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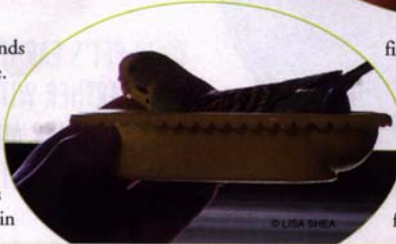
## birds

BY CHARLOTTE REED

# Clean & Sweet



**O**PTIMAL AVIAN HEALTH depends partly on good basic hygiene. Make regular grooming a part of your routine and you'll have one very happy companion. One of the most enjoyable aspects of avian grooming, for example — for bird and owner alike — is bathing. Regular dips restore and maintain your bird's plumage, as water softens the feather sheaths for preening and moistens the skin. One option is to buy your feathered friend a birdbath. (Fill the bowl with just enough water for wading.) If your buddy doesn't take to bathing, however, try giving him or her a shower with a clean plant mister or spray bottle. Mist in one area of the cage and let your bird enter the water at will. Or, try this favorite method of large-bird owners: Take a shower *with* your avian companion! Buy a shower perch that will ensure his or her solid footing when wet. Don't place your bird directly under the shower, but instead regulate the showerhead so that he or she can get a good but gentle soaking. Whatever method your pal prefers, bathe a healthy bird weekly with lukewarm water during the warmer hours of the day; take care to avoid drafts.



A COMFORTABLE BATH OR SHOWER, PLUS REGULAR GROOMING, MAKES FOR A HAPPY FEATHERED FRIEND.

Another care area where bird owners must remain vigilant is beak maintenance. In the wild, birds wear down their beaks on tree bark and rocks. If your companion bird doesn't have some abrasive surfaces to grind down his or her beak, food and other debris can get lodged between its layers, eventually causing an infection. *Don't* attempt to trim your bird's beak yourself. Overgrown or misshapen beaks require a veterinarian's attention; he or she will use a rapidly rotating file to shorten, shape, and smooth your pet's beak. You can avoid beak problems by providing your bird with natural or textured perches, plenty of toys, a mineral block, or a cuttlebone.

In addition, a professional groomer can assist you with two other important tasks: nail trimming and wing clipping. If your bird's nails grow to an unruly length, he or she will find it difficult to perch or walk, and your pal's feet may easily get caught on toys, the cage, or even your clothing, possibly resulting in serious injury. Regular nail trimming (just the tips, to avoid cutting the quick) or

file can keep this problem under control. If your bird is skittish, try setting up regular sessions with a professional groomer.

Many small-bird owners don't feel the need to clip their pets' wings, but owners of large species often feel it helps tame their birds. Clipping the primary (flight) feathers on both wings, while allowing gliding, can prevent a bird from escaping through an open door or window and from flying into mirrors or furniture. (Consult your veterinarian for advice on whether to clip or not, taking your particular pet's behavior and daily routines into account.) If feathers are clipped unevenly, however, or if you

clip the secondary feathers, your bird won't be able to control direction upon descent. In addition, you must avoid clipping "blood feathers." If you've never clipped your bird's wings, *don't* try this at home; consult your veterinarian or a professional groomer. A note to the wise: A clipped bird will need another means of physical stimulation and a variety of toys to keep him or her happy.

"Note that some nail and beak problems, such as overgrowth, flaking, and cracking, may be directly related to your bird's nutrition," observes Sonia Hernandez-Divers, DVM, DACZM, of the University of Georgia. "Feather discoloration and inappropriate growth may also be due to disease. Ask your veterinarian how you can maintain your bird's wellness and diet for healthy beak, nails, and feathers." Remember, for all your bird's needs, be sure to consult the avian-care pros at your local veterinary clinic, grooming establishment, and pet-supply store.

*Charlotte Reed is the founder and owner of Two Dogs & a Goat, full-service pet-care providers in New York. A frequent guest on television and radio programs around the country, Ms. Reed serves on the board of the National Association of Professional Pet Sitters.*

#### RESOURCES

[www.birds2grow.com](http://www.birds2grow.com) □ [www.cuttleboneplus.com](http://www.cuttleboneplus.com) □ [www.hagen.com](http://www.hagen.com) □ [www.hartz.com](http://www.hartz.com) □ [www.hunterbrand.com](http://www.hunterbrand.com) □ [www.oxfresh.com](http://www.oxfresh.com) □ [www.pennplax.com](http://www.pennplax.com) □ [www.redbirdproducts.com](http://www.redbirdproducts.com) □ [www.stonecreekdesigns.com](http://www.stonecreekdesigns.com) □ [www.zoomed.com](http://www.zoomed.com)

