

## **Sexual Aggression in Birds**

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### **Sexual Aggression**

During their reproductive cycles birds can show varying degrees of sexual behavior and aggressiveness. Egg-laying and masturbation are manifestations. However, some birds can become very aggressive and demonstrate undesirable behaviors such as screaming and biting. Sexually active birds can become very protective about their cage or the object of their desire, be it a toy or family member. When such behavior begins it is recommended to institute means to calm the reproductive cycle. Initially, it is recommended to change the photoperiod to simulate winter-long nights and short days. That means placing the bird in complete darkness for 16 hours and daylight for 8 hours. This should be done for 2 weeks. A light cover is not enough; it must be dark. Usually placing the bird in a darkened room, away from the stimulations in the household, with a cover is adequate. In addition, removal of stimulating toys and objects (mirrors, etc.) are helpful. The owner should be instructed to not physically stimulate the bird through petting. If the bird is stroked and getting especially responsive then the handling should stop. If there are other birds in the vicinity they need to be removed to prevent visual or vocal stimulation. Changing the environment or surroundings of the bird by rearranging objects in the cage or placing it in a new location to throw them off can prove useful in control. These measures will work if followed strictly. They can be instituted whenever the bird is showing sexual behavior. These measures can also calm sexually aggressive birds of either sex during their cycle.

In addition to the conservative means of behavioral modification outlined above some other things can be tried. If the bird is able to fly, sometimes wing-clipping limits their independence and seems to calm them. If none of the conservative methods work and the behavior is irritating to the owner medical therapy may be tried. In the past medroxyprogesterone (Depo Provera) has been used for calming sexual behavior in birds of both sexes, however, due to side effects it be used with great caution, if at all. Calming or mood altering drugs such as those used for feather-picking (doxepin, clomipramine, fluoxetine and haloperidol) have been used.

### **Mate Aggression**

Mate aggression is related to the sexual aggression displayed during reproductive activity. This behavior is commonly observed in cockatoos. It typically occurs because the male is ready to breed and the female is not. If a nest box is present the male will force the female to remain inside. The male may brutalize or kill the female, usually crushing the beak or traumatizing the head. There are several suggested means of preventing it. The wings of the male should be clipped to give the female a better opportunity for escape. More than one exit should be available in the nest box so that the male cannot prevent the female from exiting. Filling the nest box with small pieces of wood has proven effective as the time needed to remove the wood delays nesting time and mimics the natural cycle. The female is more likely to be ready when the male is finished clearing the nest. It also provides the male with the opportunity for chewing behavior and also to work out aggressions on the wood pieces. If these methods do not work, then the pair can be separated and eventually the male could be tried with another female. If the male is a chronic offender then he should not be used for breeding.

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