

Preventing & Reducing Behavior Problems in African Grey Parrots

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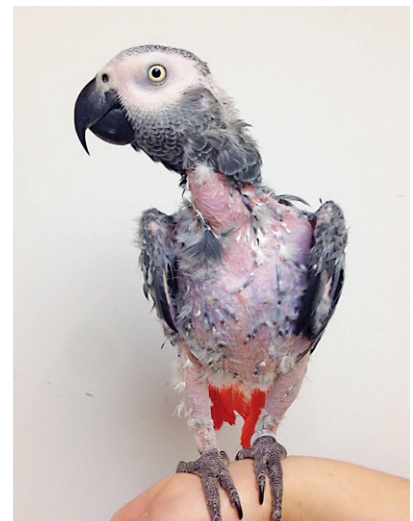
In the Literature

Greenwell PJ, Montrose VT. The grey matter: prevention and reduction of abnormal behavior in companion grey parrots (*Psittacus erithacus*). *J Vet Behav.* 2017;18:76-83.

FROM THE PAGE ...

African grey parrots are commonly presented for feather-destructive behavior, aggression, inappropriate noise making and/or excessive vocalization, and other behavior problems—usually more so than for medical illnesses, in this From Page to Patient author’s experience. Understanding the causes for developing these behaviors might be the key to treatment and prevention in this popular companion bird.

The paper’s authors chose the African grey parrot because of its popularity and described, with excellent references, the common behavior problems of this species in captivity. They also discussed the wild ecology of these birds and related how grey parrots are denied many aspects of natural behavior when in captivity. The authors attempted to correlate this to stress, anxiety, and even the root of behavior problem development. Issues related to socialization, flight, nesting, environmental temperatures and humidity, and cognitive abilities are well linked to aberrant behavior when these birds are kept as pets.



▲ **FIGURE 1** Feather-destructive behavior in African grey parrots is a common reason these birds are presented to veterinarians. The issue is largely multifactorial and without an easy solution.



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The paper described the link between the rearing method of birds and the development of abnormal behaviors. Information for breeders and owners is described, as are recommendations for clinicians treating parrots. This intelligent, complex, and social species is prone to developing abnormal behaviors in captivity. These issues are likely multifactorial in etiology. Clinicians must consider personality, wild ecology, environment, captive care, hormonal influences, and the potential for medical illness as they each relate to treating and preventing behavior problems in African grey parrots.

... TO YOUR PATIENTS

Key pearls to put into practice:

- 1** Clinicians seeing and treating pet birds must be proficient in their diagnostic evaluation and knowledgeable about interpretation, treatment, methods of enrichment, and behavior counseling.
- 2** Veterinarians must educate owners about parrots' needs so they can meet captive requirements; doing this may help address behavior issues.
- 3** The first step in addressing feather-destructive behavior is a full and competent veterinary evaluation, including proper blood tests, viral screening, and, possibly, skin biopsies.
- 4** Potential owners should commit to 4 hours a day of human–bird contact if choosing an African grey parrot as a companion bird.
- 5** The high cognitive ability of African grey parrots should be considered in their captive husbandry as a contributing factor for developing behavior concerns.

Suggested Reading

Engebretson M. The welfare and suitability of parrots as companion animals: a review. *Anim Welfare*. 2006;15:263-276.

Bradshaw GA, Engebretson M. *Parrot breeding and keeping: the impact of capture and captivity*. Ann Arbor, MI: Animals and Society Institute; 2013. https://www.upc-online.org/thinking/parrot_captivity_impact.pdf