



**Alan M Fudge, DVM, Diplomate ABVP-Avian Practice  
Practice Limited to Birds and Fish**

PO Box 1274, Taylors, SC 29687 [www.birddoctor.net](http://www.birddoctor.net)  
Tel/FAX 864-483-9940

## **FACTORS IN FEATHER PICKING**

- **DIET** Transition your companion parrot to a complete pelleted diet. Seed and veggie/fruit diets are incomplete because you cannot force the bird to eat everything it needs. Your bird will pick and choose what it wants to eat, just like a child.
- **BATHING** Birds should be bathed 2-3 times a week at minimum. Totally drench the bird with water, even getting water into the nostrils. You can take the bird in the shower or spray it with a squire bottle or pump sprayer. Use plain water.
- **SEXUAL/NESTING BEHAVIOR** Discourage reproductive behaviors by removing any toys that your bird cuddles with, hides in, regurgitates on or masturbates with. If your bird exhibits these behaviors with you, put the bird down when it happens. Ideally, put the bird in its cage to prevent reinforcement of these behaviors. Petting females over the back or males under the belly, cuddling the bird against you or offering warm, soft foods will encourage mating behaviors.
- **NERVOUS/PHOBIC BEHAVIORS** Socialization to a variety of situations from an early age is important for pet birds. Take the bird in the car with you, have different people handle the bird, and show/explain things around the house to the bird. If the bird is in a new area of the house, or if there are new pets in the home, try to get the bird used to these things by talking about it about the situation in a calm voice, as you would explain something to a child. If the bird senses that you are not afraid, you may be able to convince it not to be afraid also. Socialization is a lifelong process and will need to be reinforced through the years. Examine the area near your bird's cage to make sure there is nothing that could cause fear and cause feather picking. Anything new to a bird could be seen as a threat/predator. For instance a cage near the window could have many things pass by it (e.g. other bigger birds, animals, etc.), which the bird cannot "escape from" by fleeing.
- **ENTERTAINMENT** A bird in the wild spends portions of its day doing different things for survival. Approximately 20% of the day is spent preening, 20% of time interacting with the flock, 20% of the time foraging (finding and eating food), 20% of the day watching for predators as well as flying many miles to accomplish these things. In captivity, we place a food bowl and water bowl in front of the animal and limit their activity. Our birds learn that it has minimal predators and their flock mates (humans) are routinely away for a portion of the day. These birds then start to spend an unusual amount of time preening and over-preening by picking, clipping, chewing their feathers or mutilating their skin.