



Water Bottles and Birds by Dr Greg Burkett Board Certified Avian Veterinarian

One of the most common health problems that veterinarians encounter in birds is bacterial infection. And, the most common source for infection is the water bowl.

An open dish is a breeding ground for bacteria. Most birds will poop or dunk food in their water dish. These organic materials feed the bacteria and cause them to grow even faster. Bacterial growth is measured in doubling time - *the time it takes for bacteria to double in number*.

Doubling time for many bacteria is 2-3 hours. This means that when you put a clean water dish in the cage at 9:00 AM, by 1:00 PM there is enough bacteria growing in the water to potentially cause illness, even in a healthy bird. This situation is completely avoided when using water bottles.

When putting the bottle on your bird's cage, mount it above a perch the height of your bird's head. Be sure to fill the bottle completely to prevent leaking. One or two drops will escape to form the vacuum.

Switching your bird is very easy. After all, hamsters drink from a bottle and we all know that birds are much more intelligent than hamsters. It is my theory that birds are able to smell water. Simply showing birds where the bottle is in the cage will be enough to get them to switch. Just tap the little ball on the end of the drinker when your bird is watching. The noise and bubbles will make your bird curious. When your bird beaks the ball, water will come out and your bird will immediately be on a bottle. If not, then remove the water dish in the morning. In the evening offer your bird water in a dish. If your bird does not drink from the dish, then it probably drank from the bottle during the day. If it does drink from the dish then it likely did not drink from the bottle during the day. Repeat demonstrating the bottle to your bird until you are comfortable that your bird is drinking during the day. Nearly all birds will drink during the first day.

The bottle must be changed every day. The bottle and tube need to be scrubbed and disinfected daily.

One of the most often concerns expressed is that 'My bird likes to wet its food'. No problem. Birds can still wet its food with the bottled. Candy, our resident Congo African grey nearly

always wets her pellets and treats. She simply gets the food in her beak and then drinks from the bottle. There is no reason not to put your bird on a bottle.

Next month: Introduction to Birds as Pets from Dr. Greg Burkett Author: A graduate of North Carolina State with a BS degree in biology. He went on to earn his Doctor of Veterinary Medicine from North Carolina State. He went on with post DVM training specializing in avian medicine. He sat and passed this examination by the American Board of Veterinary Practitioners in Avian Practice earning Diplomate status in November, 2002. Fewer than 100 veterinarians can claim that status.