

*Bird Health Briefs:*



**ABNORMAL  
DROPPINGS**

## **General information**

A change in the appearance of droppings is often a sign of illness in a pet bird. While not usually specific for any one particular disease, a change in the colour, frequency, volume, or character of droppings indicates a problem that requires immediate veterinary attention.

### **What are the components of a normal dropping?**

There are 3 components to the droppings. The first is the faecal component. For most pet birds, this is a green to dark green solid part of the droppings. The second component is the urates, or the solid urine component. Unlike most animals, birds, in their attempt to conserve water, produce a solid urine dropping. The urates are usually white in colour. The third component which is not often recognised by owners is a clear liquid urine. It is important for owners to become familiar with their bird's normal droppings as evaluation of the droppings is an important clue to illness in pet birds.

### **What is an abnormal dropping?**

Simply put, once you get used to your bird's droppings, any deviation from what the normal droppings look like are abnormal for your bird and should prompt a veterinary visit. Typical abnormal droppings can include any of the following:

- Fewer than normal amount of droppings
- Increase in the number of droppings
- Change in colour or texture of either the faecal component or the urate component  
"bubbly" looking droppings
- Increase in the wet or liquid component

## **What causes abnormal droppings?**

Many diseases can cause a change in the droppings. Diet also influences the droppings. If for example, you've decided to give your bird a few blueberries, its droppings will probably be blue or purple for a short period of time. Assuming that the diet has remained constant, common causes of abnormal droppings includes *intestinal diseases, kidney disease, liver diseases, bacterial or viral infections, and parasite infections*. Psittacosis, a common cause of liver disease, may produce lime green droppings in some birds. Some birds with heavy metal poisoning produce red droppings.

## **How will the vet know what caused the abnormal droppings?**

Your veterinary surgeon can run a variety of tests, including blood tests and radiographs (X-rays) to try to determine if any internal diseases have caused the abnormal droppings. Most importantly, he/she can evaluate the droppings for parasites, yeast and bacteria by performing a special kind of stain called a gram stain on the droppings. He/she may also need to run a microscopic examination of the faeces to check for parasites, or may need to culture the droppings if he suspects a bacterial or yeast infection.

## **Can my bird be treated?**

Most birds with abnormal droppings are successfully treated once the cause of the abnormal droppings is detected. As an owner, your co-operation in agreeing to the recommended tests is critical in allowing the vet to correctly diagnose and treat your bird.