



## THE BIRD CLINIC VETERINARY CORPORATION



### HEART DISEASE IN BIRDS

Diseases of the heart, general vascular system, and therapies are well researched in the human field, but scientific and clinical literature in pet birds is still somewhat limited. Because of this, cardiac disease is still often thought not to exist in pet birds except for unsubstantiated diagnoses of “heart attacks” in patients with sudden death incidents. Rarely were these cases confirmed with proper necropsy and laboratory findings. Now, atherosclerosis (fat plaques in the vessels), arteriosclerosis (hardening of the vessel walls), myocardiopathies (defect in the heart muscle tissue), and cardiac electrical disturbances have all been diagnosed and documented in many bird species with some as young as 1 year of age!

Diagnostics like **Digital Radiology (DR)**, **Electrocardiology (ECG)**, **Angiography**, **Ultrasonography (US)**, and **CAT scans** have revealed new information in clinically normal appearing birds. The BIRD Clinic in 2005 was the first in the world to utilize high resolution digital radiology to reveal organ detail, even in our smallest species, that was not possible in the past. Then in 2007 a board certified radiologist began performing cardiac ultrasounds and doppler blood flow measurements at The BIRD Clinic. Birds can have an array of cardiac abnormalities both congenital as well as acquired. Many of these abnormalities are definable and in many cases are now **TREATABLE!** **The key is to diagnose heart disease EARLY!** Once obvious symptoms are present, the process is often advanced with a subsequent poor outcome.

All species on a high fat (predominately seeds and/or nuts) diet are susceptible. **Amazons, Cockatiels and African Parrots are at a highest risk for heart disease** and should be evaluated earlier in life. **Female birds have a higher risk than Males**, opposite of many other species, and is correlated to elevated Triglyceride levels from ovarian activity first reported by Dr. Nemetz in 2010 at the annual Association of Avian Veterinarian meeting.

Similar to humans, birds with early or advanced cardiac disease **may be completely asymptomatic, or show symptoms that seem unrelated such as lameness, lack of coordination, seizures, difficulty breathing, diminished eyesight, or even sudden death.**

A **CARDIAC WORK-UP** involves a thorough examination, followed by a full blood panel with serum triglycerides, protein electrophoresis, and whole body digital radiographs. If abnormalities are found, an ultrasound / ECG evaluation can document abnormalities in blood flow and cardiac rhythm. **The highest risk patient is 8-10 years of age or older.** This is dependent on the species of bird, with cockatiels demonstrating disease at a much younger age.