

## Speaking of Hormones; Pg 1

Category: Companion Parrot Behavior

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Real life in the wild and what that means to parrots, their hormones and their nesting drives does not exist inside the human dynamic. At all. These are two very distinct and very powerful lifestyles. I say this because when the subject of hormones comes up there is a general tendency to discuss companion parrots and those issues as if they were experiencing the influences felt by wild parrots. They aren't.

In the wild, parrots experience the sun, wind, barometric pressures, weather patterns, seasonal UVA/UVB influences, seasonal food source changes, seasonal location changes and seasonal available materials changes. In the wild water sources change location, quality and abundance. Every element for a wild parrot is in flux at all times. It is the flux of these things, and the meanings behind the sum of the whole that sends the messages that affect the hormones of parrots. Wild parrots do literally have hormonal seasons. Companion parrots have a different hormonal flux, not necessarily related to seasons. Because our controlled environments, limited unnatural outdoor settings, controlled food and water sources send no strong synergistic messages of flux.

The companion parrot lives in abundance of food, water, materials and controlled temperatures and weather. They are not influenced by nature's messaging. Outdoor aviary living may deliver the sun, but not the changing environmentals. In the wild flocks setup in their locations with outreach distances for foraging and safety perimeters. Their daily support and care of their two perimeters delivers messages of changes via fellow migrating animals. Companion parrots live in controlled, consistent, abundant, limited environments that send fewer and weaker messages. Their hormonal seasons are rather wacky due to this lifestyle.

A companion parrot's hormones are influenced strongly by diet, darkness/sound at night, materials, age and their fellow flock members. Every parrot has their own genetic makeup for these tendencies as well. Our companions are not domesticated and bring forward instinctual drives. These drives they may not recognize. They will not fully or successfully practice (as their wild cousins) these tendencies since there is no natural context to support their actions, or need to act.

It's a complicated and simple problem. They have drives that are not supported or explained by their environments. We think we can influence these drives by applying wild parrot principles to a companion parrot's world. Which is akin to speaking Spanish in Germany. Someone is going to misunderstand some intentions.

Companion parrots need 12 hours of dark, year round. How a lifestyle is managed by the human in the room to get that done varies. Making sure companion parrots get their other 12 hours in the best of the day's sunlight is mandatory. Balance. It's all about balance. In the wild Spring and Fall tend to be the seasons of breeding. Why? Because these are the two seasons least balanced. Spring is bursting at the seams in all directions with food, light, weather and rains. Fall is bursting at the seams in all directions with food changes, light changes, weather and rain changes. These two seasons in parrot native geography offer huge flux and change. Balance is off and hormones switch on.

Our companions will express their frustrated instincts inside a consistent abundant lifestyle through aggressive, sexual and nesting actions that seem inappropriate. It's always Spring in a house. But it's abundant, consistent and balanced. Our companions do not engage in the physical activity they would in the wild. Clipped wings, limited room and the controls put in place to keep them safe rarely offer the two tier distances parrots look for instinctively. I've allowed Kirby to create that inside our two story home. He has become quite the brilliant parrot.

This isn't about hormones, this is about the messages being sent to our parrots in a companion's lifestyle. This is about context and a parrot's ability to express their instinctual drives inside a new set of rules.

The words we use to discuss the challenges for our companion parrots affects how we perceive the cure. We aren't trying to fix their hormones, those are fine if they are healthy. We need to fix the messages they are receiving and the context they are allowed to use to express those instincts. I'll share our flock experiences and how we handle messages inside our companion parrot lifestyle over the next few days. I can't write about this in one article. Suffice it to say, fixing our parrot's hormones is not the goal. Their hormones are fine. We need to improve our context, response and environmental messages.

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## Speaking of Hormones; Pg 2 - Tiered Locations

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I have an art studio room. It's where I create with clay and paint. It's where I write my books. It is where I keep Felix CFT Certificates and feathers. It is the one room where I "feel" creative without fail. It is one of my tiered locations. Our bird room offers movie watching, parrot games, eating and flocking. It's the one room where every bird and human "feels" together. Our office room is all business. I know it, the parrots know it and we conduct ourselves in a certain manner when we are in there. Because it's about business. I don't try to write books in this room. I may lay them out and conduct the structuring of those books, but that's business. When you misuse a tiered location things can go wrong pretty fast. A bedroom's purpose is to provide comfort, sanctuary and rest. You shouldn't have a TV in your bedroom. You shouldn't have your cellphone in your bedroom. I know some use it as their alarm clock, but I'm here to tell you it has been scientifically proven that you are better off using an alarm clock and getting that cell signal out of your bedroom.

Like us, companion parrots do best inside a tiered locations environment. A purposeful location offers materials, views and items that promote a certain "feel" to the area. Eating, playing, resting, and yes; hormonal tendencies. Offering places that allow your companion to "get away" help them self regulate their hormones. Stress to them is the same as stress to us. The affects create the same problems. In humans stress triggers all kinds of hormonal and biological breakdown. It is no different for parrots. If you are thinking; "Ya, but I don't have that much room!" Not to worry. Tiered location setups don't need massive spaces to be successful. Clear separation and clear definitions through materials and items are a powerful answer to small space.

For an example, for defined spaces, let's consider Snickers and his round soft jingle ball. It's actually a colorful canvas baby toy ball he loves so very much. He's also decided these balls are his girlfriends. Far be it from me to deny him his need to express his manhood. I don't find those tendencies offensive or try to affect them. He has every right and mental health need to experience these emotional rushes. So three times a day in one very important spot, he exercises his rights. Specifically on the top of his macaw day cage. He flies all over with his girlfriends, they need to be nearby, but there are only two places he consummates that adoration. On the top of his macaw day cage, and on the back of Dad's chair. When dad is in the chair. I'm not going to try to figure that last part out. Snickers' hormonal drive is addressed. It does not manifest itself in any negative manner anywhere else or any other time. He feels free to do his necessary thing. And he was freely allowed to define those spaces. The top of his cage is open space to all birds, and Butters is welcomed up there. He doesn't mind sharing with anyone and anytime. ALTHOUGH he does have an issue with me straightening out the crochet blanket up there. In the end, knowing he can go there and be who he is without interference or threat, makes for a very happy male scarlet macaw. You may be asking, well if he's allowed to accommodate that hormonal need doesn't he bother Butters (our female macaw)? Doesn't he "get worse". No. In fact, he was a far bigger annoyance to her before he figured out this girlfriend business. And now he comically offers his toy balls to Butters. Which again, I'm not going to try to figure out. She has thus far, declined.

An example of tiered location environments is Kirby's. Kirby, as with all others here, is fully flighted. He has always had a tendency toward wanting to choose to go upstairs alone. We did our best to keep him downstairs through light wing tip clipping and relocation. He has locations in each room downstairs that are exclusively his, but visually he can see every other bird in close proximity one way or the other. At times during the seasonal sun changes he'd gets pretty mean to Cali when he is on me or near me. Obviously expressing hormonal trends and frustration. Redirection, relocation and caging all started creeping into the situation, and I hated it. That's when I made the choice to open the upstairs to him by not wing tip clipping and leaving one door open upstairs. His upstairs adventures are limited to the master and master bath. All Kirby Proofed. He disappears everyday for a couple hours to nap on the towel rod in the master bath. At 5:30 he goes back upstairs to wait for dad to come home, because he will then be first in line to see dad alone when dad comes upstairs! Smart boy. During the day nap he will flock call to me from upstairs. "KIRBY KIRBY!" I call back to let him know all is well. He will come downstairs when I ask him. He is so very proud and happy to have this tier location. We are having our Fall sun changes and Kirby is no longer defensive or possessive between Cali and I. That need just disappeared.

Felix has his defined locations; they are his tent, his purple perch and his RV outside on the back porch. His tent is his "hormonal outlet". He goes through many phone books during this time. And he's happier and better for it.

Hormones are not unnatural. And unless it comes with mental stress issues that lead to extreme plucking and self mutilation they need to be accommodated. It is part of their natural status. And to accommodate them successfully tiered locations need to be created. Kirby needs only the privacy. Snickers needs only his ball. Felix needs phone books in his tent. Purposeful locations with purposeful items. Our cockatiels are treated the same way. Stella lays eggs twice a year randomly. She is not affected by the light/sun changes. I provide the necessary location (lower corner of the flight) and boxes for her to destroy. I provide extra water for extra bathing. I provide extra nutrition. I remove eggs. I let her choose when I remove them. She knows because I make sure she is a witness.

Hormones aren't something to fight, they are part of the parcel we brought into our home. I don't let a masturbating macaw bother me anymore than a regurgitating Ringneck. My dog eats poop. Such is the truth of the matters. I've retooled tiered locations for others, and I have found a secret to the creation of them; your parrot has been trying to tell you already. You just have been fighting it thinking it cause problems. Kirby and his upstairs towel rod (that's really what it is, it's not the bathroom per say) are a glorious example of me fighting the request. Of course locations must be safe and appropriate. But as with cagescaping, toys and foraging foods, modification by observation will lead the way to a solid mentally healthy compromise.

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## Speaking of Hormones; Pg 3 - Flight and Interdependent Systems

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Did you know that a single baby hatchling, without mates in the nest, shows less leg, foot and hip health after fledgling than a group of hatchlings? By being crammed together in a small nest the jostling and inadvertent leaning, pushing and climbing helps build a healthy bone structure from the soft structures. Did you know that wing muscle structures are connected to the air sac structures influencing oxygenation, respiration and heart health?

Did you know that a cardio workout is more beneficial for humans if it includes working the largest muscle groups with weights, rather than just aerobic movements? Literally, squats with weights produce better cardio results and muscle endurance than jogging.

Did you know oxygenation, respiration, heart health, muscle health, strength and mass all affect hormones directly for both parrots and humans? Now you do.

Flight is the most challenging of all aspects of companion parrots. It challenges us through behavior, personal opinion, beliefs and starts many a disagreement in conversation. I am not writing this article to pick a fight about clipping or not clipping a parrot. I am writing this article to reveal a truth that doesn't get much conversation inside that other conversation. Flying uses the largest muscle group and is the center of the interdependent systems of a parrot.

Flight is important to the health, hormones and mental well being of a parrot. It is, there is no getting around this point. Fully flighted parrots, with freedom of safe choice and flock support tend to fair better over all. But that makes sense. It stands to simple reason. Health, human or parrot, requires us to use our body as it was meant to be used and at times challenged in use. The healthiest people are not the ones sitting in chairs 9 hours a day, then going home sitting on couches. Parrots who sit on perches, sit in cages, and flap their wings in the shower can not have the same physical health as a fully flighted and roaming parrot.

When it's impossible to give full flight to a parrot. How do we facilitate balancing the interdependent systems? You don't actually. Hormones are literally regulated by interdependent systems requiring use and aerobic challenge. The endocrine system needs other systems to work as prescribed. Here at home our parrots fly for a total of an hour two per day, because they are out mucking about approximately 6-8 hours a day. But that's not enough. Not for what a parrot was created for and how their systems function. But look at how long humans live working at desks 8 ours a day, sitting in cars another hour and finally sitting at home in front a TV. We endure. We have aches and pains, we may be overweight, and we may be on some prescriptions to accommodate that lifestyle, but we endure.

This is a reality we all have to acknowledge. Because part of the "hormone issues" starts here. And here is not fixable. It just needs to be acknowledged. Can we balance this loss with other options? Somewhat. Much like humans who start eating better. It's the "at least" practice.

We have invited an exotic flying being into our home. It's easy to forget the exotic part. It's mandatory to keep it in mind.

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## Speaking of Hormones; Pg 4 - Materials and Food

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Available food and nesting materials affect nesting behavior in all birds; hook-billed, soft-billed, predator and song. There's a direct correlation between the amount of necessary materials at the ready and how wild birds will conduct their mating, nesting and family building. Mammals of all sorts are affected by food sources and material sources. Abundant locations providing all the needs nearby are locations filled with flocks. Foods for energy and egg production with materials to create safe nesting environments flip the switch. Is it that simple for companion parrots?

As FlockCall goes global in advocacy a new truth reveals that abundant parrot care lifestyle is not the same in any way throughout the world. In fact, the more abundant the commodity market, the more abundant the lifestyle. Which stands to reason. I am and have worked with flocks in locations where food stuffs, farming and the lack of commercial pellets creates a completely different food profile available to companion parrots. Grocery stores are not available, but local farmer's markets instead. Seasons drive the foods available as well as materials. Economic status affects their lifestyle inside that limited provisions market. Companion Parrot materials (enrichment) does not exist. Ordering toys online is far too costly. I have spoken to parrot advocates and lovers in India, Germany, Italy, France, the UK, Greece, Mexico, Canada, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, Iceland and many other countries, and no matter the provisions market we all have perceived hormonal tendencies. So what gives?

What do we do with that idea? I am not a fan of modifying foods. I'm not a real fan of transitioning parrots to a pure pellet based diet either. Balance and health comes from balance and healthy choices. If your parrot is sharing good food with you while eating a variety of vegetables, fruits, nuts, seeds and some pellets (10%) of the whole, you've got great balance. If you have yearly blood panel draws to see the literal results, and they are good, you've got great balance. PLEASE do not utilize feeding changes to influence perceived hormone issues. Healthy feeding is the front line to healthcare. And modifying something that isn't broke to fix something else that really isn't broke, just inconvenient, won't work.

Materials send messages as well. Nesting, shredding, and enclosures all express an available safe place. If your companion parrot is enjoying these things, and finds balanced calm from them, please don't remove all of them due to perceived hormonal issues. Again, you've balance in your flock. It's never a good thing to throw off balance for short term miscommunication. It's the balance that will help rectify that miscommunication.

The real problem with perceived hormone issues isn't the hormones at all. It's the unreasonable expectation that we can eliminate something that is intrinsically part of our companion. Hormone flux is a natural state and phase in the life cycle of a healthy, aging companion parrot.

Let's go back to the beginning of this conversation. Our companions are effected by a myriad of influences. Some of those we may not even be aware of directly. Felix is greatly influenced by direct communication. He deals with anything but not being informed on comings and goings. He wants to be told you are leaving. You literally have to tell him you are going and say good bye properly. Hormones, biting, lunging, possessiveness, random nipping, dog chasing, digging, shredding, cage defensiveness; the list is huge. It's easy to point a finger at the calendar and the parrot and say "Oh! He/She is hormonal!" and immediately start taking away things to "get him/her to stop". Which just adds to the problem, because that removal of food or items sent a completely different message to your companion parrot.

Utilizing food or the removal of food to influence your parrot's behavior sends a clear message. You, their flock leader, will use their needs to control them. You are literally telling your companion trust isn't the basis, performance is the foundation. Food material is not a tool for control. It is a direct line of communication.

There are hormonal issues for specific parrots, like cockatoos, that can literally threaten their life. That is not what we are discussing here. That is extreme mental and physical breakdown of one of the most emotional, cognitive and empathetic of the great parrots. These wonderful companions require a complete re-balancing with the help of an avian vet.

Our conversation over these last few articles revolves around companions that "act up" seasonally or cyclically. The real answer to it all, is the simplest. When they act out of balance it is up to us to keep the balance to every thing around them. We must defend their lifestyle and continue through the issues. Modify by observation. These times we may loose our companion to their own need to be left alone. It's hard to trust that choice. Our once loving, cuddly boisterous bird is now irritated, grouchy, and wants nothing to do with any one or thing. Our companions may fight, and require separation. That is modification by observation. Keep the balanced consistent lifestyle around that change. We've all days or periods in our own lives where we just weren't ourselves? Our friends and family gave us space. They checked in on us, but they did not change how they love us, we still felt their reach and care. They remained balanced and consistent while we were not.

Hormonal issues are but another facet of the complexity of companion parrot personality. It isn't an issue, it's a normal phase of life that can spark unnecessary reactions on our part because we just don't want the change or we do not trust them to come back "out of it". Before you begin modifying, reacting and controlling a perceived issue, allow time for your companion to be this way inside their consistent normal balanced lifestyle as they know it. Give them a chance to communicate to you, and listen. Leaving expectation out of the conversation will lead to a better understanding of your companion. We can't get all of this right, and we can't control it all either. A relationship is a give and take, a balanced compromise emotionally. We have to trust our companions sometimes, as we ask them to trust us.

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