

BE ALERT — BUT NOT ALARMED!

PSITTACOSIS

Some newcomers to aviculture may not be aware that some birds species, particularly pigeons and parrots can carry *psittacosis*...a transmittable disease that can, if contracted and left untreated, have serious consequence for persons in close contact with affected birds.

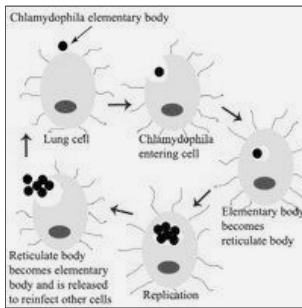
What is Psittacosis?

Psittacosis, also known as Chlamydiosis, Parrot Fever, Pigeon Fanciers Disease and Ornithosis, is a toxic bacteria *Chlamydophila psittaci* which is capable of causing death in both birds and humans. Hosts are not only parrots, but also pigeons, sparrows, ducks and other water birds, poultry, sea gulls and many other species of bird. The incidence of infection in finches and canaries is believed to be lower than in psittacine birds.

In birds the clinical signs are a “runny” eye, or eyes, (sometimes referred to as ‘a one-eye cold’) rapid extreme loss of condition, excess sleeping during the day (usually on two feet, rather than the normal single foot) and a soiled vent.

In humans the disease usually manifests itself as continuous mild ‘flu-like symptoms and shortness of breath.

What can be done to minimise the risk?



Life cycle of *Chlamydophila psittaci*

In birds the main preventative criteria are:

1. Check any birds being purchased to ensure none of the symptoms are present.
2. Quarantine all purchased birds for at least forty-two days.
3. Keep wild birds, especially parrots, pigeons, sparrows and doves off the aviary.

The reasons for the above procedures are:

1. Unhealthy birds pose a risk to you, your other birds and your pocket.
2. *Psittacosis* is opportunistic, and will manifest itself if a bird is stressed; *eg.* by the transportation process and introduction to an unfamiliar aviary. If after the forty-two day period there is no sign of the disease; the bird is probably OK.
3. Wild birds can carry the bacteria in their droppings; and if an infected dropping goes through the wire onto the floor the birds in the aviary may pick up the bacteria as they forage.

In humans the main preventative criteria are:

1. **Tell you doctor you keep birds.** Many doctors refer to it as “pigeon fanciers disease”.
2. Keep aviaries clean, as powdered droppings can be inhaled and cause infection.
3. Pay particular attention to hygiene when cleaning aviaries...wear a mask and wash thoroughly when finished.

Treatment

In birds the effective treatment is 40mg per gram *Doxycycline hydrochloride* powder administered at 5g per 500ml of drinking water for a forty-five day period. Because of the bitter taste, it may be necessary to sweeten the water with glucose powder. This treatment should not only cure an infected bird, but should also eliminate the bacteria in a “carrier” bird.

In humans, a simple blood test will ascertain if the person concerned is infected. If so, the treatment is a course of *Doxycycline* tablets as prescribed by a doctor.

It is not easy for a person to become infected; and the correct treatment will soon clear it up. But if left untreated for a prolonged period the consequences could be grave.

So, please “**be alert — but not alarmed!**”.

R.V.C.

Reference: Wikipedia...*the free internet encyclopaedia*
