



What You Need To Know About Bird Collars

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So, you've got a plucking bird. Realizing that your bird needs to wear a collar to manage plucking or to heal from an injury is stressful. Many people worry that their bird will hate it or will be mad at them. Not to worry, there are plenty of ways to help your bird adapt to wearing a collar. And yes, they do come in many different styles and shapes to suit your preference.

In this whitepaper, I'll discuss a variety of topics to help you help your bird - from helping your bird to adjust to a collar to how to manage plucking.

Why Do Birds Need A Bird Collar?

Birds that pluck their feathers out or have any type of injury are often advised to wear collars by avian veterinarians. Even though bird collars do not completely break a plucking habit, they may interrupt it without the use of drugs. Bird collars work about 80% of the time when you choose a style that matches your birds plucking pattern.

Bird collars are often recommended because a bird that is feather compromised can't regulate its body temperature and it has no protection in case it falls off the perch. It also runs the risk of damaging its feather follicles making healthy new feather growth impossible. And, some birds' plucking gets out of control, turning into a compulsive habit that sometimes turns into self-mutilation.

We offer patterns for cone style collars that are similar in shape to a traditional Elizabethan collar, a birdie bandana, a basic neck collar, and a sock vest pattern. Some birds need a collar only until the missing feathers grow back while birds that have been plucking a long time may need to wear them for the rest of their lives.

Depending on the situation, a bird collar may NOT be appropriate. For example, when the bird is in pain or in a weakened state of health, focusing on parrot wellness and positive reinforcement may be more advisable. Also, senior birds may not be strong enough to wear a bird collar. If you have any doubt about a bird collar is right for your pet, ask your vet.





Choosing The Style

In general, the more severe the plucking, the thicker and stiffer the bird collar needs to be. Again, the exception is if the bird is weak, ill, or underweight.

1. If your bird is weak, you should use a lighter, softer collar that will help regulate body temperature.
2. New pluckers also may do better with a lightweight collar that acts as a distraction. Once the habit has taken hold or even taken on a compulsive nature, though, thicker stiffer collars may be a better solution.
3. Birds that have open wounds or are bleeding usually need collars that are robust and well-made. The last thing that you want to have happen is for the bird to chew itself even more.

Helping Your Bird Adjust To A Collar

It should go without saying that wearing a bird collar can be difficult for your bird at first. He or she may find it to be uncomfortable to lie against their feathers. Plus, your bird will have to learn how to get around in the collar.

It's wise to plan for an adjustment period, and to be patient with your bird as it learns to tolerate the collar. Make sure that your bird can eat and drink while wearing a bird collar. We recommend using a water bottle rather than a water dish.



Sometimes a bird will figure out how to take the collar off faster than it took you to put it on. In this case, it's best to buy a few extra collars so that you can put another one right back on the bird if it rips the collar off.

Some birds learn how to open the hook and loop closures. If you anticipate that your bird is one that will throw a hectic fit, grab some Moleskin in the Pharmacy's foot care section and use it to secure the velcro. You can also spray the collar with Bitter Yuk before ever putting it on.

Eventually, your bird will get used to wearing a bird collar, as long as it's in good health. Patience and positive reinforcement is the key.

Other birds develop "frozen syndrome." This is when the bird rigidly stands in place, refusing to move! It won't eat, drink, play, or even move when wearing it's new collar. In this case, simply show your bird that it can eat, climb, and play while wearing a bird collar. And, again, generously reinforce the behavior you want to see more of.

What ever your birds response, always do these two things:

1. Remain calm and patient with your bird. Plucking is a stress response so don't add to your pet's stress.
2. Be sure to think about the "why" behind using a bird collar. Feathers serve a lot of health and wellness functions for your bird.

Unfortunately, continuous plucking of a bird's feathers risks permanently damaging its feather follicles. Every time a bird yanks a feather out, it rips some skin tissue with it. Scar tissue builds up and eventually the follicle can't grow new feathers.

Also, if plucking gets out of control, it can turn into compulsive behavior which may end up leading to the bird harming themselves. That's why you're addressing the feather plucking problem.

To help your bird adjust to wearing a collar, provide plenty of positive reinforcement for behaviors that you WANT to see more of. Whether its chewing on the collar instead of its feathers, or playing and foraging, or in the case of "frozen syndrome," simply climbing around the cage.

Make a big deal out of it! Do not - under any circumstances - reinforce behaviors that you don't like, such as plucking or trying to rip the collar off. That means pretend you don't even see the behavior.

How Do I Put A Bird Collar On A Scared Bird?

Some birds find a collar very scary and may even bite you when you try to put a collar on it. Your avian vet can help you with this or you can learn how to properly towel your bird so that you can put a bird collar on.

In most cases, it is much easier and safer to get a collar on a bird when you restrain it with a towel. There is a very specific way to towel a bird so that you don't injure it. Learn how to towel a bird here.

If your bird doesn't mind being handled, try this approach:





1. Kneel on the floor.
2. Pick your bird up and place it between your legs, beak facing towards your knees. For small birds, hold the head between your index and middle fingers. For larger birds hold the head at the birds jaw bones.
3. Put the towel over your birds back and wings to keep it from flying off or biting you.
4. Grab the bird collar. Figure out the opening and closing style of it. Does it simply slide over the head or require you to fasten velcro?
5. For cone style bird collars, visually assess if the neck hole is large enough. The neck hole should be large enough for your pinky finger to slide in when in place.

Here is how to trim a neck hole to fit properly. Once the neck hole is the proper size, simply slip the slip on cone over the head or for the velcro style, wrap it around the chest with velcro facing towards the birds back to fasten the velcro.

6. Neck collars and bandanas go on in a similar fashion. With the birds beak facing your knees, position the collar from the front and fasten it shut from the back.
7. To put the sock vest on, stretch out the neck, insert in your dominant hand, and slip over your bird’s head. Pull down. Gently pull one wing through the side slit and then the other.

The Recovery System

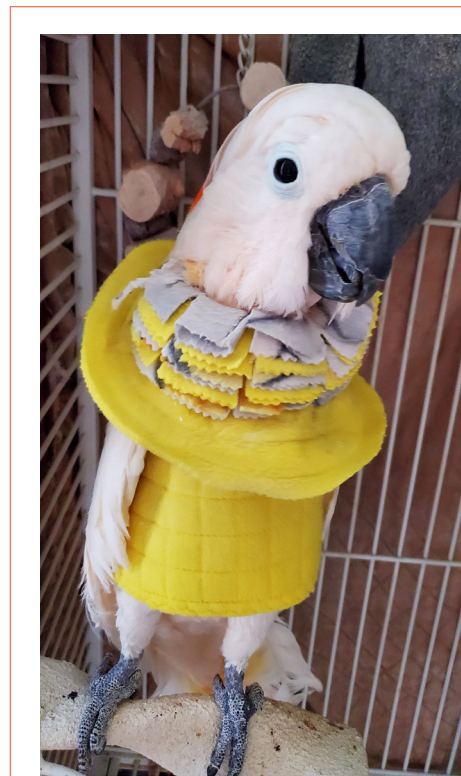
We always recommend that the first thing you do when you realize that your bird is plucking is to get a thorough wellness exam from an avian or exotics specialist vet.

While a lot of times, nothing blatant or serious turns up, we’ve seen numerous cases of birds that pluck from an infection, a virus, metal poisoning, poor diet, or even rescue birds who’ve experienced years of malnutrition. Aging birds that have developed arthritis or other health issues often resort to a serious plucking problem later in life in order to deal with pain.

Collars interrupt the plucking cycle, help your bird regulate temperature, and support your birds tender skin. They can give you peace of mind while you work on reducing stressors with parrot wellness and positive reinforcement that actually changes behavior.

At the end of the day, bird collars interrupt the plucking cycle. For long-term results, focus heavily on parrot wellness and using positive reinforcement to encourage safer, healthier parrot behavior. Using this 3 - point system has resolved many cases of mild to moderate plucking.

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Making Your Own DIY Bird Collar

Since some birds may need to wear a collar for the rest of their lives, you might want to make your own to save money. BirdSupplies.com has several patterns to help you get started. Choose the style that you want and then choose the size.

Since there are so many species of birds and there is a lot of weight fluctuation even within a species, we go by the birds weight in grams. As a general rule, here is the size chart.

XXS (3.5" Dia.).....	25- 50 gm.
XS (4" Dia.).....	50-100 gm.
S (6" Dia.).....	100 - 299 gm.
M (8" Dia.).....	300 - 499 gm.
L (10" Dia.).....	500 - 700 gm.
XLG (12" Dia.).....	700 - 1000 gm.
XXLG (14" Dia.).....	1000+

Choosing The Fabric

You should choose breathable and soft fabrics. Stay away from woven fabrics that ravel from unfinished seams. Fraying strings can get stuck in birds' crops and must be surgically removed to keep them healthy.

The best choice is fleece fabric. You can usually find it in a range of pleasant colors and in various weights from lightweight to heavy weight.

For our Sock Vests, chose high quality, soft socks. Stay away from discount socks that are poorly constructed. Also stay away from wool socks. Bamboo and pima cotton are good choices.

Strengthen collars or sock vests with moleskin and deter chewing the fabric up with a safe dog bitter spray available at most pet stores.



Sewing and Cutting Tips

If you decide to make your own bird collar, choose a thick, strong thread like Tex-40. Keep the stitch length short. Most birds have a very adept tongue and beak and they can snap longer stitching quickly. Always cut strings close to the fabric.

At BirdSupplies.com, we prefer using traditional hook and loop for the closure. Snaps can be easily chewed off and even swallowed. Don't risk metal poisoning or choking. If you feel that your bird will open the hook and loop, secure it with mole skin.

Most bird collars can be washed. We recommend using a scent-free, gentle detergent. Of course, you wouldn't want to wash a Sock Vest.

Inspect the bird collar daily and trim any loose threads.



"I was initially worried that it would be too hot for him, but that was before I saw and felt the vest. Houdini has taken to it quite well. Thank you for these wonderful products!"

