



Pododermatitis (Bumblefoot) in Birds

Pododermatitis (bumblefoot) is the inflammation and infection of the skin on the bottom of the foot. It may develop gradually and can become severe if left untreated. While it most often affects birds of prey, waterfowl, penguins, wading birds, and parrots, all bird species can develop pododermatitis.

What does pododermatitis look like?

Pododermatitis begins on the bottom of the foot, typically on weight-bearing areas such as the joints or footpad. Initially the skin may lose definition, develop a shiny appearance, become thicker with brown to black scabs, and appear red. If not treated, swelling, ulcers, sores, and abscesses may develop. Eventually infection may spread to bone. Birds may show signs of lameness, swollen joints, depression, lack of appetite, or changes in personality and behavior. Lesions may be advanced and severe before a bird develops other signs.



Figure 1. Red circles showing varying presentations of pododermatitis in flamingos. Photos: Paul Rose and Andrew Mooney

PRACTICAL TIP



The **BEST** way to prevent severe disease is to regularly and frequently inspect birds' feet for early signs of pododermatitis.

What causes pododermatitis?

- Inappropriate perches or substrates
 - Perch diameter is too small or too large
 - Perches or substrates provide inadequate support or are too hard
 - Surfaces of perches or substrates are too abrasive (e.g. cement) or lack grip
- Poor husbandry, such as damp or unsanitary bedding, substrates, or perches
- Poor nutrition and/or vitamin A deficiency
- Obesity and inactivity
- Fighting among flock members or self-harm/behavioral problems
- Overgrown toenails leading to malposition of the toes or accidental self-puncture
- History of leg or foot injury or poor conformation
- Frostbite injuries and thermal burns
- Stress, other viral/bacterial skin lesions, or immunosuppression



How do you prevent pododermatitis?

- Regularly inspect and compare both feet to each other.
- Provide many appropriately sized perches that are non-abrasive and supportive.
- Provide a clean, dry environment.
- Provide an optimal diet for species, size, and production stage.
- Trim nails as needed.
- Ensure housing temperatures are appropriate for the species.
- Manage predisposing conditions, such as arthritis or chronic lameness.



If you suspect pododermatitis, consult with an experienced avian veterinarian immediately. Advanced lesions may need antibiotics and/or surgical treatment. If the underlying causes are corrected and adequate treatment given early, birds often have a good prognosis.

