

Wing clipping

Wing clipping has traditionally been a commonly performed procedure in pet birds, but one that is controversial. The reasons for wing clipping include preventing escape, ability to tame and safety. However, wing clipping can be associated with **physical** and **psychological injury**, and many wing clipping techniques are outdated.

Birds **learn to fly** during the fledging period. It provides **essential exercise** and builds **confidence** and **independence**. By learning to fly, they also **learn to navigate and land**. It is essential that birds are provided this opportunity. Unfortunately, many birds are clipped at this age and never learn to fly properly.

When the ability to fly is removed, this can have numerous **negative consequences**:

- When a clipped bird attempts to fly, he/she may **crash** and **fall**, which is painful. A clipped bird that has not learned to fly often lands poorly and “clumsily”. This can cause serious **injury**, most commonly to the breastbone and tail, which may require surgery or lead to bone infection.
- The bird’s opportunity to exercise is compromised, which can contribute to obesity, cardiovascular disease, and other **health problems**.
- The cut ends of the feathers are sharp, which can cause the bird to **feather chew**, pick and mutilate feathers.
- Inability to fly and escape causes **fear**. Birds can get startled, which causes an instinctive “take off” (the flight response). As prey animals, they should be able to fly away from what they perceive as a dangerous situation, to a safer location. Inability to do this can have adverse effects on their physical and psychological health.

There are many **misconceptions** about wing clipping. However, it is important to remember that:

- Clipping a bird’s wings does not guarantee prevention of escape.
- Clipping the feathers of only one wing is not safer. It causes the bird to be out of balance, which can also cause injuries listed above.
- There is no evidence to suggest that a clipped bird is safer or less prone to injuries than a flighted bird.
- Birds are highly intelligent species, and can be tamed and trained without restricting flight through wing clipping.

Alternatives to wing clipping:

- Ensuring that doors and windows are closed, and not allowing your bird to free fly in a room with running ceiling fans, exposed glass windows or similar hazards.
- Harness training. See Aviator Bird Harness for more information.
- Flight training your bird. There are numerous resources for training your bird to fly back and perform other flight exercises in your household, like navigating corners and landing safely.
- An alternative to a traditional wing clip is a **modified trim**, which only removes a portion of the vane, leaving the rachis intact.
- **Not clipping at all is the best option**, allowing the bird to exercise and express normal behaviour through flight.

Please make an appointment to discuss the best option for your bird.