



Chronic Egg-Laying in Birds

What is chronic egg-laying?

Chronic egg-laying is when your bird lays eggs more often than they should. Laying an egg places huge metabolic demands on your bird and over time excessive egg laying can lead to problems. Chronic egg laying is often caused by an inappropriately high reproductive drive. There are several factors that can increase your bird's reproductive drive including:

1. Genetics
 - Some birds are innately predisposed to laying too many eggs. ISA brown chickens are a common example of this.
2. Day length
 - The reproductive cycle of many birds is seasonal
 - In general: longer daylight hours = eggs
3. Sexual stimulation due to inappropriate human interaction or availability of a mate
 - Contact such as petting and scratching below the neck may be construed as mating behaviour, which will stimulate the reproductive drive
 - Allowing your bird to eat from your mouth can be viewed as mutual feeding by your feathered friend.
 - A "mate" can sometimes be your bird's favourite toy
4. Obesity
 - Birds with more fat reserves are more likely to become reproductively active
5. Nesting sites
 - The availability of nests or nesting boxes often increases a bird's reproductive drive
6. Neoplasia (cancer)
 - Some tumours that originate from the reproductive tract may also secrete reproductive hormones which can lead to excessive egg laying





What are some symptoms besides egg laying?

The most common accompanying signs you will see is your bird becoming lethargic or reducing its level of activity around the cage.

Birds may also become more aggressive and territorial, and may favour one family member and be aggressive to all others.

Some birds may become egg-bound, which occurs when they are not able to pass an egg due to inappropriate nutrition, an excessively large egg, poor muscular tone and a few other reasons. If this occurs in your bird they may become inappetant, fluffed up, and may strain intermittently or continuously. If you suspect your bird is suffering from egg-binding, this is a condition that must be dealt with as soon as possible and prompt veterinary attention is recommended.



What kind of birds are most prone to chronic egg-laying?

Any species of bird can suffer from chronic egg-laying; however it seems that cockatiels (weiro's), lorikeets, budgies, love-birds, eclectus parrots and chickens are most prone.

What testing can we do?

There is no specific test for chronic egg-laying, and the diagnosis is based on a number of things such as history, physical exam and sometimes organ function testing or radiographs (x-rays). Your attending vet may recommend full bloodwork to ensure that your bird is otherwise well, and also x-rays to evaluate the reproductive tract and bone density. From there we may recommend more specific treatments or testing for your bird.

What kind of treatments are available?

Treatment will be determined by the cause. If the cause is due to an over-stimulated reproductive drive the veterinarian will discuss husbandry and medical treatments with you. The most common and most frequently used medical treatment is hormone based. Hormonal injections or





implants can be used. This works by switching off the hormones which drives the reproductive cycles.

Surgical sterilization similar to what we offer routinely to our rabbits, ferrets, and guinea pigs is also an option. We will discuss whether this option is appropriate for your bird during the consultation.

What can I do at home?

There are lots of husbandry factors that we can address that will help to resolve your bird's condition at home. Some of these include:

1. Proper diet—an all-seed diet is low in calcium and protein which are the main constituents of eggs. Your attending veterinarian will discuss a diet appropriate for your bird species.
2. Light exposure – depending on each case. Most commonly we recommend following the natural daylight lengths.
3. Removing nest boxes and nesting material.
4. Confining human contact to the neck and head only.

