

Signs Of An Overweight Bird

Find out if your bird is overweight

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Create a daily exercise routine to keep your bird healthy.
Courtesy Daniela Slanina, CA

Q:How do I know if my bird is overweight?

A: Ask your avian veterinarian to show you the physical signs of obesity in your bird. Palpation of the bird can provide a lot of information about its physical status. Pectoral muscles (those on either side of the keel bone) can be easily palpated (felt) in an overweight bird, fat is stored in the area of the pectorals and, instead of the muscles being even with the keel bone, the tissue might bulge out on either side, resulting in “cleavage” that is palpable and often visible through the feathers. Fat can also be stored under the skin over most of the bird, and this is called general lipomatosis. This can usually be palpated and may be visualized by parting the feathers, as the fatty layer will be yellowish in color.

Some overweight birds develop fatty tumors called lipomas, which can be seen and felt under the skin, most often over the abdomen, and sometimes in other areas, such as over the crop. Severely overweight birds can even develop fatty deposits around the cheeks. You can sometimes see that the feet even appear a bit fatter than normal bird feet.

Overweight birds might also develop xanthomas, which are fatty tumors that have a yellowish hue. The skin over xanthomas is often dimpled. These often occur on the wings. The skin over large lipomas or xanthomas can eventually ulcerate or become damaged due to trauma from being abraded or by the bird chewing the area.

While there are published weight charts that provide normal weight ranges for specific pet bird species, there are always exceptions to every chart, as the bone structure, height and muscle tone of a bird should all be factored in when determining if a bird is of a healthy weight.

Often, when performing consultations on avian patients over the phone, an avian vet will ask me if a certain weight is a “good” weight for an African grey, for example. For me to answer that question, however, I almost need to examine and handle the bird myself. A normal weight for an African grey could be 380 grams or even 500 grams. There are small, diminutive greys and huge, tall greys. Their size can vary greatly, depending on their origin in Africa and, therefore, genetics, but many domestically bred greys are paired up based on compatibility and not body size or area of origin (as this is not often known).

Another sign that a bird is overweight is the evidence of exercise intolerance. Overweight birds tend to be more sedentary and become easily winded with exercise or with mild exertion, such as during a wing-flapping exercise session. This can also be a sign of respiratory disease, so any wheezing or abnormal change to respiration should always be evaluated by an avian vet.

Did you enjoy this information on bird health? Learn more in the January 2008 special Diet & Fitness issue of BIRD TALK