

Male Hypersexual Behaviour

Carlingford Animal Hospital

Male sexuality is a behaviour problem most commonly seen in Eclectus parrots and budgerigars.

Typical symptoms are sexual regurgitations and copulation (masturbation). The condition is season, appearing throughout the warmer months of Spring, Summer and sometimes Autumn. The consequences of this abnormal breeding behaviour include uncharacteristic aggression, digestive problems and feather destruction behaviour. Our management plan focuses on restoring health by breaking this perpetual behaviour, addressing any secondary health concerns and restoring an endearing and healthy (non-sexual) pet to human bond.

Pet Bird to Human Bond

The root cause of male hypersexual behaviour is the pet bird to human bond formed during hand rearing. Upon reaching sexual maturity hand reared males spontaneously seek out a potential mate. In the absence of a strong bond with members of their own kind they will pursue members of the family. In some cases they may also pursue a toy or object that is perceived as a mate. Courtship advances follow the same physical displays as wild birds. Close face to face visual contact, head and body swaying, iris constriction, rumbling vocalisations etc. are advances that may not be recognised as sexual behaviour by the owner but when reciprocated with affection in the form of kissing, hugging or touch around the face area, a pair bond is formed. Males recognise this positive human response as confirmation of his acceptance as a mate - in the same way a female accepts the advances of males in nature.

Heightened Testosterone Production

Elevated testosterone is responsible for male hypersexual behaviour. The production of testosterone is triggered when seasonally warm temperatures (>25°C and increasing day length in Spring) bring birds into breeding mode. Nesting and courtship behaviour stimulate the full release of sex hormones essential for successful breeding outcomes. In the wild and as part of a healthy breeding cycle, this testosterone surge would last 7-10 days. Testosterone levels in the male decrease when the eggs are laid and after which time the female rejects the male's sexual advances. In the home setting however, the pet bird does not recognise or receive signals to halt breeding behaviour, causing testosterone levels to remain high. It is the prolonged elevated of testosterone that is damaging to the health of pet birds.

Symptoms

Sexual regurgitation, masturbation and extreme aggression are characteristic symptoms of male hypersexual behaviour.

Regurgitation

Male hypersexual behaviour is most common in those species that regurgitate food as part of the courtship process (e.g. budgerigars, cockatiels, asiatics, and Eclectus parrots). Regurgitation is a courtship process that stimulates the release of male hormones to prime the body sexually to maximise fertility. Regurgitation behaviour and courtship is a highly energetic process. In the wild this period lasts for 7-10 days. In captivity however, episodes of regurgitation or courtship behaviour that last for 3 weeks or more cause the bird to become agitated, aggressive and prone to health problems.

Masturbation

Masturbation occurs on the chosen human mate. Your bird may copulate when sitting on your hand or even when perched on the shoulder. This unnatural behaviour arises because the male bird's sexual advances are not rejected, as they are in Nature when the female finishes laying eggs. Instead he continues to be sexually stimulated to mate by affection given by the human partner. In this continual heightened state of sexual excitement - driven by male sex hormones - he develops an obsession to ejaculate and in a constant state of sexual tension becomes aggressive when denied the opportunity to do so.

Lack Of Preening Behaviour

When the male bird's attention is solely focused on breeding he will not seek a bath or preen properly. Without bathing and adequate preening, he then becomes prone to dry feathers and dry skin. The likelihood of digestive problems is also increased because of the lack of food in the gastro-intestinal tract, irregular feeding and psychological stress. Testosterone also has a drying effect on the skin, which with the combined effect of stress associated with hypersexual stimulation, predisposes to feather destruction behaviour. Head rubbing and dry feathers indicate a crisis point where the bird is agitated and unable to sustain energy levels leading to suppressed immunity and throat infections.

Management of Hyperactive Male Behaviour

Identify And Treat Underlying Health Problems:

Health concerns include immuno-suppression as a result of elevated testosterone and the stress hormone corticosteroid, digestive disturbances, dry skin, dry feathers and feather destruction behavior. A health check (microscopic dropping analysis, culture testing, X-rays and blood tests) is recommended to identify the exact nature of the problem(s) and develop a comprehensive treatment plan.

Male Hypersexuality Immediate Treatment Plan

	Optional Medication	In Drinking Water	On Sterile Seed	Dietary Recommendations
Day 1	*Medications are mixed with drinking water supplements	Quik Gel & Hi-Cal ³	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Establish a routine around daily mealtimes
Day 2		Quik Gel & Hi-Cal ³	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooked rice
Day 3		Quik Gel ⁴	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooked beans
Day 4		Quik Gel ⁴	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> Cooked vegetables
Day 5		Quik Gel ⁴	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	<input type="checkbox"/> Apple puree

Establish A Daily Routine Around Mealtimes: Redirect the bird's attention away from the sexual bond. This is best achieved by establishing a strict daily routine around morning and afternoon mealtimes. The feeding schedule encourages natural biorhythms and natural bathing behaviour. The bird should rise at first light and be moved into darkness 12 hours later.

Daily Baths: Daily showers or sprays with plume mist 2-3 hours after a meal will promote bathing activity, preening behaviour and healthy skin and feathers. A drenching bath will expend most of the bird's pent-up energy.

Remove All Sex Toys, Cease Physical Expressions Of Affection And Stop Behaviour By Discipline:

Management focuses on occupation that expends the bird's pent up energy. Remove all sex toys or objects perceived as a mate. When the male shows courtship advances or attempts regurgitation behaviour or masturbation he must be returned immediately to his cage. Males must not be permitted to masturbate on humans or furniture items at any time. Send a strong message to the male verbally with a strong command and physically by pushing him away. Return the bird to its cage whenever he attempts to masturbate again. This response informs the bird that the human partner is rejecting his sexual advances in the same way a female does when she has finished laying her eggs. Stop all physical expressions of affection that resemble mutual grooming, roosting contact and copulation contact as these actions perpetuate a sexual response that drive the mating urge. Do not allow your bird to respond to your touch in any way that resembles mutual grooming. The bird should not sit on your shoulder in a sedentary manner that imitates roosting contact. Do not touch your bird in places that resemble copulation contact.

Divert Attention Towards Energetic And Occupational Activities:

Meaningful and interactive occupation activities involving learning activities and training will help divert the bird's attention from sexual gratification. Encourage daily exercise and supervised free flight around the home. Other activities that help redirect your bird's attention away from sex may include singing lessons, interactive learning, and supervised time outdoors in the sunlight and outings in a travel cage (e.g. going for a drive).

Male Hypersexuality Support Programme

	In Drinking Water	On Sterile Seed	Dietary Recommendations
Day 1	KD Powder ¹	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Establish a daily feeding routine with cooked morning and evening mealtimes
Day 2	Hi-Cal, Ioford & Dufoplus ²	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	
Day 3	Quik Gel & Hi-Cal ³	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Encourage daily bathing
Day 4	Fresh Water	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Reject sexually driven behaviour (regurgitation & masturbation)
Day 5	KD Powder ¹	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Provide occupation and learning opportunities
Day 6	Quik Gel & Hi-Cal ³	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	
Day 7	Fresh Water	Turbobooster, E-Powder & F-Vite ⁵	Provide nutritional support as per programme

¹ Mix 1gm KD Powder (white spoon) into 1 litre of drinking water. Fill the water vessel and use the remainder to clean the cage.

² Mix 1ml Hi-Cal, 10 drops Ioford and 5 drops Dufoplus thoroughly into 100ml of drinking water.

³ Mix 1 drop Quik Gel and 1ml Hi-Cal thoroughly into 100ml of drinking water.

⁴ Mix 1 drop Quik Gel into 100ml of drinking water.

⁵ To 100gm of sterile seed add 6 drops of Turbobooster and mix thoroughly. Then, add 1gm (white spoon) each of E-Powder and F-Vite and mix again so that these powders stick to the Turbobooster oil impregnated seed.