

## Bird Beak Care

**Consult your avian veterinarian when it comes to caring for your bird's beak.**

*By Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP, Avian Practice*

**Q:** I noticed that my bird's beak is getting quite flaky. Is this related to molting, and do I need to have it taken care of the next time I get him groomed?

Photo courtesy of Kate Przybylo, Michigan

Some bird species, such as caiques, naturally have longer beaks. An overgrown beak in other species could be a sign of a health issue.

**A:** A flaky beak can be a normal part of growth and aging. However, many pet birds don't chew and play with toys with enough vigor to adequately wear down the beak, so sometimes the beak becomes too long or develops abnormal flaky areas. In such cases, it seek the assistance of an avian vet familiar with your species of bird so the beak can be trimmed and shaped to the normal anatomical form. Normal flaking must be differentiated from abnormal thickening and flaking, which can entrap bits of food within the beak keratin and result in infection or necrosis (tissue damage). Ask your avian vet to assess your bird's beak the next time you have him examined prior to grooming.

Beak trimming should only be performed by a trained veterinary professional, since it is possible to damage the underlying tissue if too much grinding is done. When trimming and shaping the beak, I always use a new grinder head so that I don't introduce organisms from another bird. I don't routinely anesthetize or sedate a bird for beak trimming, but some vets may require anesthesia. I have learned that, by manipulating the upper beak so that the tip is inside of the lower beak, I can safely and easily trim both the sides of the upper beak and the front surface of the lower beak. Most birds naturally have a flat front surface of the gnathotheca (lower beak), so it is easy to trim it back if overgrown. Species that are the exception to this are the cockatoos and cockatiels. Their beaks tend to have points at the corners of this surface, and are scooped out in the middle.

It is also very important to evaluate the lower beak and to have the beak trimmed back to normal symmetrical proportions when necessary so that it doesn't end up skewing the rhinotheca (upper beak) to one side or the other — known as scissors-beak.

### About The Author

Margaret A. Wissman, DVM, DABVP — Avian Practice, and her husband, Bill Parsons, own Icarus Mobile Veterinary Service. Wissman has written for many professional journals and textbooks and has lectured worldwide on avian and exotic animal medicine. She also performs avian consultations for Antech Diagnostic Labs part time. Visit her website at [www.exoticpetvet.net](http://www.exoticpetvet.net).