



HORMONAL PARROTS

THE WHO, WHAT, HOW, AND WHY?

What's natural – what's not

In the wild...

Parrots will pair bond, engage in courtship regurgitation, mate, seek tree cavities and build nests, and aggressively protect their territory.

In a human's home...

Without the ability to satisfy and act on natural urges, parrots will display behaviors of frustration and destructiveness that humans find difficult to deal with. Birds will scream, show aggression, and try to find substitute nests in closets, couches, drawers, boxes, etc. Sadly extreme behavior doesn't produce hormonal satisfaction. Humans get bitten and birds pluck out their own feathers.



How we can help our parrots when hormones surge

First, we must examine our own behavior. What are we doing that triggers our parrots to respond in what is natural behavior but harmful to them and us in our environment? What interactions between us and our parrots produce hormonal stress with unintended consequences?

- Too much physical bonding (needing to cuddle all the time, petting in places like the bird's back that stimulate postures for mating including raising tail feathers, panting, shuddering)
- Too much paper shredding (no longer a fun activity but a nesting stimulant)
- Providing a box (a play space that too easily resembles a nesting cavity)
- Too much seed or a total seed diet or even too much healthy food (prompts obesity and egg overproduction)
- Levels of light/brightness (parrots need normal day/night cycle, not exposure to constant indoor lighting and electronic screens)

Next, we must understand typical parrot behavior that corresponds to mating, nesting, egg laying

1. Overly loud screaming
2. Aggressive display of protectiveness and territoriality
3. Extended egg laying
4. Obsessive search for places to hide to nest and lay eggs
5. Climate and weather
6. Agitation
7. Regurgitation

The stress of too much hormone expression and behavior signals health issues

1. Get to the vet pronto if your parrot becomes egg bound or has a cloaca prolapse exposing the inner cloaca, intestines, or uterus.
2. Frustration leads to feathering picking/plucking, feather loss at legs, skin irritation and sores, self-mutilation
3. Diseases and conditions such as abdominal muscle changes, anemia, chronic pica, fatty liver, skeletal deformities



Easy changes you can make to make you and your parrot happier and more content

1. Learn about the species of parrot you live with. Where your parrot comes from - its native country of origin - can tell you a lot about its particular behavior characteristics.
2. Affection - If you have a baby chick, handling/petting/cuddling is appropriate. But when the baby matures, all those hormones change the meaning of touch and charge up the urge to mate and have babies. You and your parrot can certainly hang out together, play, exercise, and have fun. Be aware of where it's safe to touch your parrot without bringing on mating behaviors. Simply don't physically stimulate your bird. It's not appropriate and can harm your bird.
3. Regular routines - A 12-hour day followed by a 12-hour night is what birds experience in nature. Equal exposure to light and darkness is the same necessity. Eating is a twice a day event as well - early morning/early evening.
4. Weather and water - Some parrot species are hard-wired to respond to the seasons, particularly rainy seasons. When the rain stops, that's when the breeding urge turns on. For some parrots, limiting the amount of time having a bath or shower is necessary. Some parrots will react to sounds that remind them of rain.
5. Food - Rethink the variety you offer your parrot. Add healthier organic foods and subtract the unhealthy carbs (you know what they are!). Feed twice a day and only a tiny snack that can be part of a game. Feed cool foods rather than warm food and too much food in order to diminish regurgitation associated with mating and feeding chicks. Hand-feeding is okay, but don't let a parrot take food from your mouth or put food into your mouth.
6. Weight - Know the ideal weight your parrot should be. Align the amount of food with weight maintenance.
7. Temperature control - never too hot and never too cold. Find the right balance.
8. Tree cavity/nesting - Parrots might think any dark, safe place is nest-worthy. A report mentioned people who had rolled up a carpet. Their parrot, from its cage, could see into the end of the roll and took it to be a dark hole just perfect for a nest. Out came the hormones. When the people put the carpet in another room, the parrot's behavior returned to normal.
9. Papering the parrot's habitat. Paper belongs in the tray below the cage floor, not on the cage floor where the ability to shred paper is just like preparing a nest.
10. Lack of exercise - Keep your parrot's mind and body busy learning new tricks, games, and positive behaviors. A parrot who perches all day, never flaps wings or has a chance to fly will turn on itself and self-mutilate.

Veterinary medical advances to the rescue

Lupron, a hormonal therapy, and HCG, human chorionic gonadotropin, offer major relief although only lasting a few months - often enough time for debilitating and annoying behaviors to reduce and disappear, wounds to heal, feathers to regrow, and actual illnesses to be treated. Also gives you time to replenish your wallet! These injections are expensive but necessary, especially in cases where your parrot's health has been severely compromised.

Your avian veterinary specialist can also recommend a number of environmental changes that will benefit your parrot's health in general, while also diminishing behaviors that challenge the safety of your home and yourself.



Above all, get to know your parrot

Yes, a bird; yes, a parrot, but still an individual species with idiosyncrasies. Here's an example:

An experienced parrot person had a blue and gold macaw who enjoyed opening the refrigerator door. His human never figured out whether he was looking for food or a nesting site. She never let him pull out food items, but he was persistent about opening the door and just looking in. Some mysteries are unsolvable and aren't necessarily about hormones. This macaw was just curious...

And one more bit of advice – never punish your parrot for exhibiting natural behavior. It is your responsibility to understand it and modify or neutralize it by taking actions that are positive.