite frankly prevent molting induced feather plucking. What causes you to pluck your feathers is the itchiness of the new feathers growing in. If your human will pull the feather sheathings off for you, and give you lots of scratches, you will be less inclined to pluck your feathers.



External Parasites

If it is discovered that the cause of your feather plucking is indeed feather mites or bird lice, your slave should take you to the vet to be sprayed. Do not let your human give in to the pressure of pet shop attendants to purchase anti-lice spray. Definitely don't let your human spray you him/herself, as this is a dangerous proposition. Numerous birdies have been harmed by the indiscriminate use of the toxic preparations used to control bird lice.



Changes in the Environment

Often times, without realizing it, our humans can add to our problems by moving our cages to somewhere different. Humans don't seem to realize that birdies are creatures of habit, and that any change in our surroundings, or what goes on around us, can send us into a tizzy. The best solution to this of course, is to put things back to the way they were. Move the cage back to where it was, or if this is not entirely possible, your human should spend a large amount of time with you, acclimating you to the change.

Emotions

Birdies are exquisitely sensitive to the emotional states of their human slaves. If your slave is anxious, worried, or upset, you will be too. It is truly necessary for your slave to take a few deep breaths and leave his/her worries behind when interacting with you. Many cases of feather plucking have begun when parrots mirrored their over-anxious slaves' anxiety and frustration.

Boredom

Birdies need a properly sized living space! Life in a cage is not very exciting. Your human should provide you with a variety of toys and other objects with which to busy your beak. Natural, non-toxic, unsprayed tree branches are a cheap and easy way for a human slave to provide you with something other than your own feathers to destroy. Large pinecones can occupy a birdie's beak for a good long time. Food toys are also a natural activity that can occupy much of our time. When our humans give us parrots food that requires little or no effort to eat, we are left with more time for undesirable activities like destroying our feathers. Unshelled nuts require a lot of time to eat and we all seem to enjoy the challenge of digging out the insides of the nuts. For those of us too small to crack pecans and walnuts, our slaves can get the process started with a quick squeeze in a nutcracker. This will still leave lots of work for the birdie to do.

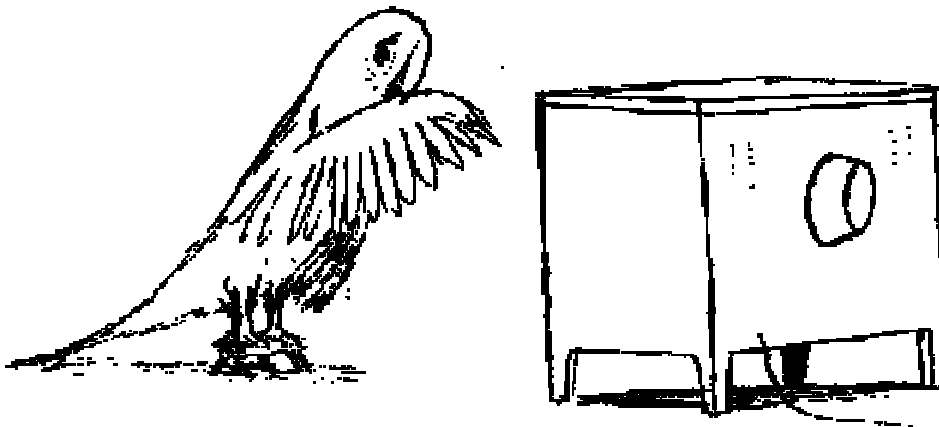


Threading different types of food through cage bars can give us a natural feeding activity and a bunch of tasty treats besides. Did you know that some birdies can be distracted with a millet spray for hours? Carrot tops, the leaves of collards and other greens woven through the cage bars near our perching area can offer a simulated foraging activity for a caged parrot master. Clean, natural rawhide strips tied into bunches of knots and hanging from our cage bars can keep our beaks busy for hours. There are lots of so called "treat toys" available from numerous parrot toy manufacturers¹⁶ and if your human doesn't have the money to buy ready made toys, it's fairly inexpensive to buy the parts for toys and build them him/herself. Ropes and swings can provide you with plenty of exercise and lots of fun! Pieces of wood, such as pine, should be much appreciated by most any parrot, and indeed, it is part of the breeding ritual of some birdies to make toothpicks out of two by four sized pieces of wood. If we were provided a REAL nest such as a dead tree log, instead of a pre-manufactured box, we would have to spend a great deal of time excavating the interior of the log and less plucking our feathers. The least our humans can do is to thank us for our care of them, is provide us with an outlet to bury this natural urge by giving us pieces of safe, clean wood to chew up and destroy. Be sure that your human slave provides you with a rope, a swing, lots of interesting toys, and a bunch of good things to chew. Ideally, you will have numerous different stations throughout the house to play at so that you can have a change of scenery. If your slave balks at this, as him/her to imagine the boredom of spending his/her entire life in one corner of one room!

¹⁶ Keep dropping copies of Hornbecks in front of your slave, he/she will eventually get the hint.

Lack of Attention

When a parrot is very attached to his/her human, it is important for that slave to MAKE TIME to interact every day, preferably on a schedule that the birdie can anticipate. This doesn't mean that he/she must be provided with his/her slave's undivided attention, but that the birdie must believe that the slave is interacting with him/her. A parrot who chooses to become responsible for a human slave can become extremely bonded to the "human mate" in the absence of a mate of his/her own kind. Lack of interaction with the human flock is also a common cause of anxiety. Separation anxiety, just as in children, can be a large problem in an emotionally attached creature, and it is a problem that can often bring on the first episodes of feather plucking. We have absolutely no way of knowing that eventually our humans will RE-appear when suddenly they DIS-appear from our little world, and considering the high degree of intelligence inherent in psitticines, it is not surprising that we may react in a negative fashion.



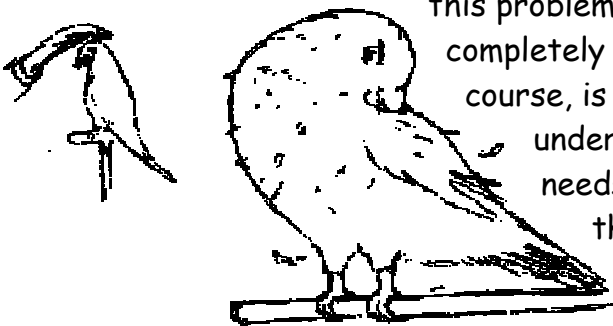
If your human absolutely must be away for an extended period of time, make sure he/she remembers to provide all of the fun distractions possible! Leaving a TV or radio on a timer for you may be sufficient for short periods of time away¹⁷, but for longer periods, it is preferable that someone is found to stay at home to interact with you, on whatever level possible, to distract you from the stress caused by your slave's absence.

¹⁷ It's also a great way for you to learn how to speak human, that's how Echo learned most of the human words that she knows.

For the non-breeding parrot master, time spent by the slave interacting with him/her is important. Humans really should not become slaves for single birdies, unless they are sure that there will be enough time to spend with their master. Human companionship can be the only social outlet for a single parrot master, and is therefore very important. Anyway, isn't that why many humans become slaves to parrots? Every birdie should be sure to set aside a regular time to interact with their slave. Even a thirty- second session of sweet talk or a quick snuggle first thing in the morning and last thing at night could make all the difference in the security level of the birdie as well as the human, and what a wonderful way to start and end the day!

Jealousy

We birdies can be very jealous of the time our humans spend with anyone or anything else. If it wasn't one hundred percent necessary, we wouldn't let our humans leave to go to work.¹⁸ Anyway, when we enter a home as an only birdie, it can be very distressing for us to have any other birdie masters suddenly appear. If is suddenly a new baby appears in our home, and all of our human's time spent on that new baby, we can tend to feel neglected, it's even worse when the drain on the slave's time is caused by another human. Another birdie, while being frustrating, is at least understandable, after all we are wonderful creatures. The best solution to



this problem, other than making your slave completely ditch the new love interest of course, is to make sure your human understands that just because he/she needs to spend time and attention on these new draws, that doesn't excuse him/her from still spending the same amount of attention on you.

¹⁸ The only reason we allow this is so that our human slaves have the ability to buy us toys and food!

Anxiety

Human slaves really need to try and limit the problem of loud noises or anything else in your environment that can be perceived as a danger. Obviously if you can see predators such as hawks and cats in your vicinity, you are going to become anxious. Changes in habits can also cause you to become a bit anxious. After all, if your human has always done things in a certain order, suddenly starts doing them in another way, you are bound to become a bit concerned. The best thing to do here, is try and let your human know that you are anxious in some other way than plucking your feathers. (Some avian behaviorists subscribe to the idea that some people can telepathically communicate with birdies. Hey, if it works for you, go with it!) Then your human can begin to try and alleviate your anxieties.



If nothing else seems to work, as a last resort, collars can be used. Your avian vet can even intervene chemically to deal with the problem of anxiety-based feather destruction. Avian vets sometimes will use something called Haloperidol (Haldol) to calm anxious birdies. However, most birdies and humans I know of prefer the use of natural anti-anxiety and anti-depressant remedies. Some of the herbal remedies that are currently being tested are ST. JOHNS WORT, KAVA KAVA, VALERIAN ROOT, and GRAPESEED EXTRACT¹⁹. There are several holistic vets now successfully using acupuncture in some cases of feather plucking. Nothing works in every case, but all avenues should be explored until the right solution for your particular needs is found.

¹⁹ These are the same things that humans use to try and regulate their emotions.

Lack of Sleep

When the natural sleep cycle of birdies in the rainforest is replaced by electric lights that stay on half the night, sleep deprivation can add to the problem of feather plucking. If necessary, a smaller cage can be set up in a quieter area of the home for a birdie to sleep undisturbed when family activities continue past birdie bedtime. Parrots need their twelve hours of undisturbed beauty sleep every night²⁰, or else they can get very cranky.



If your human doesn't want to try moving your cage, covering your cage with a heavy, light retardant cloth and turning the volume far down on the TV or radio might help. He/she might also want to try buying you a separate, smaller, cage to sleep in, placed in a small quiet room in the house. Then you can still spend the day in your play cage with all of your toys and your food, and get the sleep you need at night to be a happy healthy birdie.

Bad Habit

This is the kicker, no matter what may originally have started you on the path of feather plucking, when that cause is removed, you may find that you still pluck your feathers from habit, or from the "it hurts so much it feels good" syndrome. While this may seem incomprehensible to you now, so

²⁰ Humans need a little less sleep than this, needing six to eight hours of un-interrupted beauty sleep, But personally I feel that this is because humans now matter how hard they try cannot be as beautiful a psitticine.

does fingernail biting or smoking to most humans, yet you see how many of them do it. The best thing for your human to do in this situation is, frankly, to ignore you while you are plucking your feathers. If your human starts ignoring you whenever you are plucking yourself, but pays attention to you when you are doing something cute or funny, eventually, you will stop plucking. Of course if this doesn't work, there are always drugs. Unfortunately these only treat the symptoms and don't get rid of the cause, so as soon as you stop taking the medication, you're back to plucking. Your human can't keep you doped up forever, and as soon as he/she stops, odds are you are going to start all over again. The best thing is to break you of the habit slowly and steadily.

Conclusion

Hopefully this book has helped you to understand the reasons behind feather plucking, and has given you some ideas on what to have your human do to prevent it. Just remember, it is not an insurmountable problem. Whether the cause be physical or psychological, you can get over feather plucking and go on to lead a healthy, happy life. Just remember, your human slave will love you no matter what you look like.



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