

African Grey Feather Plucking

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Q: I have a 10-month-old African grey name Paco. About a couple of months ago, Paco started plucking. I have taken Paco to the vet. Paco is on a pellet diet. I give him showers and I have even sprayed Paco with 100 percent Aloe Vera Juice. I am at a loss on what to do. Any advice will be greatly appreciated.

Jean Pattison, also known as "The African Queen," explains:

Is your bird really plucking or are you just seeing an excess of feathers scattered around? Baby greys go through a soft molt at about 8 to 10 months where they lose a lot of their baby down. This is not the start of actual plucking. I always tell my clients that they have a 50/50 chance of their grey plucking. This is just what some birds do, and we love them anyway.

I have found, often times greys like private space. Greys do spend time awake at night, and I often wonder if they need little naps during the day. I think they need a place to retreat when they feel the need for privacy. I suggest that the cage be in a corner rather than on one wall, or just inside of a doorway. Coming through the doorway unexpectedly can be very unsettling for a bird. If the cage is on one wall, you can hang a towel or piece of wood on the outside of the cage so it appears to have an enclosed corner. I like hanging a wall of plywood inside the cage, as a shield from the rest of the cage. You can put hooks in the 10 inch end of the plywood and allow the 12 inches to hang down from the top of the cage near the corner. This will give you about a 10 by 10 square of private area behind the plywood screen. Attach a side mount screw-on perch, to the side of the cage in the private space. Do not use anything more confining as this, since you do not want your grey to feel like this is a nest box, and go into a breeding mode.

The proper wing clip is very important for greys. Improper clipping of the feathers can lead to feather picking or plucking. Dr. Marge Wissman has a great article on her website. At the top click on avian, then on the left click on Proper Wing Clip. In my experience this is the only way to clip an African grey's wings.