



The RAPP **Support** **Plucking** **Articles**

At QPSRAPP, we reap the rewards associated with placing Quaker Parakeets into the homes of adopting volunteers. "RAPP birds" come to us for a variety of reasons. Many transfer into their new homes easily. Others come to their new homes with behavioral problems. Of the more prevalent problems, feather picking, (also called plucking), and /or mutilation, are the most frustrating concerns and difficult behaviors to modify.

It has been said that 1 out of every 10 Quakers will pluck at some point in their life for an undeterminable length of time. The question of why Quakers begin to pluck and /or mutilate and how to break the cycle, is difficult to answer. Plucking can begin for many reasons, individual as each bird. In the case of birds that have experienced moving from one home to another, it would be easy to say that the previous environment in which the bird was living began the behavior. It is not that simple. There is also not one solution or deterrent. So, while you might be one of the fortunate people who does not own a Quaker who feather picks or mutilates, as an owner, you want to be armed with as much information as possible about the behavior, without alarming yourself but, to be as thoroughly educated as you would wish to be about other aspects of Quaker ownership.

RAPP feels the need and responsibility to offer support to each adopting QPSRAPP volunteer about plucking and/or mutilation, especially those volunteers who have elected to adopt Quakers who may have come to them with this behavior already established. It cannot be stressed enough that a complete check up by your veterinarian is the beginning step to addressing the problem and that continuing open and honest communication with your vet is essential. Investigate, discuss, and understand all the options that your vet puts before you. Understand that there are numerous options available and that some experimentation might be necessary before a method is found to be the most effective for treating your bird.

On the following RAPP Support pages are 2 excellent articles that address the use of foam collars. Foam collars have been shown effective in deterring plucking and /or mutilation in many small birds, but not in all. Some vets prefer small plastic collars. The success of each depends largely on the individual bird. Both the plastic and foam collars seem to be more effective and certainly, more comfortable, than the large Elizabethan style collars used on larger birds.

With any type of collar or medication, careful observation of the bird is mandatory. The reaction to medication and to collaring can manifest itself in anger, depression, loss of balance and lack of appetite in the bird. These conditions are temporary, but may last longer in some birds than others. Keep in mind that the emotional reactions you might

exhibit may be felt and reflected in the attitude of the bird as the bird adjusts to collaring. While collared, a bird may lack the ability to defend themselves from other animals in the household; cats, dogs, and even, other birds, no matter the loving relationship exhibited prior to collaring, as the collar may be viewed as a foreign object and as a sign of weakness or illness. It is a crucial time to draw upon common sense to make the adjustment to the collar easy and effective.

[All photos and foam collar instruction © Bill Smith]



Most folks report that their Quaker will adapt to a foam collar fairly quickly. The Quaker may be angry and more stubborn than usual for a few hours, even to the point of nipping anyone near just to get even. But, that angry phase will pass. Some of the extra Quaker stubbornness will pass too. They will grudgingly accept the collar and go on about their normal birdie routines such as eating, playing, climbing, perching, talking, and such.

Other Quakers may react differently. Perhaps on and off for several hours they may actively fight the collar. They will try to remove the collar by scratching it with their feet or twisting their necks and stretching in an attempt to reach it. They may refuse to eat or play for an hour or two.

But, soon they will accept the collaring too. If a bird can reach the collar and chew it, then replace that collar with one about 1/8th of an inch longer. I have not yet heard of a Quaker reaching a 1 1/2 inch long collar, unless the foam had a larger hole in it than the size of a penny.

A few Quakers may appear depressed about the whole ordeal of being collared. After an initial struggle they may appear to completely give up to the point of hanging their head and resting the point of their beak against a flat surface. It may seem that the foam collar is much too heavy for them to support, but actually it weighs about one half of a gram. Those Quakers will adjust too, but it may take overnight. Some of those birds may refuse to eat from their food dish for the remainder of that day, but within two or three hours they will usually accept a small treat or some ground pellets mixed with baby food fruit or sweet potatoes.

Should a Quaker Parrot appear severely depressed and flatly refuses to eat anything the following day, then consult a veterinarian. A temporary and mild anti-depressant may be indicated. It may be worth mentioning that one of our smarter Quakers sometimes appear depressed after being collared following a new plucking episode, but we see her sneak a bite from her dish and play with her toys until she notices us watching her from another room.

If it is necessary to collar your Quaker, it may be better to do so in a familiar place. Have the collar and tape ready and quickly collar the bird

to minimize stress. Speak soothingly to the bird during the collaring process. Afterwards, give the bird extra attention and let it know that you love it and everything is ok. We hold our QPs for a few minutes. Do things to distract it from fighting the collar. Give it a favorite toy or treat.

If it has a surrogate enemy toy, then let it take out any frustrations on it. The bird may refuse to eat or play for a while, but present the offerings often. One of our birds loves to ride in the auto, so I will take her for a spin about the neighborhood.

It may take a few minutes for a collared bird to readjust its balance. So, do not place a freshly collared bird where it may fall from a distance. Soon it will be climbing and balancing almost perfectly normal.

If collaring a bird is necessary to protect it against its own actions, then be sure to collar it. If you cannot bring yourself to collar it, then let someone else do it. When you begin collaring a Quaker, then do not give in to any emotions of pity which the bird may provoke in you. Sometimes birds are masters at playing on our sympathies. For that reason some veterinarians choose to keep a bird overnight away from a potentially upset owner, especially if the bird is to be fitted with a bulky and heavy Elizabethan or solid spool collar. I have seen Quakers collared in a veterinarian clinic fall over on their sides or back and appear to pass out. Often their being collared in such an unfamiliar place by unfamiliar people with heavy and bulk collars will cause much more

stress to the bird than being collared at home by the owner.

We have noticed that our Quakers speak less when collared. That is natural since their neck muscles are being constricted a tiny bit. When they speak or make their special birdie sounds, it may be with a lower voice. However with a beak full of plucked feathers or while picking at a wound, they did not speak as often either.

It may not be wise to place a collared bird with another bird or birds. If you attempt to do that, then be aware that the others may attack the collared bird. It cannot defend itself as well when collared.

Step by Step Instructions **to Constructing a Foam** **Collar**

A foam collar is easily made from two pieces of material. The collar is a slice from a lightweight piece of foam tubing commonly used to insulate 1/2 inch diameter copper water pipe. A piece of 1 inch wide cloth tape is added at the last step to keep the collar shut around the Quaker Parrot's neck



The advantages of using a foam collar rather than others include the freedom for the bird to easily go about its regular daily activities, the ease of installation & removal, its cost of few cents, and most importantly it is much less stressful for the bird to wear than a much heavier and bulkier Elizabethan or solid spool collar.



The light weight foam tubes used to insulate water pipe come in differing sizes and lengths. This is a label from a foam tube bought at Home Depot. The tubes are porous, light, and charcoal in color. The correct size of a foam collar to fit over the neck of a Quaker Parrot will be the tubes used to cover 1/2 inch copper and 3/8 inch iron pipe. Either of those pipes is about the diameter of a penny. So, the inside of the foam tube will permit a penny to barely fit into it. A nickel will be too big, and a dime will be too small in the foam tube.

The lengths of the foam tubes may be 3, 4, or 6 feet. I like the ones from Home Depot which are 6 feet long and cost less than a couple dollars. Such a tube will provide about 40 collars. The tubes of foam will be readily available in hardware, plumbing, and home center stores such as Lowe's and Home Depot. Wal-Mart stocks the shorter foam tubes.



The foam tubes can be sliced easily with a sharp knife. The cuts will be straighter if you slowly slice the tube with a sawing motion. It does not matter if the ends of a collar are tapered a bit. The correct length of a collar for most Quakers will be between 1 1/2 to 1 5/8 inches long, although a few birds cannot remove a 1 1/4 to 1 3/8 inch long one. If your bird can tuck-in its beak far enough to reach and chew on the 1 1/4 inch long collar, then try a slightly longer collar that is sliced 1 3/8 inches long. If the bird can reach the 1 3/8 inch long collar, then try one 1 1/2 inch long. In other words each chewed collar needs to be replaced by one which is 1/8 inch longer until the bird cannot reach it. It is fairly rare that a collar as long as 2 inches is required.



Use a pair of scissors to lightly trim the edges around the outside of the foam collar.



To remove the edges along the holes in a foam collar, spread it open and trim with scissors. When released the collar will snap back into its round position.



If you bought a foam tube with a partially cut slit along the side, then use a pair of scissors to cut the collar completely through at the slit. If you bought a foam tube with glue along the edges of the slit, then remove the protective paper from the glue on the edges and then seal the collar together. Then cut a new slit on the opposite side of the collar. There is no way to attach a collar with exposed glue to a Quaker without feathers

being in the way. Also, a glued on collar will be extremely difficult to be removed later with scissors.



Slip the foam collar over the bird's neck from the bottom.

I find it much easier if someone holds the bird firmly while gently extending its neck by placing a forefinger under the beak and a thumb at the back of the head. Position the slit upward and push any exposed feathers downward into the slit before lightly squeezing the collar shut. That will prevent glue from the tape from covering any feathers. Some Quakers prefer to be held in a towel during the collaring process.



One inch wide cloth tape works well to seal the foam collar shut. Have a piece of the tape precut to 6 or 7 inches long and ready to use at the final step when collaring a bird. As the foam collar is lightly squeezed together with the slit at the top, lightly wrap the tape completely around the collar. Usually no feathers will be in the way, but take

a glance. Later when a collar is to be removed, then cut the tape at the slit



to easily remove the collar.

" Now, that wasn't so bad! "

With two people working together a collar can be installed on a Quaker within seconds, and it can be removed as quickly too. Your Quaker may react differently immediately after being collared. Some Quakers take a collaring well, while other may fight the collar for a few minutes or longer.