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The Quarterly Bulletin

The Budgerigar Society of South Africa

Issue 14 **January 2004**

The Budgerigar Society of South Africa

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Message from the Chairman

Cover

Best Bird on Show at the 2003 National Championship Show – George Sutton

National Championship Picture Report

By John Nel

Above Left: George Sutton with the 2003 National winner. (Light Green Cock)
Above Right: Best Any Age on Show – George Sutton (Skyblue cock)

Above: Members at the prize giving.

Stress Part 2, continued from page 12

By Dr Colin Walker BSc, BVSc, MRCVS, Victoria, Australia

As an extension of this, stroking around the base of the beak or the side of the tongue itself is a very strong bonding behaviour. Jerking your hand away suddenly when a friendly parrot moves his head towards you gives him a very confused message. Rather than reinforcing friendly behaviour, to him this may mimic the behaviour of a subordinate bird and trigger an aggressive response. Once you have established a relationship with your parrot, it will no more bite you than would your pet dog. The trust and antics displayed by birds ranging from the family pet Budgerigar up to the largest parrots are some of the true pleasures that bird ownership can bring.

Acknowledgement
This article by Dr. Colin Walker is supplied by the ***World Budgerigar Organisation (www.worldbudgerigar.org)***, as part of their encouraged exchange of research information, and reprinted with kind permission from ***Australian Birdkeeper Magazine.***

Left:The 2003 National judges were (l-r) Ghalib Al Nasser, Dave Hislop, Janice Al Nasser, and Malcolm Taylor

Inside This Issue

Avian Gastric Yeast (aka Megabacteria): Should You Be Worried?

By David N. Phalen, DVM, PhD, Dipl. ABVP (Avian)

This article first appeared in the Newsletter of the Midwestern Avian Research Expo, 2001.

Veterinary students, aviculturalists, and pet bird owners all have one thing in common, they always have to be worried about something. The question that I want to address here is whether bird owners should be worried about megabacteria? The comments that I am about to make are based on my experience and knowledge of the literature. Many things have been said about this organism and diseases associated with it, but as of yet, there is little good experimental data to support many of those claims.

The first question that we need to answer is what is this organism anyway? Work in my laboratory by Dr Elizabeth Tomaszewski has shown that it is a type of fungus, a yeast. This is in agreement with work that has also been done in Germany. Therefore, I will refer to this organism as the **avian gastric yeast (AGY)** for the rest of this article. Our work contrasts with previous work that suggested that this organism was a bacteria. It is my opinion that scientists that have reported that they have grown this organism using traditional bacterial isolation methods have grown bacteria that live in the ventriculus, but have not grown the AGY itself. Because AGY is a fungus, it will only be expected to respond to specific drugs that are effective against fungi.

The AGY has been identified in many species of birds, but it is particularly common in budgerigars, some species of finches, and it is the general impression that it commonly infects parrots. From our research and based on conversations with aviculturalists and veterinarians, there is a suggestion that this organism may commonly infect the green-naped parrot and may be more likely to cause disease in parrots that have been bred for colour mutations. Rumours abound and one rumour is that there is more than one AGY and that some are more likely to cause disease than others. This point is totally speculative and our data at this time, do not support this hypothesis.

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Avian Gastric Yeast (aka Megabacteria): Should You Be Worried?

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We have used two different preparations of amphotericin and found that in two weeks, many birds will become negative, but low levels of infection will persist in other birds. Four weeks of treatment, however, showed a complete cure in one of our studies. Another drug that we have studied, fluconazole, was effective against the organism in most birds, but did not eliminate it from all birds treated.

At this point in time, my conclusions about the avian gastric yeast are the following. Infection with AGY is very common in some species of birds, but disease is rare. No treatment trials, except 30-day treatment with amphotericin, have resulted in the elimination of AGY from a flock of birds. Individual birds showing signs of illness may respond to treatment. In my opinion treating sick birds makes sense. However, treating entire flocks of birds that do not show signs of disease does not make sense because I do not think it can be eliminated from an entire flock and we may cause the organism to become resistant to the drug we are using. Should a bird be eliminated because it is found to have this organism in its droppings? I would say no. If you are sure that none of your other birds have this infection then don't bring it into your collection. But if you have a nice healthy fat and cheery parrot or budgerigar with small numbers of organisms in the droppings, I do not consider this to be a problem. I am sure that other veterinarians may disagree with me and I may change my opinion as we learn more about this organism, but for now, this is what I think. ♦

Low Numbers By *Bill and Christine Heale*

Disastrous breeding season with hardly any fertile eggs, leading to very few chicks or even a barren year! Check before the breeding season that adults are firstly, not too old to be able to reproduce and secondly, that pairs are in breeding condition. Breeding pairs should be sited in their breeding cages in a position enabling them to see one another and hear spare birds in the flights. Being gregarious, budgerigars need this stimulation from others, to breed successfully. Ample light of sufficient length, will also stimulate selected pairs into breeding. I always have a subdued night-light burning when the main lights are off at night, so that any unsettled individuals can find their way back to a nest box or perch. Without this, other pairs may be caused to panic due to one frightened bird. It does not take much disturbance to throw the entire aviary into panic and this night fright can cause severe damage to the breeding season in just one evening. ♦

Stress Part 2, continued from page 11

By Dr Colin Walker BSc, BVSc, MRCVS, Victoria, Australia

Many people not familiar with birds, when they see them simply sitting in a cage, regard a bird's IQ as perhaps not much higher than that of a goldfish, when in fact anyone who has kept a bird for a period of time realises that nothing could be further from the truth. Many birds have an IQ similar to, if not higher, than that of a dog. It goes without saying that they not only recognise other species of birds but also individual birds of their own and other species. They can also recognise different humans. Some parrots can recognise more than 60 individual voice commands, which is way beyond most dogs. In fact, one of my client's parrots can whistle the entire theme of the television show 'Burke's Backyard', which is quite impressive. With this level of intelligence demonstrated, it is easy to understand how loneliness and boredom can become problems in many pet birds. Satisfying a bird's psychological needs does much to avoid stress.

Much has been written on bird behaviour and training. Correctly interpreting your bird's behaviour will not only increase your level of enjoyment of him but also help to make him feel more secure and less stressed in the captive situation. This is particularly so with parrots and other social birds where interactions with humans need to be a substitute for those with other members of the flock in the wild. Most parrots form fairly strong pair bonds within their flock. Captive pet birds are deprived of this sort of relationship and yet it is part of their instinct to develop this type of bond. As a result, many transfer this behaviour usually to their primary carer. Being an intelligent animal, parrots easily become lonely. The primary carer not only represents company but is also associated with the giving of food. As a result it is only natural that a relationship starts to develop between the primary carer and pet bird, which mimics that of a wild pair of birds. It is important to recognise this 'I want to be your friend' behaviour for what it is.

Parrots develop a mutual trust and bond through mutual preening. Too many people are frightened by a parrot's biting beak. A parrot that lets you stroke or scratch him around the head is displaying trust in you. Let him know that you trust him by letting him groom your hand.

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REOVIRUSES

These viruses are members of the family Reoviridae. In which there are three general Orthoreovirus, Orbivirus and Rotavirus. All of these can affect birds but the first Orthoreovirus is far and away themost important and is the main one considered in this summary. Details of most aspects of the infection in domestic poultry will not be considered, as it is rather different from that seen in cage birds.

Orthoreovirus

Orthoreoviruses have been found in birds in the USA, Europe, the Indian subcontinent, West Africa, Indonesia and Bolivia. The disease has been seen in psittacines (African greys are particularly prone to the disease), finches, pheasants, pigeons, raptors (falcons, hawks and eagles) geese, ducks, poultry and quail. A number of strains of the virus exist, at least 11, and probably many more. The virulence of different strains varies. Some are relatively harmless while others are potentially fatal - the mortality rate in African grey parrots ranges from 10% to 100%. The virus can be transmitted between different species of birds. In one experiment it was isolated from a healthy bird of one species but when given to two other unrelated species it caused disease.

The incubation period is between two and nine days with death occurring suddenly or after an illness of up to 18 days. There may be numerous birds dying over a few days, or deaths may occur daily over a long period. The clinical features in psittacines are many and varied, but are principally associated with inflammation of the liver and enteritis giving depression, anorexia, weight loss and diarrhoea. Other signs recorded are anaemia, haemorrhages, abdominal swelling, difficulty in breathing, nasal discharge, incoordination, paralysis, inflammation of the eye, swelling of the head and pneumonia. Obviously an individual bird will not show all these symptoms.

One important aspect of this virus is that it is frequently isolated from healthy birds which are symptom free.

The main post-mortem findings in psittacines are swelling and mottling of the liver and spleen and enteritis. It is of interest to note that these changes are the same as those of polyomavirus, paramyxovirus, adenovirus and Pacheco's disease.

There is a strong possibility that at least some of the strains of the virus are able to Depress the immune system, rendering the birds prone to other diseases - so-called secondary infections. In psittacines those recorded are Escherichia coli and salmonella infections, psittacosis and fungal diseases.

Birds which survive the infection may become carriers; this has been confirmed in chickens and there is circumstantial evidence for it in psittacines.

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REOVIRUSES

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Also, as noted the virus is frequently isolated from normal symptom free birds with no history or previous illness.

Carriers excrete the virus intermittently and there are no tests for the detection of carriers.
The virus is transmitted by the droppings and in nasal discharges. Budgerigars can ingest it by eating faeces, which they do on occasion, and by faecal contamination of food or water. Also, if the droppings dry and dust is formed this has known to be infectious so that the spread by airborne infection is also known to occur. This dust can get onto people, in the hair and clothing for example, so that it can spread from stud to stud this way. In poultry it can also get in through the soles of the feet if skin in this site is damaged but this has not been shown to happen in cage and aviary birds. Also in poultry the disease can be transmitted via the egg to the next generation although this has again not been seen in psittacines except, possibly, in lories.
The virus is extremely stable and will last for a long time in environment it will resist the normal concentration of many commonly used disinfectants and will survive heating to 60C (140F). It is extremely stable in faeces and nasal discharge the population of the virus can be reduced by prolonged exposure to high concentrations of the common disinfectants but it is extremely difficult to get rid of it totally Chlorhexidine (in Saniclens and other propriety agents) in the drinking water for 30 days may reduce the numbers of the virus.
A vaccine for poultry is available but is of little or no value in other species as the strains of the virus in poultry are almost always different from those in cage and aviary birds. An experimental vaccine has been used with a degree of success in parrots in the USA. There is no treatment for the condition other than nursing care such as keeping the bird warm as possible (up to 30C - 86F provided the bird can move away from the heat if it wishes to do so) and making sure it does not get dehydrated.

As this disease can mimic many others it is essential to get the diagnosis confirmed or refuted so that a check can be made on the progress or otherwise of the disease and to see when it disappears, as it almost certainly will do in time.
Steps need to be taken to limit the spread of this disease. First and foremost fanciers who suspect that they have an infection should not sell or give away birds and at the relevant time of the year, must not exhibit them. Fanciers thinking of buying birds should give careful thought as to whether they need to do so at the present time. If birds have to be purchased one should buy from one or two known healthy studs which themselves have not purchased birds recently, this will limit the spread compared with buying from all sorts of unknown places.

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Stress Part 2, continued from page 10

By Dr Colin Walker BSc, BVSc, MRCVS, Victoria, Australia

It is common to see parasitic disease occurring simultaneously with stress related disease, a common example being the double-barreled problem of roundworm infection and chlamydial disease often seen in *Neophema* grass parrots. It is not possible to provide effective treatment for the chlamydiophilis until the roundworm infection has been cleared and the stress associated with this drain on the bird's system removed.

In free-flying wild birds, parasites are much less of a problem than in cage birds because of the decreased level of contact between individuals and the lower level of exposure to droppings because of the wider area over which the animals roam. With the higher stocking densities associated with captivity, exposure to parasites increases dramatically. Without ongoing hygiene and an adequate control program, parasite numbers can build up to levels that cause disease and deaths in their own right. Lower parasite burdens generally weaken birds and predispose them to other diseases. The control of parasites is a significant concern.. Suffice it to say now, that the major parasites are worms, coccidia, lice and mites and that there is a range of safe and effective medications available. Your avian veterinarian is well equipped to advise you on what parasites are particularly relevant to your species and which medications are best to use.

Stocking Stress

It is not only important that the correct number of birds for the available cage space be kept but also that species that are compatible are kept together. As a general rule pre-pubertal young birds require less space than adults and yet overcrowding is a common cause of stress induced flare-ups of disease in youngsters. In most species, once the birds go through puberty they require larger areas within an aviary. Parrots in particular are very territorial and overcrowding can lead to aggression, fighting and injuries. Birds not only compete for cage space but also for access to food bowls, the better (ie higher) perches and nesting sites.

Behaviour-related Stress

Birds, particularly young birds, gain security from a predictable daily routine and a familiar environment.

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Stress Part 2

Identifying Possible causes and Improving Management to Minimise its effect on Disease

By Dr Colin Walker BSc, BVSc, MRCVS, Victoria, Australia

Hygiene-related Stress

Cage birds prefer clean, dry conditions. Dampness encourages bacterial proliferation and speeds the development of worm and coccidial eggs. Accumulated droppings, particularly around food and water trays, expose the birds to a higher level of germs generally and also to noxious gases, such as ammonia. It is commonsense to keep the cage clean and feed and water the birds in a hygienic manner.

Nutrition-related Stress

In the past 10–20 years both bird fanciers and avian veterinarians have realised that the ingestion of a full and balanced diet is vital. This is particularly so in certain species. For example, it would not be an exaggeration to state that probably more than 90% of diseases observed in lorikeets relate to a poor diet. This is even seen in free-flying lorikeets, where people offer wild birds saucers of sugar, bread and water. These birds develop a dependence on these easily available foods rather than forage for themselves. Because these foods are low in protein and lack many micronutrients, the birds become immunosuppressed and significantly more vulnerable to disease. In many cases, when a disease outbreak occurs in an aviary, the owner of such birds and the veterinarian must not only figure out what the disease problem is but then ask what caused this in the first place. Often, an improvement in diet will help in preventing a recurrence of the problem and avoid the need for medication in the future. The closer the aviculturist can mimic the diet of wild birds of that species the better. Keep in mind that many birds such as Galahs, pigeons and many parrots are essentially foragers that take a wide variety of foods, and simply increasing the variety offered to them does much to improve the situation.

Parasites and Stress

A parasite is essentially any organism that lives off another organism. In order to survive, parasites must drain energy from their host. In doing this, many also damage the host animal physically. Parasites therefore cause significant stress to the host animal.

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REOVIRUSES

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Buying, selling and exhibiting should not start again until, at a minimum, there have been no new cases for three months. Any birds which have been purchased from what ever source need to be quarantined for at least 30 days but even this is not guaranteed to work because of the problem of carrier birds. All the bird accommodation needs to be kept as clean as possible. Physically removing the virus by thorough cleaning is desirable as the virus is so difficult to kill and this should be followed by a known vermicidal disinfectant and this should be left on as long as possible. There should be no traffic between one bird room and another, such as popular aviary visits, to avoid carrying the infections from one to another on clothing and footwear and also about the person.

Combined Western Cape Budgerigar Clubs INC.

CPBS, CTBC, TBC & WP&BBS

Plans for the 2004 National Show to be hosted by the combined Western Cape Clubs are well underway, already 4 show committee meetings have been held and many decisions have been made. The panel of judges has been confirmed and boasts a wealth of talent and experience, F Wright (UK) R Aplin (UK) and M Bulher (Switzerland) make up the trio of overseas judges with B Hirst and D Davie completing the panel of 5 who will have the task of selecting the best bird in S Africa

For those not aware of the show details the dates are 6/7 August 2004, please make a note of these dates in your diary, the venue is the Parow Civic Centre. This is an excellent venue situated in Central Parow and close to the airport and many other facilities, secure parking is available for those travellers to CapeTown who need space for trailers.

Prize money currently stands at R9100-00 but this could be increased as more sponsors come forward, to ensure that everyone gets a slice of the pie R50-00 will be awarded to the 26 BOC winners in each of the 3 sections. A sales section will be organised to give exhibitors a chance to buy that special bird from some of the top studs in the S Africa.

As the show dates coincides with a long weekend why not take this opportunity to bring the family for a short holiday and take in some of the sights around CapeTown while you enjoy making new friends and meeting old acquaintances at the show. A limited number of show cages will be available at a small fee to visitors to the show, these can be reserved on a first come first served basis.

If you require any further information or would like to support the show in any way through sponsorship, advertising or providing a stall to sell bird requisites or memorabilia please contact any one of the show committee listed below.

Show Manager Chris Smit 101 Church Street, Wellington 7655 tel. 021 8732400
Show Secretary Gerald De Beer 90 Tiverton Road, Plumstead 7800 tel. 021 7621921
Show Co-ordinator John Dunlop 5 Hoogstede Street, Oakglen, Bellville 7530 tel. 021 9192625
Harish Chavda 021- 6730907 Albert Olivier 021-9191344 Roleen Carstens 021-8871968
Any new developments will be updated in the next issue of the Bulletin.
Many Thanks and Regards
John Dunlop, Show Co-ordinator

Avian Gastric Yeast (aka Megabacteria): Should You Be Worried?

Continued from page 4

Does AGY cause disease? Does it cause disease in all birds that it infects or just some? Although, I personally have rarely seen birds that I thought had disease caused by the AGY, work in Australia, Europe and reports from veterinarians here in the United States' suggest that it does cause disease in some infected birds. In the budgerigar, the disease most commonly associated with AGY is termed "going light." These are typically older birds and they typically have a long course of disease characterised by weight loss and regurgitation. Birds with this disease will have large numbers of the AGY in their droppings and when treated with an appropriate drug will become clinically better and the AGY will no longer be found in the droppings. It is important to note that other diseases, including trichomoniasis, can also cause these same signs in budgerigars. In other species of birds, AGY has been associated with a chronic wasting disease, but regurgitation has not been reported to me, at least, as a common sign. These birds also shed large numbers of organisms and signs resolve with treatment.

The AGY, however, does not cause disease in all infected birds. Currently I have a research flock of budgerigars. At one time or another, most of these birds have shed AGY. Yet, none of these birds show any signs of disease that could be related to this organism. I have made similar observations in other budgerigar collections. So I am going to go out on a limb and tell you that I think that most budgerigars infected with AGY are just fine and healthy and that only a small percentage of infected birds actually develop AGY-associated disease.

Diagnosis of AGY infection is not always easy. AGY does not stain well with the Gram stain or quick stains. It is readily observed in a slurry made of a dropping and saline, but not all infected birds shed the organism in sufficient concentrations so that it can be detected with one or more samples and other organisms in the faeces may be mistaken for AGY.

The final questions about AGY revolve around treatment. Can we treat this organism in the sick bird and expect improvement? What about flock treatment? Does it make sense to be treating entire collections of birds? The best information on this topic is from Dr Lucio Filippich at the University of Queensland, Australia. Dr Filippich has shown that AGY can be treated with amphotericin B and that sick birds get better with treatment. However, at least in budgerigar collections, treatment is not 100 per cent affective and some birds remain infected and presumably will re-infect the others after treatment has ended. Our work has also supported this.

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