

About Parrot Feathers

Category: Companion Parrot Healthcare

Author: Kathy LaFollett | Companion Parrot Advocate™

With a muscle for every feather there is a lot more going on for a parrot and his feathers than flying. Feathers and feathering offer thermoregulation, protection, communication, flight, nesting material, camouflage, mating ritual expressions, and pride. Oh yes, a healthy bird takes time and pride in their feathering.

Communication through observation of feathers and feathering offers a wealth of information from our parrots and between our parrots. We can determine moods, health, comfort and nutritional needs from their look, lay and colors. Parrots communicate constantly with involuntary and voluntary feather movements. Their body language follows the expression as well. If a bird is angry or resistant we can see a number of feather expressions from head to toe. Compacted smooth feathers on the head, head lowered, wings open and raised at the shoulder, feathers fluffed on the neck or all around the neck are a clear indication of a warning statement.

Involuntary feather movements and positions are a great health and nutrition indicator. An ill parrot will fluff for warmth, discomfort, or to compensate for feeling weak by looking larger. Quick chest respiration, open mouth and fluffed feathers and sagging wings are an indication of distress in health.

Stress bars in new feathers are like a timeline telling us when nutrition was low or when stress was high. Stress bars can't be healed or removed but they are excellent timeline clues if you are trying to unravel a bird's behavior. For example; our Macaw Butters showed stress bars on her tail feathers on a wellness Vet visit. We were able to put the time the feathers came in to Felix's (CAG) arrival to the flock. A bit of rehashing those weeks and we realized the new cage and new bird introduction wasn't done very well for Butters' needs.

When we brought Snickers home, we applied what we learned. Through the next molting and new feather growth we saw no stresses for Felix or Butters. This is a long process of course. But using all the communication lines our parrots offer us allows us to gather knowledge we can use long down the road as well as in the current situation.

With flight feathers connected to bone and thereby connected to air sacs, a fully fledged bird also has a healthier respiratory system, simply by allowing the interdependent feather/muscle/air sac mechanism to generate under normal conditions of stress via fledging. A fully fledged parrot is shown to have less fear and an ability to feel secure enough to learn to think. He learns to act volitionally.

Trimming feathers for control or safety reasons is a personal choice, and should not be judged. But knowing and understanding the physiologic affects is helpful for understanding feather communication and usage after the trimming. When feathers are trimmed or missing, the muscles utilized by those feathers are no longer used. They are stagnant from the loss. These missing feathers can no longer be used for communication. Missing flight also removes communication. These are not statements of judgement, but statements of physiological facts. Something to think about for us as parents.

Feathers and their primary purpose of flight are only the tip of parrot communication and health.

When you are enjoying your parrot's company take time to notate their feathers and feather communication. They have a lot to say, even when they are quietly preening.

Together we can give every parrot everywhere, a happy home!

FlockCall.com | Facebook.com/flockcall | facebook.com/felixlafollett

copyright 2015 Kathy LaFollett | all rights reserved