

Trichomonas in Budgies

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Trichomoniasis, caused by the protozoal parasite *Trichomonas gallinae*, is a significant infectious disease affecting budgerigars. Although often associated with pigeons and doves, trichomoniasis is increasingly recognised as an important cause of illness and mortality in budgerigar aviaries across Australia. Understanding the clinical signs, disease progression, transmission pathways, and appropriate management strategies is critical to maintaining healthy flocks.

Clinical Signs

Trichomonas infections can present with a range of signs, from mild to severe:

Early signs:

- Wet, matted feathers around the beak
- Slight swelling or discharge from the crop area
- Difficulty swallowing or regurgitation

Progressive disease:

- Weight loss despite normal or increased appetite
- Laboured breathing if lesions obstruct the oral cavity or airways
- Offensive odour from the mouth (halitosis)
- Visible yellowish plaques or lumps in the mouth or throat

Severe disease:

- Lethargy
- Inability to perch
- Sudden death, particularly in young or immunocompromised birds

Subclinical infections are also common, meaning a bird may carry and spread the parasite without showing obvious signs of illness.

Disease Progression

Once *Trichomonas* infects a budgerigar, it typically colonises the upper digestive tract, particularly the crop, oesophagus, and oral cavity. The parasite damages the delicate tissues, causing inflammation, ulceration, and the formation of characteristic yellow "caseous" (cheesy) plaques. If untreated, these lesions can grow large enough to obstruct feeding and breathing.

In young birds, infection can rapidly become fatal due to their immature immune systems and smaller airway size. Chronic cases in adults may contribute to persistent poor condition, secondary infections, and increased vulnerability to other diseases.

Transmission Routes

Understanding transmission is crucial for controlling outbreaks:

Direct bird-to-bird contact — through courtship feeding, regurgitation, or fighting
Contaminated food and water sources — the parasite can survive for short periods in moist environments

Parent-to-chick transmission — particularly during hand-feeding or brooding

Shared cage furnishings — such as perches or nest boxes contaminated with saliva
As *Trichomonas* thrives in moist conditions, aviaries with poor hygiene or water management are particularly vulnerable.

Aviary Management for Prevention

Implementing robust management practices greatly reduces the risk of trichomoniasis:

Water hygiene:

Clean all water containers daily with hot, soapy water and dry thoroughly before refilling.

Use narrow-topped drinkers that minimise contamination.

Feeding practices:

Avoid allowing food to become wet or soiled.

Discard uneaten soft foods within a few hours.

Quarantine:

Isolate all new birds for at least 30 days.

During quarantine, test birds for *Trichomonas* via crop wash and microscopic examination.

Environmental management:

Ensure good ventilation to prevent dampness.

Regularly disinfect perches, nesting boxes, and food dishes.

Avoid overcrowding to reduce stress and physical contact.

Wild bird exclusion:

Minimise contact with feral pigeons and doves, which are major reservoirs of *T. gallinae*.

Treatment Regimes

Prompt veterinary treatment is critical, early detection and treatment saves lives:

Medications:

Ronidazole or **Metronidazole** are commonly used antiprotozoal drugs.

Treatment usually lasts 5–10 days, depending on severity and veterinary recommendations.

Administration methods:

Individual dosing (by mouth) provides the most reliable outcomes.

Flock treatments via medicated water can be used but may be less effective due to variable water intake.

Supportive care:

Birds may require supplemental feeding or fluid therapy during recovery.

Secondary bacterial infections may also require targeted antibiotic therapy.

Follow-up:

Retesting after treatment ensures clearance of the infection.

Reinfection is possible if environmental conditions are not corrected.

Important: Not all drugs registered for pigeons are safe for budgerigars. Always consult an avian veterinarian before initiating any treatment.

Conclusion

Trichomoniasis remains a serious threat to budgerigar health but can be effectively managed through good husbandry, early recognition of clinical signs, and veterinary intervention. By enhancing aviary hygiene and minimising opportunities for disease transmission, breeders and owners can help protect their flocks and ensure strong, thriving budgerigars.

Acknowledgement

This article by Dr. Hamish Baron is supplied by the ***World Budgerigar Organisation*** (www.world-budgerigar.org), as part of their encouraged exchange of research information.