

All Bird and Exotic Veterinary Clinic. Do you want be one? - My experience as an all-bird and exotic veterinarian

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WATERLOO 2017
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Having been an all-bird veterinarian for the past 7 years and in the past three years also seeing exotics I have experienced many of the styles of clinic that can be run. To run an all bird and exotic service without having a sideline business (selling bird drugs or diagnostic services) it is important to know some simple management factors to survive.

It is much simpler to have a normal veterinary clinic that also sees birds and exotics as the normal veterinary management lessons are applicable.

For the basics of setting yourself up to see birds and exotics consult the commonly written articles in major Australian And North American AAV conferences.

1. Styles of service

- Mobile to homes
- Mobile to other veterinary clinics and other homes
- Bird and exotic clinic within another veterinary clinic
- Bird and exotic clinic within specialist clinic
- Bird and exotic clinic stand alone

2. Bird and Exotic clinic

positives

- Become an "expert" in a field with few others
- Shorter working hours as less competition
- Spend longer with each patient
- clients not usually going elsewhere
- Financial reward
- Fun
- Fulfilling case load
- your passion is your work

negatives

- No or few vaccinations
- No constant income stream
- Few simple cases
- long consults
- Information not always available
- many clients have never been to a veterinarian before
 - need to discuss husbandry
 - cost is often a shock even if small account as have only been to pet stores before
- Frustration as many diagnostic tests not available and not enough information to take cases further
 - (ever had an adrenal problem in a bird, probably- but not diagnosed)
- Locums hard to find so holidays difficult
- your passion is your work so you need a new hobby

3. All Birds or Birds and Exotics?

All birds

Positives

- Is specialised and so easy to market
- Easy to keep up to date
- Small amount of equipment
- Small drug account
- Small number of staff
- Unlikely to have competition by other vets

Negatives

- Often no simple cases
- No variation in species

Birds and Exotics

Positives

- Variation in cases
- More turnover in money and cases

Negatives

- Have become a generalist again
- Other veterinarians on some species may have more knowledge
- A lot more equipment that may be used only occasionally
- A lot more drugs that may be only used occasionally

4. 10 Management recommendations

Most of the suggestions below are to avoid burnout. Because most all-bird and all-bird and exotic clinics are small it is important to make your work enjoyable and profitable without taking 24 hours seven days a week. These 10 points do not include all the basic necessities of any veterinary clinic seeing birds but for clinics specialising in birds and/or exotics only.

1. Spend a long time with each client
 - enjoy each client and their animal
 - explain husbandry
 - explain behaviour
2. Charge appropriately
 - it is better to be considered "expensive but good"
 - they are not coming to you because your cheap
 - you are not a "rip off" but you must give value for money
3. Have a well-trained nurse or technician who loves birds, exotics and wildlife
 - train them to answer the calls
 - train them to do all treatments and most diagnostic tests
4. Have a lot of handout sheets
 - saves time and explains facts consistently
5. Encourage health checks and send reminders
6. Encourage high level diagnostics
 - clients come for answers and diagnostics not just treatments
7. Have equipment other regular clinics do not have or cannot use properly
 - eg a video microscope
8. If available, train the after hours service to handle night cases
 - you can't be on duty all the time
9. Make contacts with your closest Specialist Centre or at least large modern veterinary hospital
 - they have equipment, drugs and expertise you will need to call upon
 - that as a small service you may not have
 - eg ultrasound, chemotherapeutic drugs and ophthalmologists
10. Limit your opening hours, if your clinic is small, as there is only low level competition and you cannot be there all hours

References

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