

Molting

When a bird molts, usually feathers are replaced symmetrically, meaning that the same wing feathers will be pushed out simultaneously on both wings, for example. Most birds replace all of their feathers at least once a year, usually after breeding season, and some may molt more frequently. During a parrot's normal molt, there should never be bald patches present. During molting, the discarded feather is pushed out by the proliferation of the cells at the base of the feather. The length of the feather that is being molted out has nothing to do with the ability of molting to occur. In the past, it was mistakenly thought that the weight of the feather was responsible for the feather falling out, but we now know that this is not true.

A bird that is molting may have many pinfeathers present, and these are most obvious on the head, since a single pet bird cannot preen the normally present feather sheaths from the back of the head. If two or more birds share a cage, they may preen each other's heads, removing the sheaths. But, you can often tell if a bird is molting from visualizing feather sheaths on the wings, tail or head, most commonly.



Left: The appearance of blood feathers, which are active, growing feathers, replacing molted out ones. Blood feathers have a soft, purple-blue shaft, with an active blood supply. If a blood feather is cut or injured, it can bleed excessively. A broken blood feather should be dealt with by an experienced avian vet. Pulling the feather out and then applying pressure with a sterile gauze square is often all that is required. However, if a blood feather is broken off at the level of the skin, this may require more extensive therapy.



Right: A broken blood feather that is seeping blood. This feather should be pulled out to stop the bleeding and then pressure should be applied to the follicle to encourage clot formation.