

Airbags Could Be Fatal To Birds, Veterinarians Warn

Avian vets note commonsense ways to keep pet birds safe during travel.

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Across the country, law makers and veterinarians alike are torn as to how to encourage safer travel with pet birds. A bill in California would have banned pet owners from keeping their animals in their laps while driving, but it was vetoed.

All legalities aside, veterinarians warn bird owners of the dangers of driving with their pet birds in their laps or on their hands or shoulder. Just like a human without a seatbelt, a pet bird without some sort of restraint or protection can suffer injuries, or worse, should an accident occur.

A major potential danger, veterinarians say, are airbags.

"If an airbag went off suddenly, a bird or dog could potentially be injured, just like a child," said Scott McDonald, DVM, of Avian Laparoscopy Mobile Veterinary Clinic in Clarendon Hills, Ill. "More so with a bird, especially if it was compressed between the owner and the expanded airbag."

Although McDonald said he has never had to attend to a bird patient that was injured in a car accident, he said that the momentum incurred during an accident could propel an unrestrained bird through the car or even out of it.

"Birds are pretty resilient," he said. Even if a bird were knocked to the ground or against a window during an accident, it could be ok. "Whether it was injured or not would depend on a number of factors: where it landed and how hard."

On the other hand, Kitty Remington, DVM, of Animal Health Clinic At Northhampton in Tallahassee, Fla., has seen several bird fatalities due to accidents involving airbags.

To keep birds as safe as possible while traveling, even when laws don't mandate such restrictions, Remington offered a few recommendations: Don't use wire cages. They can collapse in an accident. Instead, use an airline-approved carrier. Don't put the carrier in the front seat. Avoid the airbag catastrophe by restraining your pet bird in the back seat. Pack the carrier tight. This prevents the carrier from shifting around when making turns, and helps keep it from flying forward in the event of a crash.