
Hormones and boxes

Beaks & Feathers Aviaries

Over the years, we have realised that many bird owners often forget about the need for a bed for their parrots. They believe many myths they have seen or read on social media or Google or the people answering their questions, but many of these have no more or even less experience than those asking for advice. However, sleep is an integral and vital part of ensuring your parrots health, so the importance of beds must be considered.

Sadly, this includes some vets, as well, as they class parrots under one big umbrella as that's what they are taught at university; yes, many parrots are perch sleepers and only use a box for nesting, BUT Conures and Caiques and some others are not perch sleepers. They are naturally hollow or Crevice sleepers :) (I saw it on Facebook, so it must be right), and now people Are removing access to their basic instinctual needs and requirements. Sadly, we spend so much time and effort trying to help people get the most from their birds and give them the best or as close to their natural life as possible. DON'T WE OWE THEM AT LEAST THAT MUCH

"We now know that chronic lack of sleep has an effect on how an animal sleeps," said Fred Turek, professor of neurobiology and physiology, director of Northwestern's Centre for Sleep and Circadian Biology, and author of the study.

"I've seen a lot of birds whose overall health improved when getting better sleep," said Fern Van Sant, DVM, of the For the Birds avian-only clinic in San Jose, California. Van Sant believes bird owners should look closer at what their pets' lives would be like in their native environment. "The health of the bird is typically so much better when we look at where they come from, where they live, and we try to use some of those tools to enhance their lives or sense of well-being," she said. "I think that it's very, very important to restore most of these birds to a normal photoperiod."

According to Liz Wilson, CVT, CPBC and founder of the parrot division of the International Association of Animal Behaviour Consultants,

In fact, walking past a covered cage, no matter how quietly, could keep the pet bird awake anyway, Wilson said. "When people sneak through the house, you could be perceived as a predator," she said. "You cannot sneak up on a sleeping bird... Their hearing is much better than ours."

She suspects that most pet birds receive much less sleep than we expect they do. "If someone covers the cage at 8 p.m., then the teenager watches TV until 2 a.m., and Dad gets up at 6 am, that bird is only getting four hours of sleep," Wilson said. "I bite when I only have four hours of sleep."

We have many Conures and Caiques here, and all have a box to sleep in or do what they want 24/7, whether inside pet birds or outside birds. Wooden sleeping/nest boxes provide excellent insulation in hot or cold weather and additional protection for all birds. There is not one of them does not sleep in their boxes. There is no aggression from having a box; even breeding ones will stand on their perch outside their Box and are happy to give kisses. Even if I open the box door, they will do the same. I find it sad that humans want to keep birds as pets but do not offer their basic instinctual needs for their instinctual behaviour. Wooden boxes are warm on cold winter nights and cool in summer. Their instincts draw them to one from the time they wean. They may seem protective of a box when first introduced for a while if they have never had one before and fear losing their most prized possession, the only safe, private, secure place they have just got and have been wanting for a long time. Kids are the same with a new toy they have wanted for ages.

A nest box is essential for female birds, whether inside pets or outside birds. The Box, as well as the bedding, are used to create heat & humidity. That is a vital part of laying their eggs, as the warmth and humidity relax their muscles for laying their eggs (apart from diet). Sadly, the inability to get the required heat to relax their muscles is a significant contributing factor in the cause of egg binding in hens. In addition, hypothermia (from not having a box to sleep in) and environmental stress have all been implicated as causes of egg binding.

The daylight hours' length drives hormones and the urge to nest. The presence or absence of light sets their 'internal clock' (circadian and circannual cycles), so their bodies know what to do and when. These 'conditions' are called 'breeding triggers', and there are three: light, food, and weather.

So, weather conditions (rain & temperature) and diet are the breeding triggers, not what they sleep in, and a female body clock is the same as any living thing when

they mature. They will want to reproduce and lay eggs with or without a box or a male. Still, without a box, they run a more significant risk of trouble passing the egg (Egg binding, etc..)

It is also their secure place to go if there is any danger about hiding in and feeling safe. If your bird feels secure, it is less stressed and much happier, unlike those tent & tube things and unsafe happy huts. Those tent & tube things are ok for a play toy but offer nothing like security, protection, warmth or cooling. The poor thing is just there in the open for all to see, and there is nowhere to hide from the danger that would cause a considerable amount of stress to the bird, whether we can see it or not.

The wooden Box needs to be secured at the highest place in the cage or enclosure as that's where they feel safe and secure and have about 100mm (4") of untreated wood shavings, Eucalyptus mulch or other safe natural material but never any fabric type materials. If the Box is placed low or on the floor of the cage, they feel vulnerable and scared as they think they are an easy target for predators (Dogs, cats, snakes and even children)

Lafeber's Global Parrot Conservation Spotlight January 2024: The Sun Conures of Guyana

by Ann Brooks

In March 2023, the newly trained parakeet rangers of Karasabai climbed their first active sun parakeet nests. Since so little has been known about the species in the wild, this was the start of intensive observation and data collection. The ecology of sun parakeets varies significantly from other South American parrots like macaws and Amazons. For example, unlike most parrots, it roosts and nests in the same tree cavity. So, if you see a sun parakeet in a tree cavity, it does not mean it is an active nest with chicks, it may just be used for sleeping. Many suns can come and go from the same cavity, making it hard to know if the same birds are involved or if an individual has a variety of roosting sites and companions. As of October 2022, 37 cavities had been identified, and 15 were confirmed to be for roosting only. The other 22 were potential nesting cavities. There are now 59 confirmed cavities based on recent observations.

Sun Conures Rising

By Toa Kyle

One by one, each member of the large Sun Conure (*Aratinga solstitialis*) flock descends and enters the tree cavity.

It's near dusk, but their brilliant yellow bodies still stand out in the ebbing sunlight. Finally, only one individual remains perched on the upper branches of the roost tree, vigilantly scanning the surrounding hills. After a few minutes, this bird, too, descends into the tree cavity to join the rest of the flock for the night. I smile as I realise I am the first biologist to witness this tree cavity roosting behaviour for the species in the wild. Like many parrot species that are popular as cage birds, little is known of the natural history of Sun Conures.

"Tony Silva 2015"

Like all Conures, A nesting box should be offered throughout the year for sleeping. Removing the nest/sleeping box to stop nesting is not an option.

Rosemary Low (The parrots of South America)

Dark Corners, cavities, ledges, Sleeping Boxes and logs and quiet dark spots. Are where they are not disturbed for some quiet time where the birds can feel secure and safe, and Conures like such things. (Happy huts and open front and back tent things do not provide this security and safety for them). Never will they roost on a perch if a hollow log, cavity, or sleeping/nest box is supplied and built into a secure high corner of the cage, which allows them to feel secure and safe and is not stressful for them, (as they can hide out of harm's way and not feel they cannot escape stuck out in the open where they feel vulnerable)

All Conures are hardy when acclimatised. They must have their nest/sleeping boxes left in throughout the year for roosting as Conures are instinctively cavity or hollow sleepers. 2 or more birds will happily crowd into the same Box.

Pyrrhura (Green Cheek Conures): If a nest/roosting box and a natural log are provided for Conures, they will usually choose the natural log. Should only a nest/roosting box be available, however, they will take to this immediately. So great is the curiosity of this genus that anything new placed in the cage or aviary is inspected at once.

Aratinga (Sun Conures and alike) are quite different in this respect; much less inquisitive and confident (than Green Cheeks); they, therefore, take longer to accept a roosting/nest-box or other new things placed in their cage etc.