

Hyacinth Macaw Thinks Ball Is An Egg

A hyacinth macaw is treating a toy ball as if it is an egg.

By Sally Blanchard

Q: I have a hyacinth macaw. She loves to play on the bottom of her cage. She has two stuffed toys and a red ball on a towel in the corner of her cage. For the last two days she has been putting the ball under her wing, like trying to keep it warm. I think she thinks it's an egg. She hasn't been eating as much. Do you think this behavior is in any way detrimental to her health? Would removing the ball be bad?

A: It is natural for hyacinth macaws to spend time on the ground; so the fact that your macaw loves to play on the bottom of her cage makes a lot of sense. Her behavior toward the red ball is most likely nesting behavior. Because of the way she acts with the ball, I agree that it has become an "egg" to her. Having an egg changes a hen's behavior. Some parrot family birds become very defensive of their eggs and may become aggressive in an attempt to protect them. This vigilance and nesting behavior creates hormonal changes that can be detrimental to a single parrot's health ... especially if this type of behavior becomes pattern and happens over and over.

Having one perceived egg may also stimulate her to lay a real egg to complete her clutch. This should not be a problem if she is healthy, receives a good amount of exercise and on a calcium-rich diet. The reason she is not eating as much is because her attention is devoted to her egg. In the wild, her mate would bring her food and would also spend some time with the egg while she went to forage for food.

I do not recommend removing the red ball from her while she is in the cage. This could cause her to lay another egg, or she could become upset or confused for a day because her "egg" is missing. Often when a parrot hen sits on an infertile egg or an egg substitute, she will abandon it when the egg does not hatch within a normal amount of time. If she has been sitting on her "egg" for a few days, I recommend taking her out of the cage and paying lots of attention to her. While her attention is distracted, have someone remove the red ball. Now that you that she perceives this type of a toy as an egg, provide her with toys that are less "egg-like."