

Beak Trimming

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Do not assume that an overgrown beak is strictly due to the lack of beak activity or chewing. When a client brings their bird in for grooming and has never had an examination (or if it has been longer than a year) the technician (or whomever is performing the trim) should recommend a physical examination. In this way an evaluation can be made to determine a possible cause for any beak abnormalities.

The same instruments used for trimming toenails can be used on the beak. The variable speed Dremel™ tool is outstanding for trimming and shaping the beak as the speed can be controlled to minimize vibration, depending upon the size of the bird. The noise created by the Dremel™ can frighten some birds and some head vibration can be noted during the grinding, especially with small birds. If clippers are to be used, it is preferable to leave the beak a little longer than desired with the initial clip and then finish shaping with a Dremel or appropriate file as too short of a clip can be painful.

Before trimming a beak, it is essential to have a mental image of the normal appearance of the beak for the type of bird that is being groomed. With this image firmly in mind, the beak can be trimmed to the proper length and shape. As with nail trimming, smaller birds can have their beaks clipped with the appropriate instruments for their size. Larger birds require grinding or a combination of clipping and shaping. If the lower beak is overgrown, the upper beak can be gently positioned inside the lower beak. This provides the groomer direct access to the overgrown beak tissue, allowing for quick grooming.

Trimming a beak too short can lead to bleeding and if painful to the bird, it can prevent eating for a variable number of days depending upon the severity of the injury. If using a high-speed grinder, one must always be cautious when shaping the sides of the beak as the hard beak itself is not very thick and a careless groomer could wear through to the underlying vascular and sensitive tissues. Caution must always be exercised when using a grinder on small birds due to the vibration generated during beak trimming and shaping. Hepatic lipidosis (fatty liver) birds should be trimmed with great care, using a grinder sparingly, if at all. During involved beak trimming procedures such as a severe malocclusion, it may be advisable to allow the bird to rest if the procedure is taking a prolonged period of time.

To eliminate stress, it may be advisable to anesthetize a bird for an involved grooming procedure or if the bird is very excitable. The safety of isoflurane anesthesia has reduced the risk involved and is used quite frequently by avian practitioners.

Adapted from *Avian Medicine: A Practitioner's Guide 2nd Edition*. Peter S. Sakas DVM. AAHA Press 2002.