

# Bird Toys! *When Are They Dangerous?*

by Marcy Covault, © 2000, all rights reserved, rev. 2014

Super, creative, imaginative, colorful bird toys—every pet store and bird mart has lots of them! You can also make plain or fancy toys yourself, depending on how creative you want to be. Frankly, the birds don't care if it's a \$20 toy, and looks professionally made, or a couple of dollars worth of wood, leather and beads strung together. They'll play with a plain old ten-cent chunk of 1x2" pine as readily as a precisely chiseled 50-cent rectangular wood block.

The key is that the toy is safe, because just like human children, birds are orally-fixated, and will "beak" just about anything to test whether it's edible, chewable, destroyable, tasty, tough—you name it! And if there's a way to ingest it, they will.

When I had horses, we used to say that if a horse were accident-prone, he'd find a way to hurt him-self in a padded stall. That seems to hold true for people and birds too. I heard of a bird suffocating because a seed hull got stuck in his windpipe! We can sure minimize dangers though, if we are aware of some of the potential hazards.

*But what is an unsafe toy?*

There are several web sites that post warnings about hazards in our birds' artificial environments (our homes). I'll list a few at the end, as well as some sites that give lots of ideas for toy making for your birds. You'll need to use common sense about which of the ideas are appropriate for your bird, and you may notice that more than one ignores the potential dangers listed in the following paragraphs.

**Bottom line: check your bird's toys often for signs of destruction, loose threads, etc., and know what toys are safe for your species of bird.**

These are some sites that discuss safe and unsafe toys and toy-building. Most are okay, but use common sense when deciding which toy is appropriate for your type of bird.

"Hanging Bird Toys": <http://www.birdsnways.com/birds/ihang.htm>

"Baubles, Bangles & Beads: All About Toys FAQ":  
<http://www.birdsnways.com/wisdom/ww5e.htm>

"Toy Safety": <http://www.beautyofbirds.com/toysafety.html>

"Bird Toy Safe and Unsafe Material":  
<http://www.pethealthandnutritioncenter.com/bird-toy-safe-unsafe-material.html>

"Dangers of Soft PVC Toys & Vinyl Products": <http://www.birdsnways.com/wisdom/ww18eiv.htm>

## **Threads and fluff**

- Anything with strings can potentially wrap around a toe, tongue, wing, or a neck—that means ropes, sewn toys, string toys, cage covers. That definitely includes the popular "sleep tents"!
- Any piece of fluffy material can get impacted in the digestive system—from soft cotton to medium-soft bedding.

## **All that glitters**

- Costume jewelry is pretty on you, but can poison your bird (zinc, lead, pot metal).
- Rhinestones are twinkly glass, and they can shred an intestinal tract if ingested—so can lava rocks used in toys—they're glass too!

## **As strong as the weakest link**

- Large loops can be nooses—neck, toe, or beak.
- Small links can catch toes and tongues.
- A "quick-link" can be almost as bad as a fishhook in a bird's beak. "Pear links" are a little better, but be sure they are tightly closed.

## **Tinkle, tinkle, little bell**

- Noisy bells are fun toys, but not if they have removable metal (usually lead or pot metal) clappers.
- Jingle bells can snag a beak and not let go.

## **The wonders of plastics**

- Tearing up plastic toys can be fun for your bird—but can be lethal if some types are ingested, through leaching of chemicals, impaction, or internal laceration.
- That pretty plastic spiral around a millet spray can hang your bird—by the neck or leg.



### **Unsafe bird toy!**

A woman purchased this toy at a WalMart for her pet jenday, and after chewing on it, the jenday became ill and died from "lead poisoning". The woman sent the toy to a university for testing, and the center yellow rod was determined to have lead-based paint on it.

This toy has also been seen at PetSmart and other stores. It's relatively inexpensive and cute, so attractive to bird owners.

This toy was produced in China.

Incident report 10/2014