



Clipping Wings

By Meliva

Why clip your birds' wings? They are so beautiful in flight and it is the way nature intended your bird to live. Besides, you are always careful when your bird is out of its cage or you never let it out.

Last year, the day of his scheduled clipping, my favorite budgie Izzy came out the tray slot of his cage when I was cleaning it and flew out an open door. He was gone. I spent hundreds of dollars in newspaper ads and hours upon hours tracking down every single reported sighting of any parakeet. I posted fliers, I took phone calls from people who did not know the difference between a budgie and a gold finch. I lost my bird, I lost my entire summer, and I lost a big chunk of my heart.

Accidents are not planned. I am a careful bird keeper with over 15 years experience with budgies and this still happened to me. You may be careful but what if someone else is in your house and holds a door open when your bird is out? What if the cage drops when you are moving it and a window is open? It takes only a split second for tragedy to strike.

A side effect of keeping your bird clipped is that it will be easier to tame and keep tame. Flight is a fright reflex in birds and given the choice between staying with a human and flying away from the human, most budgies will take flight.

Clipping wings is actually not quite what you are doing. You are actually going to clip the wing feathers. Once these cut feathers are molted, a new flight feather grows rapidly in its place. For this reason, wing feathers should be checked regularly.

A proper wing clip is 6-8 of the longest feathers (count from the outside of the wing to the inside). They should be cut to the length of the feathers that overlap the shafts of the flight feathers. If you don't clip them short enough, you still have a flyer.

If you are clipping the bird for the first time, you may want to leave the feathers a smidgen longer to make sure your budgie has a nice glide to the ground and does not drop like a tomato. Once he gets the hang of being clipped, he will get stronger and the feathers should be cut shorter. I have one "jet budgie," Angelotti, who can fly to the ceiling with nine feathers clipped as short as they can go, so you just have to watch your bird and judge based on its abilities.

A good place to learn a proper wing clip is from your vet. When your bird's feathers grow back in, make an appointment for a grooming and ask the vet to show you how to groom rather than just doing it him/herself. If you learn how to do it yourself, you are more likely to keep it up and less likely to lose your bird. Schedule clippings and wing checks regularly and write them on your calendar.

Please keep your bird safe. Clip its wings.