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Feather Destructive Behavior

Feather Destructive Behavior (FDB) or "Feather Picking" is not uncommon in captive birds and perhaps is best understood through the viewpoint of your bird. In the wild they are free to fly, forage, choose a mate, and exhibit normal destructive behaviors on the intended objects such as with nest building, tree pruning, and food that is challenging to eat. In captivity our relationships are often a combination of us being their maids, friends, cooks, parents, general servants, and unintended mates. Birds that have cage mates (social enrichment) tend to exhibit less feather destructive behaviors than birds that are kept single. Birds that are encouraged to forage and that utilize toys in functional ways (environmental enrichment) also have fewer tendencies to exhibit FDB. Birds that exercise routinely and have choices on where they want to be may also exhibit fewer tendencies for FDB. The Avian and Exotic Animal Clinic of Arizona has several DVD resources for purchase that may enhance your understanding of both basic bird care and foraging techniques.

Negative behaviors such as FDB can be modified by understanding functional assessment as well. Functional assessment breaks behavior down into "**ABC**" or **A**ntecedent, **B**ehavior, and **C**onsequence. **A** or Antecedents are, simply put, those situational factors (or lack of factors) that encourage the behavior. They set the stage for the behavior to occur. With FDB, multiple and changing antecedents are the rule rather than the exception. Birds have different relationships with different people, animals, and birds which influence behavior. To ensure the best possible success with your bird, everyone in the family must understand the situational influences (antecedents) of FDB. **B** or Behavior is feather destruction in this specific case. **C** or Consequence is how the behavior is encouraged or "reinforced". It is the "engine" that drives the behavior to encourage again. For example, if you see your bird "feather pick" and you go over to the cage giving it attention, it may assume that the FDB is an effective tool for achieving attention.

A solid scientific understanding of how to positively reinforce good behaviors (best proactive practice) can be found at <http://behaviorworks.org>. Please spend time on this website if you desire to have tools to shape positive behaviors or to decrease negative behaviors. There is also a phone app for functional assessment. It could really change your bird's life!