

Dirty or Depigmented Feathers

The bright plumage of most parrots comes from different kinds of pigments present in the feathers. If a bird has not molted in a timely fashion, due to malnutrition, metabolic problems or an incorrect photoperiod, the feathers may become depigmented, and the result is feathers that have areas that appear blackened or "dirty." These old feathers that should have already molted out often cause concern to owners, but they usually mean that a bird is overdue for a molt, for whatever the reason.

Another reason for depigmented feathers is from damage to feathers, either from repeated petting and handling by owners or from a bird repeatedly brushing up against an object in the cage that is causing premature depigmentation of feathers. Another reason for depigmentation is from a bird that overpreens its feathers, and thus, over time, removing pigment from the feathers. This is different from a light colored bird, a white cockatoo, for example, that has dirty, greasy feathers from oils transferred from human hands to the feathers.

Right: A scarlet macaw with many unkempt feathers due to rough play. She often lies on her back and plays with her toys and owner, causing rough appearing feathers. This is not due to overpreening.

