

A Quick Guide to Bumblefoot

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“Bumblefoot” is another word for the medical term “pododermatitis,” which means inflammation of the skin of the feet. It can happen for a variety of reasons, but the main lesson is...

incorrect perching = unhappy feet

Out in natural environments, birds are constantly sitting on different surfaces – different textures of tree bark, widths of branches, and hard surfaces such as concrete or rocks or soft surfaces such as the ground. This constant variety means that the contact surfaces of the feet are well developed with tiny papilla (bumps) that relieve pressure to any one area, and the nails are kept nicely trimmed to a useful (but not too long) length. In captivity, even the largest cages with multiple types of perching do not provide that variety, and birds can start to get sores on their feet. This is especially true in obese or less active birds.



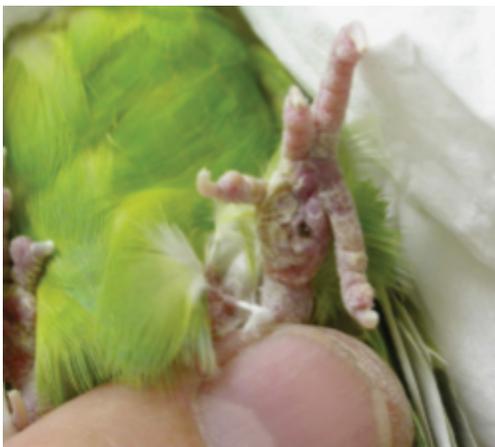
Normal foot condition – no signs of bumblefoot (pododermatitis)

The first thing that happens in pododermatitis is the papilla start to become worn and the bottom of the foot develops a shiny and slightly pink appearance. I see many birds with this early stage of disease. It's a warning sign to me that the feet are dealing with areas of increased pressure, and some changes are warranted.



Grade 1 Bumblefoot Lesion – This stage is difficult to detect, but must be corrected immediately to prevent further stage developments. Apply Vitamin E ointment to affected area. Supply rope perches and avoid excessive use of rough grooming perches.

If corrections are not made, this early form of inflammation can develop to more severe lesions, to the point where the bottoms of the feet have painful, deep ulcers that can become infected. Once pododermatitis has reached this stage, treatment is difficult and prolonged – a huge challenge both for the owner and the bird.



Grade 5 bumblefoot lesions

How can I prevent bumblefoot?

Rotate and clean perches regularly, providing a variety of textures, widths and surfaces. Be aware that your bird will probably spend the most time on the highest perch. Perches are too thin of a diameter if your bird's front and back nails are curling around and overlapping each other. Avoid extremely harsh surfaces like sandpaper, but concrete can be a good surface as long as smoother perches are also

available. If possible, use bird-safe branches covered in natural bark, which is great for foot health but also provides enrichment since the bird can chew the bark off over time. And check your bird's feet regularly! If you notice early signs, you can make changes to keep your bird's feet happy and healthy.

BUMBLEFOOT LOOK FOR THESE SYMPTOMS	
Grade 1:	Thinning of the plantar surface of the foot with some reddening.
Grade 2:	The thinning of the plantar surface of the foot has progressed to the point where sub cutaneous tissue such as tendons can be seen through the skin.
Grade 3:	Ulcers form on the soles of the feet with calluses forming around the edges of the lesions. Some pain and mild lameness are present.
Grade 4:	A necrotic plug forms in the center of the ulcer, and pain and lameness are present.
Grade 5:	Cellulitis (swelling and edema) surrounds the area of necrosis, and the foot or digits can be swollen with edema (fluid). Tendons and metatarsal pads can become infected, and pain and severe lameness are present.
Grade 6:	The digits are swollen and the necrotic flexor tendons on the plantar surface of the foot rupture. Even with treatment, non-functioning digits and ankylosis (fusion of joints) will be present.
Grade 7:	Osteomyelitis (bone infection) occurs and can progress to systemic infection and even death.

Julia M. Hill, DVM is a veterinarian with a special passion for avian medicine. After graduating from the College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Georgia, she has worked in several private practices that see a high caseload of exotic animals as well as completing a yearlong internship in wildlife medicine at the Clinic for the Rehabilitation of Wildlife (C.R.O.W.) in Sanibel, Florida. She has a special interest in educating bird owners about avian conservation issues and incorporating foraging, principles of nutrition and applied behavior analysis to improve captive parrot welfare.