

Chronic Egg Laying

What is chronic egg laying?

Chronic egg laying is the production of an excessive number of eggs or repeated clutches (or collections) of eggs. Chronic egg laying often occurs in the absence of a normal bird mate and outside of the normal breeding season.

Domestic chickens may lay egg after egg after egg, but only with the help of a special diet. Without significant nutritional support, heavy egg production creates a drain on the body leading to depletion of calcium and protein stores. High levels of calcium are required to shell the egg, and calcium also stimulates the uterine contractions needed to push the egg along. Falling calcium levels increase the risk of egg binding or dystocia, as well as the formation of abnormally shelled or shell-less eggs. The production of malformed eggs also increases the risk of egg binding or dystocia.

Who may suffer from chronic egg laying?

Chronic egg laying may be seen in any hen, however this problem is most commonly observed in small psittacines like the budgerigar parakeet, lovebird, and cockatiel.

Why are some individuals more likely to be chronic egg layers?

In the wild, specific environmental cues may stimulate reproductive activity and egg laying. Companion parrots may be strongly stimulated by some of these cues such as:

- * Long day length
- * The presence of a mate
- Warm temperatures
- Rainfall
- Abundant food supply

In captivity, some genetic lines also appear to be predisposed to reproductive problems.

What measures can you take to minimize egg laying in your hen?

- Allow eggs to remain in the cage for at least a couple weeks after they have been laid. To minimize the risk of breakage, eggs may be hard boiled or frozen. Craft store “fakes” may also work as substitutes eggs.
- Provide a strict 8-10 hours of daylight per day for a period recommended by your avian veterinarian.
- Halt exposure to the mate (real or perceived). The mate may be another bird housed in the same cage, the same room, or simply within hearing distance. A perceived mate may also be a favorite toy or mirror, or even a human being.

- Remove nesting material such as shredded paper and any dark cavity with an opening that the bird may perceive as a nest box.
- Offer calcium-rich foods such as boiled egg with the shell and dark, leafy greens.
- Gradually improve the general plane of nutrition by converting your bird to a healthy diet that includes a formulated food.
- Avoid interacting with your pet in ways that may stimulate reproductive activity such as rubbing over the back, under the wings, or around the vent.
- In select individuals it may also help to switch cage location. This change may “distract” or “stress” the bird out of its broodiness or breeding behavior.

What can your avian veterinarian do to help?

- Some birds with evidence of hypocalcemia may require oral calcium supplementation
- Hormonal therapy to halt or reduce egg laying using products such as leuprolide acetate (Depo Lupron) may also be indicated.
- Surgical removal of the oviduct and uterus is a technically challenging procedure, and is only indicated in select cases.

References

Bowles HL. Reproductive diseases of pet bird species. *Vet Clin Exot Anim* 5(3): 489-506, 2002.

Pollock CG, Orosz SE. Avian reproductive anatomy, physiology and endocrinology. *Vet Clin Exot Anim* 5(3): 441-474, 2002.