

Stress



This fact sheet gives guidance on how to avoid causing stress to your birds.

GENERAL

Stress is a condition in a bird that dramatically reduces their body's normal resistance to disease, although there may be no obvious outward signs of any particular disease. The bird may suffer loss of appetite making it more susceptible to infection. Initially new birds should be given the same type of food they have been accustomed to, with any changes in diet being made gradually. Although birds in quarantine should have as much peace and quiet as possible, they should be checked daily to ensure that they remain healthy, look fit and are not fluffed up.

Whilst birds are not normally nervous, the first few weeks of life may determine their stress level. It is important to be quite gentle in movement when tending very young birds, and not subjecting them to dramatic changes in light and temperature. Switching on and off of lights in the dark is not a good idea and will certainly add to the stress level of a bird. Taking birds out of a cage is also a stressful time, and it is always best to attempt to train birds to voluntarily go into a show cage. A stick can be used by gently placing it into the cage to encourage the bird to move to the nearest outlet. If the show cage is held against an open door this is a nice invitation for the bird to enter. Favourite foods or tit-bits in the show cage may encourage this but young birds are normally quite responsive to training.

Breeding time can also be a stressful time for birds. They need privacy when sitting on eggs rather than receiving constant interruptions from their owner. Always move slowly in the bird room without too many bangs and fast movements.

When showing birds, it is important that exhibitors do not allow their birds to be poked at by all and sundry. Winning exhibits tend to be the centre of attention at shows, and “experts” want to look and assess birds closely. If birds are being abused, the Show Manager should be informed to stop this happening.

The whole life-style of a bird is dictated by its owner, and we have a responsibility to ensure that our birds have as stress-free life as we can arrange. It is our responsibility and no one else's.

BIRD SALES

The diagnosis of the root cause of disease, and confirming a "chain of responsibility" poses a difficult detective problem for the avian vet. The sick bird may be unwell simply as the result of stress and change of environment. Different temperature, humidity, diet, or water quality may all make a delicate bird unwell, without any infectious cause. This would especially apply to smaller species or young birds. The control of this aspect is mostly common sense: one should question the seller of the bird about its previous housing and diet, and then obviously do not put a bird that has been kept in a warm house in a cage straight in to an outside aviary. It is also important to see that the new bird is fed on much the same diet initially to that which its digestive system is accustomed. So many times avian vets see cases of illness in birds brought on by simple omission of these apparently simple steps.

One should remember that all these birds will have undergone some degree of stress, and some cope better than others. They will have been moved from their original home to the show venue, often travelling long distances in small boxes, then put on display in a noisy hall, adjacent to unfamiliar species, with bright lights, possibly draughts, regrettably often cigarette smoke, and a general total shock to the system. Then they may be caught up and transported yet more hours in a car or truck to the new home, and dumped unceremoniously into a different cage or aviary, with strange companions and environment. Wouldn't you feel unwell after such treatment ?! Such birds should be treated with care and respect, and at the very least should be offered quiet, subdued conditions in which to recover from their ordeal, with the addition of electrolyte fluids such as Spark, Polyaid, Critical Care Formula or the like as a "pick-me-up" while they get over the shock.

This fact sheet has been produced for:
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