

Determining The Sex Of A Macaw

An owner asks if there is a way to determine a macaw's sex without DNA testing.

Q: Is there a way to tell if my green-winged macaw is a male or female without a DNA test?

Kashmir Csaky explains:

There is no reliable way to determine if your macaw is male or female by external physical examination. DNA testing is the least invasive of all the methods to determine the sex of a macaw. The other methods are chromosomal testing and surgical sexing. DNA testing only requires one of the following; a drop of blood, the shell of the egg the bird hatched from, or a few small feathers plucked from the bird's chest. Chromosomal testing requires a large blood feather pulled from the wing or tail of the bird.

Surgical sexing is an invasive procedure that requires anesthesia. The veterinarian makes a small incision into the bird's abdomen and inserts an endoscope to visualize the bird's sexual organs. Veterinarians can make mistakes if the bird is very young. However, the advantage of this procedure is that the veterinarian can immediately identify sexual defects and many other health issues. It is a safe procedure when performed by a capable avian veterinarian.