Egg Laying Problems

Reproductive problems are a common occurrence in many of the smaller avian species—particularly cockatiels, budgerigars (parakeets), lovebirds, finches, and canaries. A female can produce eggs without a male being present, but the egg will be sterile without a male being present.

Abnormal eggs--Causes include abnormalities of the reproductive tract, nutritional problems, and environmental causes. When fertile, these eggs can still hatch but the chances to due so are decreased. Further testing or treatments may be warranted.

Egg-binding—Causes include malnutrition, excessive egg production, malformed eggs, first time laying eggs, obesity, lack of exercise, stress, old age, breeding out of season, activity in both oviducts (their equivalent to the uterus in humans) and reproductive disease. An avian veterinarian should see a bird with this problem right away if it shows signs of depression, poor appetite, a wide-based stance, abdominal straining, tail wagging, leg paralysis, and/or wing drooping. Further testing or treatments may be warranted.

Egg Yolk Peritonitis—Egg yolk peritonitis is the bird equivalent of ectopic pregnancy. This condition occurs when the egg surrounded by yolk leaves the ovary, misses the oviduct, and is deposited in the free abdomen. Yolk is very irritating and the body responds with inflammation. Also, yolk is an excellent material for bacterial growth, so infection can sometimes occur. Clinical signs to watch for indicating a problem needing to be seen by the veterinarian right away include: weight loss, depression, difficulty breathing, anorexia, and swelling of the abdomen. Further testing or treatments may be warranted.

Chronic Egg Laying—Overproduction of eggs is a major concern in small parrots like budgerigars, cockatiels, and lovebirds. Chronic egg laying can lead to calcium deficiency, loss of general body condition, weakening of the bones, egg binding, and abnormal egg formation. Causes include genetics, malnutrition, sexual stimulation, and excessive light. Birds are often exposed to the same light schedule as we are (6am-12am), which may give them 18 hours+ of light. This signals the body that conditions are ideal for egg laying, and thus the cycle begins and maintains.

Treatment revolves around environmental changes and potential medical treatments. At home, leave eggs in the cage for up to 18 days after being laid (unless they are broken or ruptured). Separate the hen from cage mates, remove all nest box/nesting materials and any toys with which the bird interacts in a sexual manner. **Reduce light exposure to only 6 hours of light and 18 hours of <u>total</u> darkness for at least 30 days.** If extra light exposure occurs during this time, such as through a window or under a door crack, halting of egg laying will not occur. House the hen in a **windowless** room during “night”. Medical treatments may include hormone injections and hormone implants, and in some instances a partial “spay” (salpingohysterectomy) is sometimes necessary, but this surgical procedure carries a high level of risk.