

# **MOULTING IN PET BIRDS**

## **1. What is a Moults?**

Moulting is the replacement of old feathers with new feathers. It is a normal process in birds.

## **2. What does moulting look like?**

During a moult feathers that have fallen out are often found in the bottom of the cage/aviary. The new feathers growing in their place on the body initially appear like waxy pins. Usually these are more noticeable on the head.

During a feather's growth there is a large blood supply to the quill (also known as the shaft) of each new feather, these feathers are commonly called blood feathers. The blood in the feather is easiest to see in the large wing and tail feathers. This blood supply is steadily reduced as the feather matures into a normal fully grown feather.

## **3. What is an abnormal Moults?**

A moult should not cause major bald spots as a normal moult replaces a few feathers at a time with new growth shortly after.

Feathers that are discoloured or remain as pin feathers are abnormal and a disease process is likely to be the cause. Common causes of abnormal moults include viral and bacterial infections as well as liver diseases and nutritional deficiencies.

## **4. How often do birds moult?**

Moults occur once to twice a year depending on the bird species. The most common time for a moult is mid-summer, with often a second, smaller moult in early-mid winter. Most normal moults take about 6 weeks to complete.

The flight feathers of both wings are moulted and replaced in order with the outer feathers being replaced before the inner flight feathers.

## **5. Problems associated with moults.**

Moulting can be stressful for birds. A lot of energy is expended in the production of new feathers. Hormonal changes, which are a normal part of the moulting process, may also affect the immune system such that moulting birds are more susceptible to infections.

Wing clips can be potential problems during moults. Normally only a few wing feathers fall out at a time. In the wild this is to allow the bird to continue to fly

during a moult. In an unclipped wing, new blood feathers are protected by the old feathers yet to be moulted. If there are no old feathers or the feathers have been clipped too short the new blood feathers are left exposed. This can lead to injury, should the bird flap its wings on a branch or the side of the cage, and cause excessive bleeding and pain to the bird. If this happens the bird may need to have pain relief or antibiotics.

#### **6. Do birds need supplements to help during times of moulting?**

Birds on a balanced diet of pellets, some seed and fresh foods do not need vitamin supplements. Birds on all seed diets may need vitamin and mineral supplements

*<http://www.birdvet.com.au>*