



Abnormal Droppings

General Information

A common cause of illness in pet birds involves a change of droppings. While not usually specific for any one particular disease, a change in the color, frequency, volume, or character of droppings indicates a problem that requires immediate veterinary attention.

What are the components of a normal dropping?

There are three components to the droppings. The first is the fecal component. For most pet birds, this is a green to dark green solid part of the droppings. The second component is the urates, or the solid urine component. Unlike most pets, birds, in their attempt to conserve water, produce a solid urine dropping. The urates are usually white in color. The third component, which is not often recognized by owners, is a clear liquid urine. It is important for owners to become familiar with their bird's normal droppings, as evaluation of the droppings is an important clue to illness in pet birds.

What is an abnormal dropping?

Simply put, once you get used to your bird's droppings, any deviation from what the normal droppings look like are abnormal for your bird and should prompt a veterinary visit. Typical abnormal droppings can include any of the following:

- Fewer than normal amount of droppings
- Increase in the number of droppings
- Change in color or texture of either the fecal component or the urate component
- "Bubbly" looking droppings (usually indicative of diarrhea)
- Increase in the wet or liquid component (called polyuria, or too much urine)

While most owners state that their birds have diarrhea, true diarrhea is rare in birds. The most common sign of abnormal droppings in birds is actually polyuria.

What causes abnormal droppings?

Many diseases can cause a change in the droppings. Diet also influences the droppings. If for example, you've decided to give your bird a few blueberries, its droppings will probably be blue or purple for a short period of time. Assuming that the diet has remained constant, common causes of abnormal droppings includes *intestinal diseases, kidney disease, liver diseases, bacterial or viral infections, and parasite infections*. Psittacosis, a common cause of liver disease, may produce lime green droppings in some birds. Some birds with heavy metal poisoning produce red droppings.

How will your veterinarian know what caused the abnormal droppings?

Your veterinarian can run a variety of tests, including blood tests and radiographs (X-rays) to try to determine if any internal diseases have caused the abnormal droppings. Most importantly, evaluation can be done on the droppings for parasites, yeast and bacteria by performing a special kind of stain called a gram stain on the droppings. A microscopic examination of the feces is done to check for parasites, or there may be a need to culture the droppings if a bacterial or yeast infection is suspected.

Can my bird be treated?

Most birds with abnormal droppings are successfully treated once the cause of the abnormal droppings is detected. As an owner, your cooperation in agreeing to the recommended tests is critical in allowing your veterinarian to correctly diagnose and treat your bird.