

What I learned about feather conditioning in Modern Game Bantams in 2008 Part one.

Many are the things I love about Modern Games. Fortunately few things I don't like. One of them is over preening.

This problem I am sure many of you are familiar with, the end results being shredded primary feathers. Each year over preening starts the juveniles right around the beginning of August. This is the time my youngsters are growing in a heavy load of feathers.

It always starts the same way. Just a simple and unremarkable split in the secondary wing feather closest to the birds body and beak. They appear to be picking at the wing feathers. In fact I used to call this "feather picking".

This year at the first signs of over preening, I did what I usually do, I sat down my milk crate and had a good cry.

I reflected over my ideas from past years. I have suspected moderns are just nuts (similar to cockatoos or African Grey's ). Of course I have thought of the usual ideas such as over crowding, boredom, and mites.

I gave them toys, I dusted them, I let them free range even though the hawks kept gunning them down. Last year I even tried spraying bad tasting remedies onto the primaries. Nothing worked.

Alone and in a fog of tears I even considered a *new breed*. Over preening *was* driving me crazy.

**Why** I wondered. *Why* could just one small split in these birds's primaries turn into shredded sticks for feathers in just a matter of a couple of weeks.

It occurred to me that the birds might be *unable* to “ zip “ back up a split feather. I pondered this for 2 full days.

Then I received an inspirational email from Jeff Halbach. I wish I had saved it, but it had something to do with being a quitter vises never giving up.

I sat back down on my milk crate. I did not think I was a quitter.

I began thinking about how the Modern Game is a man made breed. Preen glands on some wild birds I have seen seemed to produce more oil. Maybe I thought the Modern Game as an insufficient preen gland.

The first chance I got I Googled “ Preen Glands “. I came up with an article on the diseases of preen glands. Vitamin A deficiency was frequently mentioned.

Instantly I was transported back to my time working as an Avian Veterinary Technician. It seemed that our clinic saw more vitamin A deficiency than any other problems in birds. I had always figured that poultry feed is Vitamin balanced. But what if its *not* I wondered. What if my Modern Games were deficient in vitamin A.

I read more about the preen gland. I learned that the type of oil produced is called Ester oil. I then Googled Ester oil. What came back ? Cod Liver Oil !!! Heck I knew that Cod liver oil is high in Vit A. And I just happen to have a gallon of it in my shed.

The next morning I started mixing it in the feed. I did not have any science of how much to use. I had previously thought my feed seemed sort of dry. So I mixed in just enough to make the crumbles barely coated.

They loved it ! I realized that in mixing it with my hands my skin seemed quite nicely hydrated. Then I tried a tiny bit on a wing feather. I was impressed how smoothly the oil melted in to the feather. I tried applying Cod Liver oil to a couple of culls. Those birds almost instantly stopped over preening. The feathers seemed to “heal” or zip up well. I was worried the feathers would do the opposite. But the result was pleasing.

Soon I got bolder and was adding oil carefully to all my pullets wings. I added a touch behind the tail and under the wings. *It was working.* This was the first thing that ever really worked in fact. I was thrilled !

I think in fact I may have “figured it out”. Prior to the Cod liver oil treatments the feathers feel dry to the birds. The same uncomfortable feeling to dry hands perhaps. Add to this pinching of painful pinfeathers which are in full bloom on the birds bodies. I think the preen gland is not producing enough oil to “moisturize” the birds. In essence I believe they feel itchy.

I now realize that I had been seeing signs of vitamin A deficiency in the winter in my older hens. These were the same signs we would see in the avian clinic ( Grey, thickened choanas ) So my new theory of Vitamin A deficiency and over preening made perfect sense to me.

Today I have hens that I never have never been able to show due to over preening. They really quite awful to look at. Now they are in good enough feather to show. In fact last weekend one of those old hens took best of Breed in a class of 45 birds. I have noticed that even the old cocks have never looked better !

I know your asking cant this be bad ? Cant you over do this ?  
*Well ya.* First off Vitamin A is one of the vitamins that is stored in

the body. Too much vitamin A can cause liver damage. I am not sure how much Cod liver oil is too much. This is still something to be figured out by me.

Also, I over did it. You know that saying that “if some is better than more must be even better”? Well apparently that’s me. In late August, when the pullets had stopped the frantic over preening I applied just a little more just in case. That last application did make for a whitish waxy build up. I suspect the weather was just cooling off at that time and the oil has a better viscosity when its warm out.

I used Happy Jack Cod Liver Oil. I was told by my supplier “this is the good stuff” I believe it as its pretty clear and has very little odor.

Reader please note; I used it *Sparingly* ! I just painted it on with my finger tip when the primaries seemed dry. I also would recommend just putting on a very small amount on a paper towel and wiping it on the bird. Of course try this on a cull first to see if it works for you.

In the five years I have been working with Modern Game Bantams only in my first year did I really have good feather quality. I think this is because I fed them all kinds of treats from my kitchen, thus keeping them from lacking in vitamins. Due to some family problems this year I was unable to do any culling until September. As a result during this experiment my birds were the most crowed they have ever been. Also I never once let them run around as we are swarming with hawks here.

In Closing I must say I am convinced vitamin A plays a roll in over preening in my flock of Modern Game Bantams.

I encourage more discussion on this topic. Please feel free to email me at [Tallchicken@yahoo.com](mailto:Tallchicken@yahoo.com) Or phone me in the early evening as I go to bed with the chickens too.

Thank you to everyone who has already engaged countless hours talking about this topic with me I really appreciate your thoughts.