

# Grooming Your Bird

- Be sure that your bird is healthy enough to be groomed and that you are comfortable performing the procedures.
- Safely grooming your bird may require two people—one person to hold the bird, and one person to perform the grooming.
- It's okay to leave grooming to the professionals! Ask your veterinary team what grooming services they offer for birds.

## Getting Started

Like most other pets, pet birds can benefit from regular grooming. But before you get started, here are a few things you should know:

- ***Be sure that you can handle your bird without causing injury.*** This may not be an issue if your bird is used to being handled. However, improper handling can injure a bird very easily. In some cases, your bird may even become startled or agitated and harm *you*, so talk to your veterinary care team about proper handling techniques before attempting to groom your bird.
- ***Be sure your bird is healthy.*** Sick birds may not be able to tolerate the excitement or stress of being handled for grooming. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to tell when a bird is not feeling well. Birds naturally hide illnesses, so sometimes problems can go undetected. Be sure to schedule regular checkups with your veterinarian, who will examine your bird for signs of illness and discuss proper nutrition and other tips for keeping your bird as healthy as possible.
- ***Don't be afraid to ask questions.*** Your team of veterinary professionals will be glad to answer any questions you may have about safely grooming your pet bird.
- ***It's okay to leave grooming to the professionals.*** Even if you have the necessary equipment, grooming birds safely requires skill, patience, and confidence. If you aren't comfortable trying

to groom your bird at home, ask your veterinary team about the grooming services it provides.

## Proper Restraint

Many pet birds are used to being held, so capturing and holding them for simple grooming procedures can be fairly simple. In many cases, two people are needed—one to hold the bird, and another to perform the grooming procedure.

When holding a bird, the head and feet should be secured, and the body and wings should be supported in case the bird struggles during the procedure. Your index finger and thumb can be used to hold

Safely grooming your bird may require two people—one person to hold the bird, and one person to perform the grooming.

the back of your bird's head, which can rest in the palm of your hand. Be careful to avoid pressing on the eyes and throat. Also, avoid squeezing the chest, which can cause injury and breathing difficulty. In most cases, a small towel can be used to cover the back of the head and part of the body while the feet are held in the opposite hand.

## Nail Trimming

Nail trimming is recommended if the nails become overgrown (which can injure the feet or make perching difficult) or become sharp enough to injure someone. As the nails grow, they curve naturally to form an arc. As a general rule, the arc should not be longer than a half-circle. However, be careful to avoid cutting the nails too short. Nails contain a blood vessel (sometimes called the *quick*) that can bleed if cut. In most cases, bleeding can be stopped by applying a styptic pencil or styptic powder designed for use in birds.

## Wellness Care

Most birds can be restrained as described above, with the legs held between the fingers so the bird's toes can be isolated for trimming. For small birds (such as parakeets), a small human nail clipper or small scissors can be used to trim the nails. For larger birds, a rotary tool, nail file, or emery board can be used.

### Beak Trimming

Most birds never need their beaks trimmed. However, a bird that has suffered trauma to the area or has a malocclusion (a defect in which the upper and lower beaks don't meet properly when the mouth is closed) may need the beak trimmed regularly to ensure normal ability to eat and drink. Restraint for a beak trim is similar to that for a nail trim. The beak should be held closed before trying to trim it. A rotary tool can be used to trim the beak, but be aware that the beak contains a bone and blood vessels, so it should not be over-trimmed. Some birds, like macaws, have very long, pointed beaks compared with other birds (such as parakeets), so it is important to know how long the beak should be before trying to trim it.

### Wing Trimming

Wing trimming is usually recommended to reduce flight capability. Trimming reduces the risk of the bird escaping through an open door or window or becoming injured as it flies through the house. If the wings are properly trimmed, the bird should be able to gently glide to the ground but is much less able to gain lift or fly a significant distance. Wings generally need to be trimmed a few times each year.

Many trimmed birds still try to fly, so the wings must be trimmed properly and symmetrically to allow the bird to maintain balance as it tries to land safely. If the bird is unbalanced, it can fall too quickly or awkwardly and become injured. Similarly, young birds should be permitted to learn to fly and land before the wings are trimmed for the first time.

Otherwise, they are more likely to fall and become injured.

When handling a bird for a wing trim, restraint is similar to that for nail or beak trims. The wing must be extended to inspect the feathers. Be sure to grasp the wing close to the bird's body to reduce the risk of breaking the bone.

Usually, the primary feathers are trimmed. These are the feathers at the outer edge of the wing. Depending on the size of the bird, anywhere from

It's okay to leave grooming to the professionals! Ask your veterinary team what grooming services they offer for birds.

four to eight feathers may need to be trimmed. Larger birds tend to need fewer feathers trimmed, whereas smaller birds (such as cockatiels) may need up to eight feathers trimmed. Sharp scissors or sharp feline nail clippers should be used to prevent shredding. The scissors should have a blunt tip to reduce the risk of accidental injury.

Before trimming, inspect each feather to be sure it is not a "blood feather." These feathers have darker quills containing a blood vessel. Significant bleeding will occur if a blood feather is cut; it is also recommended to leave the feathers on either side of a blood feather, to provide additional protection. If you accidentally cut a blood feather, it will need to be removed quickly to minimize blood loss. Call your veterinarian if this occurs.

**Ask your veterinary team to teach you how to perform these grooming procedures safely. If you aren't comfortable performing them, ask your veterinary team what grooming services it offers for birds.**