

Wing & Toenail Trimming

By Debbie Maneke

Trimming your pet birds' wings is a painless operation. Keeping your birds' flight feathers trimmed will not only help in protecting your pet from escaping through open doors or windows but also help prevent your bird from flying into mirrors or closed windows. Many pet cockatiels have been startled into a panic flight, resulting in the bird breaking a wing, hitting their head or beak into walls, mirrors or windows, resulting in concussions, broken beaks or even worse breaking their neck. Trimming the flight feathers also helps make training your cockatiel much easier. Trimming of the wings will also take away your birds ability to fly away from danger such as other household pets so please keep their safety in mind after trimming.

Wing trimming if done properly should allow your bird to maintain a controlled flight down to the floor. If your bird "crashes" to the floor after trimming you have clipped the wings to far back and care must be taken that the bird doesn't damage its breast bone on hard surfaces, such as table edges or hard wood floors. I recommend trimming four or five flight feathers, equally from BOTH wings and watching the bird to see if he can still gain altitude when allowed to fly from the hand. If the bird is able to fly up then trim one or two more flight feathers on each wing. Never trim the secondary flight feathers! A trimmed wing will need to be retrimmed after the bird finishes its molt, opposed to pulling or plucking out the wing feathers, which will result in new feathers growing back within six to eight weeks.

The trimming process may require two people, one to hold the bird and the other to do the trimming. Before you begin hold the bird "belly up" and stretch out the wing you wish to trim. In this position you will be able to see the underside of the wing, look for new feathers coming in that may still contain blood. Do not cut these feathers until they are completely grown in and the blood is no longer in the feather shaft. Be very careful not to cut into the under wing coverts, this will result in bleeding. When you begin trimming start from the outer most primary feathers working your way in toward the secondary flights, making sure to make a clean cut of each feather. (refer to the diagram).

Trimming your birds' wings is not difficult, but you may wish to have your avian veterinarian or an experienced bird breeder show you how to trim the wings properly the first time.

