Nursing wildlife and birds

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Introduction

Species seen
Knowing the species that we are likely to see is going to help in knowing what we need to set up in the vet hospital to look after these patients.

Pet bird species that are seen in Australia include:
- Budgerigar
- Cockateil
- lovebird
- Conures – new entry
- Canary
- Galahs
- Indian ringnecks
- Rainbow lorikeets
- Sulfur crested cockatoos

Wild bird species that commonly present into care include: Magpie, Laughing kookaburra, Rainbow lorikeets, Tawny frogmouth, Crimson rosella and Galahs.

Other wildlife species that may be seen in the vet clinic include:
- Marsupials: Brushtail and Ringtail possums and occasionally Eastern grey kangaroo and Swamp wallaby. Echidna may be presented after vehicle trauma.
- Reptiles: blue tongue lizards

Making the appointment
When a client calls with a pet bird for an appointment, it is a great idea to collect some information:
- Species
- What is wrong with it that the owner can see?
- How long have they had the bird?
- Where did they purchase the bird from?

FAST FACT: The average age of birds in Australia is 2 years – despite the fact that birds can live for decades. Most die of infectious diseases when young… just like dogs.

Ask the client to:
1. Remove the toys from the cage
2. Remove water from the bowl for travel
3. Cover the cage for travel
4. Do not change the paper on the floor of the cage as it may be used for a sample.
The following conditions are emergencies and the bird needs to come in immediately:
- Bleeding
- On the floor of cage
- Difficulty breathing
- Egg-laying without delivering the egg

For injured wildlife, it is critical to obtain the original location as many species will die if not returned to where they were found. If someone can pick a wild animal up (particularly without any training) then it needs to be assessed by a vet. Try to get a brief history of what happened to the animal: found next to road, dog had it bailed up in the yard, flew into a window, etc.

**In the waiting room**

Once the bird has arrived, it is time for a quick triage as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Where to take the bird</th>
<th>What to do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quiet and fluffed up</td>
<td>Treatment room</td>
<td>Quiet area, cover cage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the floor of the cage</td>
<td>Treatment room</td>
<td>Provide warmth and eave for 5 – 10 minutes and check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broken leg</td>
<td>Treatment room</td>
<td>Into warmth to treat shock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluffed up, straining</td>
<td>Treatment room</td>
<td>Provide warmth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trouble breathing</td>
<td>Out the back into 02 box, partly cover cage</td>
<td>Give 02 into box,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bleeding</td>
<td>Treatment room</td>
<td>Apply pressure for 3 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FAST FACT:** Bird blood takes at least 2 minutes to clot, compared to 30 seconds in mammals.

**Housing birds and wildlife in hospital**
The goal is to provide housing that is not stressful. It should be warm, dark and quiet to treat shock initially. The enclosure should be placed out of sight of dogs and cats.

Wild and pet birds may be carrying diseases that pose a risk to other birds, such as Psittacosis and Psittacine beak and feather disease. The housing of the bird should ideally prevent the transmission of these diseases.

**Providing warmth**
Warmth is critical to treat shock.
Provide heating in the range of
- Birds 26 -30 °C
- Marsupials = 24 – 28 °C
Reptiles = 28 – 32 °C
Provide a heat gradient across the cage and monitor with a thermometer
Some ideas to supply heating include:
  ▫ Light globe in a hospital box
  ▫ Hot water bottle, hottie, wrapped in a towel and placed near the animal
  ▫ Heat pad placed under the cage

Enclosures that can be used to house birds and wildlife include:
  • Cardboard box
  • Dog/cat cage with towel placed over front of wire
  • Vetario
  • Incubators

Birds need an enclosure that prevents escape and injury. The enclosure should be easily cleaned and able to be warmed.

Perching
Most birds like to perch. Some ideas for perches include purpose-built perches, home-made T-perches, thick branch or log.

If birds are unable to stand, then roll a hand-towel into a U-shape and sit the bird into this so that the weight of the pectoral muscles is supported by the towel. Tuck the legs under the bird to prevent muscle cramping.

Substrate – what you put on the floor of the enclosure
Newspaper is ideal – cheap, disposable, absorbent. Thin towels without cotton threads can also be used but may need to be discarded after use.

Food and water bowls
Ideally bowls should not be able to be tipped over. They should be large enough that the bird can access the food or water. A kookaburra cannot use a D cup!
Some food and water bowls that can be used in hospital include:
  • D cups
  • Coop cups
  • Ceramic bowls
Dog and cat bowls are often too wide and become used for perching. This results in contamination of the food or water.

Cage cleaning
Yes, the important part of the day! As birds are the great pretenders, we need to be detectives and assess what has really happened when we were not looking.

How cage cleaning is done
  • Remove bird – it will only escape if you try to clean the cage with it in there!
  • Time to weigh! All bird and wildlife patients should be weighed daily. Small benchtop scales can be taken into wards where birds are housed
  • Note the cage and fill out the hospital cage card:
Number and type of faeces. The number tells us if the bird is eating. How the faeces appear tells us if the bird is getting better or not.

Record temperature of cage – is the thermostat working?

How much food has been eaten?

What food type is eaten? Some birds love their sunflower seeds!

FAST FACT: A budgie poos every 30 minutes during daylight hours!

Equipment that is necessary to nurse birds in the hospital

1. **Restraining the bird.**
   Towels come in all shapes and sizes: from facecloths to blankets. Dedicate a towel to each bird while it is in the hospital. Change the towels when they become dirty.

2. **Scales for weighing**
   Scales that weigh up to 2kg in 1 – 2 g increments are purchased from large department stores.
   Tubs to place the bird in for weighing can include small pet carry cages, microwave containers, Tupperware containers. A lid will help to keep the bird inside.

3. **Oral electrolyte replacers**
   There are a number of them on the market. Lectade and Vytrate are available. They can be made up into syringes and stored in the freezer. Take them out, defrost them for each patient.
   Other electrolyte replacers that can be used for birds include Polyaid Plus – more than an electrolyte replacer, it contains vitamins and other sources of energy.

4. **Bandaging**
   Elastoplast damages the barbules and destroys the feathers. Suitable bandaging material includes coplus/vetrap and Micropore.

5. **Stopping the bleeding**
   Feathers bleed and nails bleed when trimmed. Use Aristopet’s styptic powder ($6) for external bleeds.

6. **Feeding utensils**
   Crop needles for feeding birds:
   - 8G for parrots over 300g (galah, SCC)
   - 12 G for parrots 100 – 200g (cockatiel, lorikeet, ringneck, conure)
   - 16G for birds under 100g (budgie, canary)
   Feeding tubes are useful for waterbirds and seabirds
   Catheter tip syringes are used with feeding tubes.

**Feeding birds and wildlife in the hospital**
The goal here is not to stock a lot of things that will simply become rancid. But for the stock to be able to be used across a range of species
• **Bird seed** – a cockatiel mix can be used for all birds from budgies to cockatoos. It is low in sunflower seed, which will encourage some birds to eat other seeds. Do not feed wild bird seed to wild birds as it is nutritionally inadequate.

• **Chicken pellets** – used to feed chickens and ducks that come in as pets. It can be crushed and offered to baby ducklings.

• **Hand-rearing mix** – this is crop fed to sick parrots, pigeons, ducks and chickens. A bird with a crop can take 2.5% of bodyweight for each feed into the crop.

• **Wombaroo Lorikeet-honeyeater mix** for lorikeets. Offer 20 – 50ml daily in hospital.

• If you are near the coast, buy some **frozen pilchards** from the bait shop to feed to penguins, pelicans, gannets, gulls and terns.

• Store **frozen mice** in the freezer. Carnivorous birds will eat them.

• **Hills a/d or Eukanuba high calorie** – yes! It can be used for wildlife. Add a can of a/d to a ½ - 2/3 can of warm water. Draw up into syringes and freeze until you need it. You can give 1.25% of bodyweight to a bird without a crop as a meal. This can be fed to blue-tongue lizards, waterbirds, seabirds and carnivorous birds as an emergency food.

Do not aim to feed orphaned marsupials. Changes in milk will only upset the stomach. The goal of the vet clinic should be to aggressively rehydrate the joey so that it is ready for a milk feed when it gets to the wildlife

**Good references:**

- VNCA website: Currumbin nurse has some good notes on the website on caring for wildlife.
- *Caring for injured native birds*, by Heather Parsons, Pub: Kangaroo Press. Cost, about $25
- **Good species identification books:**
  - *Birds – Simpson & Day, Slater and Slater*
  - *Key guide to Australian Reptiles and amphibians* by L Cronin. Pub: Envirobook, 2001
  - *A field guide to the Mammals of Australia* by Menkhorst & Knight, pub: Oxford, 2001
- NSW code of practice for rehabilitation of wildlife. This can be found at the DECC website. A minimum standards document has also been produced.
DATE __________ SPECIES ______________________________________
LOCATION FOUND
______________________________________________________________________
Name of person who found animal ________________________________
contact number____________________________________________________

WEIGHT ______________________

NATURE OF INJURY- how was animal found?
______________________________________________________________________

PHYSICAL EXAMINATION

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<tr>
<th>Body part</th>
<th>Normal</th>
<th>Abnormality found</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eyes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ears</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mouth – tongue, lips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Beak / teeth</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nose</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin on head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forearms/wings</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hind legs</td>
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<tr>
<td>abdomen</td>
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<tr>
<td>chest</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin/feathers/scales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anus/cloaca</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breathing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Faeces/urine</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Skin on body</td>
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SUMMARY OF TESTS DONE BY THE VET

RADIOGRAPH
______________________________________________________________________

OTHER _____________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

TREATMENT
______________________________________________________________________

Outcome _______________________________________________________
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