



Keeping Your Parrot Healthy: Health Checks

Introduction

Health checks are recommended for newly purchased birds (this will safeguard the existing birds in the household, as well as ensure the new arrival is free of disease), and once or twice yearly for all other birds. Regular examination for birds is even more important, because symptoms of disease in birds can be much more subtle. Newly purchased birds should undergo a period of quarantine, and some diagnostic testing before being introduced to the resident birds. This form details the options that you have regarding health testing of your bird.

Consultation

During your consultation, we aim to do a number of different things. These include:

- A thorough physical examination
- A behavioural check-over, including training advice and minor trouble-shooting. More involved behavior cases will need a second consultation time booked
- Discussion of environmental enrichment
- Discussion of husbandry
- Weight check
- Dietary assessment
- Discussion and planning of further testing

Microscopic Examination of Faeces and Oral Swabs

Most consultations involve an examination of the droppings and or oral swabs. These can be done using wet smears, gram stains or faecal floatations (the last for droppings only).

- A wet smear will reveal worm eggs, flagellate infections and give an estimate of bacterial numbers. This is a normal part of consultations, and is free of charge.
- A gram stain will assess the bacterial groups, assist with determination of the origin of infections, and guides antibiotic choice.
- A faecal floatation is a more accurate way of determining worm burdens.

General Blood Testing

- Haematology is the examination of the red and white cells present in a bird's blood. This will show anaemia, identify subclinical illness, and demonstrate chronic diseases; often before the bird itself looks sick.
- Biochemical testing is done if any abnormalities are detected in the haematological or physical examination, in older birds or in birds on chronic medication. Biochemistry assesses the function of, and any damage to, internal organs including the liver, kidneys and pancreas.

Sex Determination

- The sex of your bird can be determined by a specific DNA blood test. While there are surgical options available for determination of sex, we reserve this degree of invasiveness for investigation of fertility problems or for breeding birds

Chlamydia/Psittacosis Testing

This is an important disease. As well as being potentially fatal for birds, it can cause chronic low grade ill-thriftiness in birds that carry it. Although rare, humans can also become seriously unwell if infected.

A blood test is performed in the clinic for direct detection of Chlamydia antibodies.

Viral Testing

There are a number of different avian viruses present in Australia, many of which have long incubation or carrier states. We will make recommendations for viral screening on a case by case basis.

- Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease. This is a highly infectious viral disease of parrots, with different species manifesting different types of disease. Clinical disease in cockatoos is usually progressive and fatal, and therefore it is highly recommended to test all young cockatoos. Lorikeets tend to have more subtle signs of circoviral infection, and can act as a source of infection for other birds. Testing of lorikeets is often advisable. Testing is also recommended for birds with suspicious clinical signs and for households with existing birds who may be at risk.
 - A PBF screening test looks for direct evidence of PBF virus.
 - A PBF diagnostic test includes direct detection of PBF organisms, as well as antibody testing of the bird.
- Polyomavirus. This is a highly infectious disease, which mainly causes disease in young or immune suppressed birds. Testing for polyomavirus is advised when introducing adult birds to a breeding establishment, or introducing a new bird to young or pre-weaned baby birds.
- Other viruses. There are other viruses present in South East Queensland that can be dangerous for birds. Currently, we do not have an economical way to screen for these, so testing is done on a case by case basis, when we have suspicion of disease. Brisbane Bird and Exotics Veterinary Service is currently working with different researchers to improve the number of diagnostic tests available.

