Treatment For Mites

Parasitic Diseases

Scaley Face Mites

Budgies with a crusty cere, feet and vent are usually infested with the ***Knemidokoptes mite***. Most budgies with this condition are young (usually less than one year of age). These mites do not cause pruritis (itchiness), and cause a honeycomb type appearance to the skin and cere, upon close examination. Scrapings of the lesions or examination of the crusts in oil under the microscope will show the mites. The treatment of choice is ivermectin based upon careful dose calculation Dosage: 0.2 mg/kg PO, repeat in 10-14 day intervals until signs decrease. Although they do not appear to be very contagious, it is recommended that all birds kept in the same cage also be treated with ivermectin, either orally or topically. As with demodectic mange in dogs, this mite appears to be related to the immune status of the bird, and often the offspring of infested birds will develop Knemidokoptes, as well. Treatment should be repeated at two-week intervals until the bird is clinically normal. Long term infestation may result in permanently deformed beaks, which will require periodic shaping by an avian vet with a grinding tool and emery board. Mites do not live off the bird, so treating the cage is not necessary, but is recommended. Mites that occur in older birds usually indicate some underlying medical problem, such as hepatic lipidosis, diabetes mellitus or even tumors. Mites occasionally occur in other species of birds, rarely cockatiels.

Red mites can occur in budgies and cockatiels. These mites are very contagious between birds of different species, and they suck blood. They are visible to the naked eye as tiny specks of red pepper. Red mites (Dermanyssus species) remain off the bird and climb on the host to take a blood meal. They can make the infested birds very nervous and irritated. They sometimes bite people when birds are absent. In addition to treating the birds with red mites, the entire cage and bird area must be thoroughly disinfected to prevent reinfestation. Treatment with oral ivermectin and topical 5% carbaryl, repeated weekly, is usually effective. I saw one case involving a military macaw that had a severe infestation with red mites, and the poor baby bird had multiple feather cysts caused by the damage from the mites.

Feather mites can occur on budgies, and two species have been described to infest budgies. These mites, however, are not commonly encountered. Feather and quill mites can be found (rarely) on cockatiel feathers (usually primary and secondary remiges). Many budgie and 'tiel owners believe that they must use some sort of protection against mites, which can be hung on the outside of the cage, but these are ineffective and potentially dangerous, as the fumes can cause liver damage and perhaps cancer if inhaled for a long period of time. Mite protectors usually have mothballs (paradichlorobenzene) as the active ingredient. If a budgie does not have mites, a mite protector is not necessary to prevent infestation. If a budgie does have an external parasite, it is best to seek the expert advice of an avian veterinarian who can diagnose the exact problem and prescribe the correct medication to treat it at the proper intervals.

Finding an Avian Vet

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