

Small Parrot Nesting Habits

Three signs that your pet bird wants to become a parent

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Springtime triggers an instinctive reaction in our pet parrots to reproduce. The lovebirds begin to shred more paper than usual, parakeets get really perky and cockatiels act broody. If you don't want a moody, egg-laying pet on your hands, you'll want to curtail some of this behavior in your parrot. Even single-kept pet birds might lay eggs at this time of year or will vigorously defend a perceived nest or territory, such as a favorite roosting spot.

Watch for these three signs of breeding behavior in your parrot:

1. Courtship behaviors – These include two birds feeding and preening each other, or a single-kept parrot trying to regurgitate food for its owner or even on a toy. Pet birds often exhibit these behaviors throughout the year, but the frequency of them increases when the bird is reproductively stimulated. Increased vocalizations also often indicate mating behaviors (e.g., male cockatiel will whistle into his intended's ear.)
2. Preparing a nest – Every new bird parent needs a nest to raise its chicks in, so during the spring, your pet bird might start rooting around in dark spaces, such as a cupboard, under furniture or even under the newspaper in the bottom of its cage in search of a good spot. To prepare the nest, parrots will chew on perches, branches, windowsills or lamps. If your bird chooses its cage as a nesting spot, it will become temporarily aggressive and noisy, defending its territory. This is temporary.
3. Egg-laying or brooding – Female parrots might lay one or more eggs (a clutch) even without a male present. The eggs will be infertile. Some males also take an interest in the incubation. For example, male cockatiels are very involved in the incubation of their eggs and will assemble round balls, nuts or pieces of toys to incubate.

If your bird produces eggs, do not immediately remove them from her cage. Leave them for about 10 days, allowing the hen to sit on the eggs and finish her hormonal cycle. If you take them away right away, your bird might immediately lay another clutch. Excessive egg-laying can lead to serious health problems and even death, particularly in cockatiels.

Nesting Facts & Figures

BUDGIES

Nest box Size: 7 to 8 inches cube

Nest box Bedding: Include a nest block with a concave center. Optionally, provide pine or ash shavings 1 inch deep on bottom of box.

Clutch Size: 4-5 eggs

Incubation Period: 18 days

COCKATIELS

Nest box Size: 10-12 inches cube

Nest box Bedding: Provide pine or aspen shavings 1 inch deep on the bottom of the box. Clutch Size: 4-5 eggs

Incubation Period: 18-21 days

LOVEBIRDS

Nest box Size: 7 to 8 inches cube

Nest box Bedding: Provide birds with palm fronds, straw, twigs or grasses and they will build a nest.

Clutch Size: 4-5 eggs

Incubation Period: 21-27 days

PARROTLETS

Nest box Size: 6 wide by 10 tall by 7 inches deep

Nest box Bedding: Fill nest box with pine shavings to within 2 inches of entrance hole. Clutch Size: 4-5 eggs

Incubation Period: 21 days

*To protect their sensitive respiratory systems, do not use cedar bedding for parrot nesting material.

Tip: Prevent breeding and nesting behavior by shortening your birds' days. Allow them 10 to 12 hours of time awake each day, and create a darkened, quiet environment for them to sleep. For more info check out:
www.forthebirdsdvm.com/breedingbehavior.html

A bird that is sitting on eggs will not defecate in her "nest," but will store wastes and produce one large, smelly poop in the morning. You're forewarned. While your hen is sitting on eggs, start reducing daylight hours to prevent the start of another breeding cycle. Also, amp up your bird's calcium offerings to ensure the egg-laying doesn't deplete her calcium reserves.

You should interrupt this breeding cycle if you do not want to breed birds or deal with nesting behavior. Change the location of your bird's cage, for example. Rearrange the cage interior so the bird does not feel it has a stable environment for raising a family. Start taking your bird on short excursions with you. Interrupt its routine.

As spring approaches, daylight hours lengthen, rain showers increase and nourishing, fresh growth is available for parent birds to feed chicks. In our artificial inside environments, we can control these environmental stimuli to curtail the breeding season. Keep daylight hours for small companion birds to about 10 to 12 hours per day. Spray your bird to bathe it only once or twice a week, and offer a minimum of fresh, soft foods.

Companion birds can become unnaturally attached to their owners, especially in the spring and fall when the seasons are changing and a bird can be stimulated to breed. Don't be overly physically affectionate with your bird. Keep your relationship a teaching one or one of friends; not as a perceived mate. After all, in a flock, a bird would have many friendly relationships with flock members.

You may not be able to stop all breeding behavior, but it is possible to limit breeding when you recognize what's happening and are willing to set up an environment for your bird that discourages breeding. Of course, if you plan to breed birds, do the opposite! Lengthen days to 15 hours, offer plenty of fresh and soft foods and a nest box.