



## Hormones and the average parrot

### Hormonal Times

It was the best of times, it was the most hormonal of times. If you have a parrot, you know what that is like. Sometimes it is mild and other times, it is rough on the bird and family. Being prepared, knowing what is happening, and what your role is can help. First off, this isn't about you. They don't hate you or want to hurt you. You can't stop this from happening! Having them back to "normal" isn't the goal of this missive. We are sharing our experiences with housing over 300 birds of various species, ages, both sexes, at different places in their physical health. This is not a scientific paper since science has not had to deal with the companion bird in the throes of their hormones. It is to help you cope and provide support to your bird. Coping with your bird's time of being in "season" starts with understanding what is happening.

If you want to get a different, in-depth perspective on parrot hormones, go to Flockcall <http://flockcall.com/advocate-center/kathys-blog/speaking-of-hormones-part-1/>.

The first and most important point to make before we go any further is that if you have not worked on training, understanding how to work with your bird, this is only going to help keep all other living beings in the house safe. When they are going through their season is NOT the time to start a training program with them. The second most important point to make is that not everything your bird(s) do is them being hormonal. It is a good thing to practice assessing your bird's behavior in a journal or a birdie book that you track what you are feeding them, treats they like, weights, vet visits, dates of hormone onset and end, and also document sleep times. Look to determine a pattern of changes.

### Nutrition

Food is a "process". The first layer is the pellets. Very few birds require seed or nectar but if they do, make it the best grade possible. You have to select a pellet that you would feed your children or your parents or even yourself. We have chosen TOPS and Zupreem Naturals. TOPS is a cold-pressed natural ingredient pellet so it is currently at the "top" of the pellet list. We prefer to have to deal with the Zupreem Naturals ingredient of sugar versus salt in Harrison's. We have all the ingredients listed for the top pellets on the market on our Facebook page @papayagorescue. The second layer of the food process is fresh food. Based on the time of year, consider what fresh veggies (some dark green for natural calcium) of approximately 95% of the fresh food served. Fruit should be considered for the amount of sugar introduced. This is important to keep very low during their season. Nuts are not optional. They are also important in their diet. Consider the "drier" nuts like almonds for beak conditioning and a better treat. Use high-fat seeds like sunflower seeds for

training if you use them now. The 3rd layer is herbs. We use the herbs mixed into fresh food to help support their needs of the day in their cycle. During their season, we will add several tablespoons of dried organic lavender and chamomile to about 12-15 lbs of food. We will add Red Clover in the middle of the cycle. We will use lavender and chamomile in teas as well. A nice way to have a quiet moment with your bird is to “share” a cuppa. Moral of the story? Avoid mangoes, grapes, cherries, peas, sweet potatoes and beets, and give more vegetables and herbs to help calm via food or tea.

To learn all things for excellent nutrition, go to Dr. Jason Crean on his Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/AVIANRAW/>

### Exercise

Like all animals, birds need exercise to help manage their hormones, blood flow, muscles, bone health, weight, brain activity, sleep, and resiliency. Exercise is a broader term for them than it is for us because they spend more time (most likely) within their cage than walking, sitting, flying, perching, foraging, flapping, showering, chewing, posturing or dancing, running, and/or rolling around. These things are all on the exercise list for them. Help make sure they do this with you or near you to be the reward for the partaking of these activities. Give them “cool” off time prior to putting them back into their cage. When it comes to their season, he may want to only have time on top of their cage. If he is growling, tail fanning, eyes pinning; leave the door closed. Ensure he has toys to keep him busy. How do you do that if you have a growling, tail fanning, eyes pinning bird? Give him a treat on a perch furthest away of where you want to add toys. Moral of the story? Redirect birds with toys, exercise, and stimuli to keep their minds on what is front of them.

To learn more about exercises and your bird, go to <https://avianenrichment.com/learn/physical-needs/exercise-play/how-to-get-your-perch-potato-to-exercise>

### Cage

Cages are extremely important as a bird’s home, a safe place, a trusted place. It needs to be big enough space to provide sleeping, playing, eating, foraging, flapping, and being safe. For that reason, we recommend bird cages to be of the longest width possible. Some birds like to feel as high as possible when resting which would be a dome top cage. Some birds don’t need to be higher but further back to rest and have a high place for playtime, which would be a play top cage. Here are our recommendations:

Cockatoos/Macaws (large)	Dome top	starting at 40x
Greys/Amazons/Patagonian Conures (medium)	Play top	starting at 36x (take the above-the-head tray out during the time the bird is in the cage)
Conures (small)	Play top	starting at 34x (take the above-the-head tray out during the time the bird is in the cage)
Lovebirds/Cockatiels/Parakeets/Canaries (small)	tall	flight cage that stands on its own or has a rolling stand. Suggested width starting at 30x. Notice we

		<p>did not say conures for this cage as most of the price effective flight cages available from Amazon does not have feed doors. You have to open the big door to hang a feed tray. Conures learn to wait at the main door to give you a hard time or to escape.</p>
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We use unprinted paper on both the top grates and lower trays. If your bird is a paper shredder or uses it to create pretty little tails (Lovebirds) then forego the paper on the top grate. The paper makes for easier cleanup but not if it gets the birds nest-y. There are 4 rules for cages. These are rules that should be followed for anyone that has a companion bird over say 12 weeks old. Ready?

1. No bird needs a nest, a little house, a furry hut, nest box, a bed, etc after they have fledged. They do not sleep in nesting areas that are considered the bed. If you have one in the cage, it could trigger hormones.
2. No substrate should be used in the cage. No matter where you put it, no matter what bird store told you it is a good idea to keep the “smell” down or make it easier to clean. Printed newspaper uses a vegetable dye but this dye can get on their feathers, your hands, and transferred to everything until it is cleaned with soap and water. This can cause the bird to preen unnecessarily to clean themselves of the dye.
3. In this case, more is more. Get more cage but pay attention to the bar spacing if you are trying to buy a macaw size cage for a parakeet. They just fly in and out if you are lucky, a head or body will get stuck if you are not. Stainless steel is still the best, and depending on the grade of stainless steel screws, etc. you will never have to replace it if you take care of it. It is much much easier to clean and disinfect. Aluminum cages are pretty good for the next price point for being lightweight and easy to clean and disinfect. They do not come in large sizes, however. Powder-coated is the next best.
4. The cage is his place. Respect their space. End of discussion.

Moral of the story? Get an awesomely big cage so if you have to leave your hormonal bird inside their own space, they will have room to do stuff other than to mess with the people and the dog.

### **Sleep**

Oh, what a lovely word. We have seen that birds not getting at least 12 hours of sleep within the dark hours seem to have elevated stress levels as well as negative behaviors such as screaming, feather plucking, or lack of interest in daily activities. When birds sleep, they lock their legs so they don’t fall and they will feel every vibration on their perch. They sleep with one eye open for the most part. If they are in the middle of the livingroom to be with everyone, use a sleeping cage or move the cage into an adjoining room to give them the dark and quiet they need. Don’t move them to the backroom full time in order to allow them their sleep. It shouldn’t be one or the other. Moral of the story? You need more than 8 hours of sleep, so make sure your bird gets at least 12 hours of sleep in the quiet dark. For you, night fright cockatiels, a little night light or black light will work just fine.

### **What else?**

Maintain a 50% humidity and temperature that the bird has been accustomed to for the past year. No sudden changes should be introduced right now. Showers are fine if they want to step up for them but not

more than once a week. Use cool water. It is good for their feathers. Hot feels good but go with cool for them. Offer a Lixit bowl that is large enough for them to bathe well in but not big enough the littles can drown in. [https://www.amazon.com/Lixit-30-0740-012-Jumbo-Crock-40-Ounce/dp/B00176GJBA/ref=sr\\_1\\_4?keywords=lixit+bowls&qid=1585264656&sr=8-4](https://www.amazon.com/Lixit-30-0740-012-Jumbo-Crock-40-Ounce/dp/B00176GJBA/ref=sr_1_4?keywords=lixit+bowls&qid=1585264656&sr=8-4).

Reduce the handling of your friend. Be careful of how you are petting, if they are trying to regurgitate, go behind you on the couch, go under the covers, or seek a dark place to go (under the couch, behind pillows, cubbies or a dark powder room. These are all signs of wanting to nest. Distract them but this is where you and she can come to bites and blows! She knows what she wants and if you stand in her way, there may be hell to pay. So let her do her own distracting by putting her back on her door perch and gently close the door. Then give her a treat and tell her she is a good girl. You are not the boss.

Watch toys and perches are not in a position to provide convenient masturbation stations. Not all can be prevented but we must try to make sure that while we go through the effort of ensuring their hormones are not running away with them due to their captive environment, we remember this important tidbit.

Move them around. If they were on the wall in the living room nearest the tv (thinking of an adopter's home), move his cage to behind the couch away from the wall and far enough away from the couch that it doesn't become the world's biggest chew toy. Move them onto the deck for some sunshine and a shower. Make sure they have water out there.

Real sunshine is the best lighting possible for them. However, you have to make sure that they are not in direct sunlight for more than 15 minutes. Change them to shade for another hour. If you see them panting, get them inside right away. Put them in a carrier and take them out for a while if you can't fit their cage through the door.

This doesn't cover concerns about egg binding in parakeets or larger birds. This doesn't cover cockatoos prolapsing. Unless you have a bird with a hemipenis like a Greater Vasa, nothing should protrude from their cloaca. If you see protrusions, please call your vet immediately. It isn't something you should try to rectify yourself.

Yearly vet visits are extremely important. The CBC and bile acids will help you and your vet know your bird's baseline and if there is anything to be aware of.

This doesn't cover species-specific behaviors that may alter a few things talked about in this article.

Be patient, respectful, and take pictures, document this activity to discern if you are confusing hormones for responses you don't like from your bird. Reward your bird for practicing their patience with you and others. Reward them for stepping up. Reward them at least 50x a day so you know that you are interacting with your bird and you are not running past them in your multitasking busy day. True story, most birds come with "be back (soon)" already installed when we get them. Not "I love you!" or "good bird!" or "it is good to see you!". That is not to say that it's your fault. Just saying that we need to check our busy lives, slow your roll, and respect the beak.

Thank you. PRH