

Fits, neck twisting and poor flying

We often get calls and e-mails from people whose birds are showing a number of different symptoms of poor nerve and/or muscle function. The most common are fits, twitching, neck twisting (stargazing), poor flying, inability to perch properly and twirling. Twirling is when the bird gets onto its back and turns around in an attempt to get back upright.

Although there are a number of nasty possible causes of this sort of behaviour (infections, epilepsy etc) by far the most common cause is a simple shortage of calcium in the nerves and muscles. So it is easily fixed by feeding CalciBoost directly into the beak. This can be repeated every two hours or so until the bird recovers. We then recommend that you give your bird CalciBoost five days a week for about a month to ensure that the bones are well topped up with calcium.

Although these problems can occur with any bird three groups are particularly prone.

* The first is rapidly growing nestlings. If the bones are taking most of the calcium then the nerves and muscles can become deficient. Such cases are often reported in species being hand reared on "home made formulas" and is particularly common in touracos who stargaze. Most other species

show symptoms like splayed legs, rickets and lethargy

* The second is young birds that have just about reached full size. These birds pump lots of calcium into the bones to harden them up and the nerves and muscles can be starved of this crucial mineral. Twirling is common, and canaries and gouldian finches are highly prone to this problem.

* The third group is egg laying hens whose demand for calcium to make eggs is very high. Normally this shows up as egg-binding which is often accompanied by poor flying, being on the floor with the legs spread

Amongst adult birds it is quite common for African greys and eclectus to "fall off the perch" in the middle of the night.

Prevention of these problems is easy with CalciBoost given regularly once a week to non breeding birds (twice a week for greys and eclectus) and five times a week for breeders. Do not give this product seven days a week as the body can become dependent on calcium from the gut and the bones lose their ability to correctly control

blood calcium levels.

CalciBoost works far more efficiently than other "traditional" calcium supplements because it has an exceedingly high absorption rate.



This grey is showing more extreme calcium deficiency - clenched fists and an inability to stand. It died before we could get CalciBoost to it!

Egg-binding

There are lots of old wives tales told about egg-binding in cage and aviary birds. Whilst a few cases have medical causes the majority of cases have calcium at their root. This article is intended to explain how calcium is involved in egg-binding and how proper calcium supplementation can prevent its occurrence, increase clutch sizes and improve hen health.

When a hen manufactures an egg she draws calcium from her bones to make the eggshell. In a healthy, well-fed bird the bones contain about three eggs worth of calcium. A number of problems can stop the bones from providing enough calcium to make the shell and when this happens the hen has three options. In reality most birds will select a combination of these three:

1. Stop laying - calcium deficient hens lay smaller clutches. The reverse of this is that diets rich in bio-available calcium enable hens to lay larger clutches.

2. Produce thin or soft shelled eggs - these eggs cannot control their moisture content so most dehydrate and a few (in humid conditions) may water log. Whichever happens - they die!

3. Steal calcium from other organs - when this happens the calcium is removed from nerves and muscles. These organs need calcium to work properly. So when the calcium is removed they stop working properly. The hen is partially paralysed and cannot expel the egg. This is egg-binding.

The traditional veterinary treatment for this problem is an injection of calcium. This works very well though it is expensive, invasive and risky. Oral treatment, with a highly bio-available liquid calcium/magnesium/vitaminD3 supplement like Calcivet, works equally effectively but is far cheaper and less stressful for the bird.

Old-fashioned remedies like applying oil to the vent and holding the bird over a hot kettle do not address the fundamental problem are risky and unreliable.

As usual prevention is better than cure. This is achieved by addressing two factors:

1. Ensuring the bones are full of calcium - this simply involves a

weekly dose of Calcivet to all non-breeding birds. For Eclectus and African Greys we recommend twice weekly administration.

2. Exercising the bones' ability to quickly pump calcium into the blood - the above regime ensures this is achieved as well. By feeding both high and low calcium levels in the diet the bones are regularly forced to move calcium in both directions. This ensures that the hormonal functions involved in this process are working optimally.

Perversely providing good quality calcium every day can actually have the reverse result to that you desire. If all the birds' maintenance calcium requirements are satisfied from the gut then the bones slowly lose the ability to quickly pump calcium back into the blood (simply because they have not needed to do so for so long). Egg-binding can result from this over supplementation. So we never use Calcivet seven days a week.

When the hen starts to lay she needs to replace the calcium removed from the bones so we increase the frequency of Calcivet administration to five days a week. This keeps the bones topped up. We continue this frequency until the chicks have reached full size.

It is easy to see why this technique increases clutch sizes as the hen always has plenty of calcium and she is storing it and releasing it very efficiently. Remember that Calcivet is designed to be used with other products such as one of the Essentials range, ProBoost SuperMax, Feast eggfood and a probiotic such as Potent Brew.

**Birdcare Company products
are available in UK from:**

Northern Parrots
0800 488 0345
www.northernparrots.com