

## Bird Gasping For Breath

### Learn more about bird respiratory problems

*By Rebecca Sweat*

A bird regularly inhaling fumes could develop a respiratory disease.  
Courtesy Jason Sholar, Michigan

Signs of acute respiratory distress include open-mouth breathing, weakness or inability to stay perched, quiet or lethargic behavior, tail bobbing and restless or disoriented behavior. If you observe any of these signs, get your bird into fresh air immediately and call your veterinarian or emergency animal hospital. There your bird will be given oxygen therapy and a diuretic to try to get him breathing normally again.

Chronic respiratory problems are a little different. With these, your bird may be inhaling noxious fumes for years before finally succumbing to them. "Cumulative toxins can cause long-term problems," said Illinois avian veterinarian, Ken Welle, DVM. These type of airborne substances are definitely not good to inhale, but they won't kill you right away. Second-hand tobacco smoke is the classic example. "Cigarette smoke won't cause sudden death, but it causes the same health risks in birds that it does in humans," Welle said. Eventually the bird could develop respiratory disease, asthma, lung cancer, emphysema, cardiac problems, etc., from the cigarette smoke — just as people do.

Finally, there are also minor airborne irritants. These can cause eye or nasal discharges or sometimes coughing. Dilute bleach and other cleaning solutions, hair spray, cologne, scented air filters and candles and air freshener sprays fall into this category. These may not cause death, but they may make the bird cough and make it feel run-down if you expose it to these substances again and again. However, eventually there may be one "final straw" that does the bird in. You may have sprayed air freshener next to your bird's cage a dozen times without observing signs in your bird that it was bothered by the smells. But then, the 13th time you spray it, the bird suddenly collapses on the bottom of its cage.