

# MANAGING MILD BUMBLEFOOT (PODODERMATITIS)

## What is Bumblefoot?

Bumblefoot (also known as pododermatitis) describes any inflammatory or degenerative condition of a bird's foot. Bumblefoot can range in severity from very mild thinning and redness on the bottoms of the feet and ankle to infected, large, open wounds with bone, joint, and tendon/ligament damage. While the more severe forms of the disease happen most often in waterfowl and inappropriately housed birds of prey, pet parrots commonly suffer from mild grades of bumblefoot.



*Mild to moderate bumblefoot*



*Moderate to severe bumblefoot*

## Why Does Bumblefoot Occur?

In pet parrots, bumblefoot occurs for several reasons:

### Obesity

Pet parrots are often overweight so their feet have to deal with a larger amount of pressure.

### Sedentary Lifestyle

Most parrots sit in their cages most of the day rather than flying around from place to place. This also leads to a consistent pattern of wear on the feet, similar to bed sores developing in bed-bound people.

### Perching

Pet parrots usually have few perching options while in the wild they would have almost endless options from which to choose. Limited perching options lead to the feet being worn in the same way day after day, especially when wooden dowels are used as they lack any variation in size or shape. In addition, inappropriate perches, such as ones with sandpaper or ones that are of incorrect size, will cause excessive wear on the feet. (A bird's foot should wrap about 2/3 to 3/4 of the way around a perch if appropriately sized, not including the toenails.)

### Contact Irritants

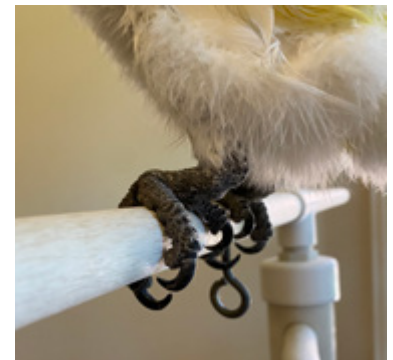
Perching on surfaces soiled with feces or food will irritate the bird's skin and can cause infection, as can perching on chemicals such as nicotine and cleaning products.

### Medical Problems

Birds with arthritis or injury of one leg are more prone to wearing their feet abnormally due to abnormal stances or weight bearing. Additionally, heart disease and atherosclerosis (clogging of the arteries) can cause reduced blood flow to the feet and secondary sore formation.

### Malnutrition

Birds on a poor-quality diet, such as 100% seed, are prone to bumblefoot because seeds lack nutrients that are necessary for maintaining healthy skin.



*Example of a perch that is too small*



*Example of a perch that is the appropriate size, however wooden dowel perches are not preferred.*



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## What Can You Do at Home?

Patients with mild bumblefoot can often be successfully managed with some simple changes to the environment. The following options should be considered:

- Providing a variety of appropriately-sized perches on which the bird may sit. Some options include a corner/flat perch (see images to the right), rope perch, and padded perch. A rope swing can also be a nice option for birds with excessive wear on their feet. Natural branch perches are recommended over wooden dowels that are exactly the same diameter and shape along their entire lengths.
- (Temporarily) removing rough/concrete perches that help to keep nails short as these can be somewhat abrasive and exacerbate the problem.
- Weight loss should be encouraged for birds that are overweight. You can discuss how to do this safely with your avian veterinarian.
- Dietary corrections. Regardless of your bird's body condition, a balanced diet is essential since skin health depends on good nutrition. Be sure to discuss with your avian veterinarian whether your bird is on an appropriate diet, and what changes can be made to correct it.
- Providing opportunities to exercise. Increasing exercise is beneficial for many things, including increasing the blood flow to the legs and helping obese animals to lose weight. You can do flapping exercises with your bird, start captive foraging activities, encourage running around on the floor or climbing ladders, and, if it can be done safely, allow your bird to fly.
- Make sure your bird is only perching on clean, chemical free perches and hands.
- Work with your avian veterinarian to manage any predisposing medical conditions such as arthritis.

## How Long Will it Take for the Bumblefoot to Go Away?

It can take a long time for bumblefoot to resolve. As long as things are going in the right direction, patience is recommended.

## What if the Bumblefoot Gets Worse?

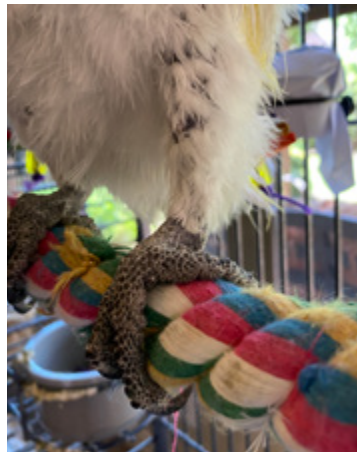
If your bird's foot lesions are getting worse then a recheck exam with your avian veterinarian is warranted. In some cases, further work-up is needed (e.g. radiographs, wound cultures) and more extensive treatments including bandages, antibiotics, topical therapies, or even surgery are indicated.



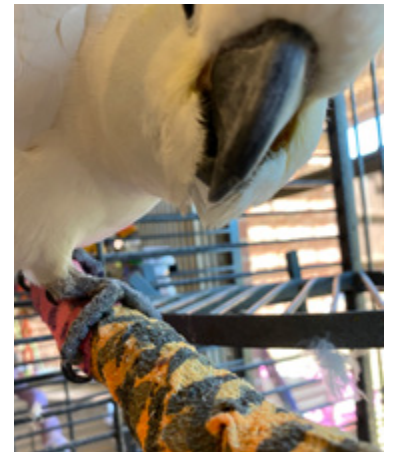
Corner perch



Chinchilla perch (for smaller birds)



Rope perches are a good option



Example of a padded perch



Be sure to provide opportunities for exercise

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## How to Pad Perches

To pad perches, simply wrap self-adherent bandage material (e.g. VetRap or Coban) around a dowel rod, java wood, or manzanita perch. The VetRap can be cut off with an Exacto-knife or scissors (keep curious beaks away from these sharp objects!) and replaced as needed when soiled, sticky, or chewed upon.



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Avian medicine is a distinct and very specialized field that requires extensive training, advanced skills, and facilities specifically designed and equipped to treat and hospitalize birds. The Association of Avian Veterinarians was established to provide veterinarians with this special education, and to keep them up to date with the latest information on bird health. The AAV holds an annual conference on avian medicine and publishes the peer-reviewed *Journal of Avian Medicine and Surgery*. AAV also makes annual contributions toward avian conservation and sponsors studies advancing the understanding of avian medicine.



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## For More Information

For more information on birds, ask your veterinarian for copies of the following AAV Client Education Brochures:

- Avian Chlamydiosis and Psittacosis\*
- Additional Bumblefoot Brochures (Raptors, Poultry)
- Veterinary Care for Your Pet Bird\*
- Basic Care for Companion Birds\*
- Behavior: Normal and Abnormal
- Caring for Backyard Chickens
- Caring for Ducks
- Digital Scales
- Feather Loss
- Feeding Birds
- Foraging for Parrots\*
- Injury Prevention and Emergency Care
- Managing Chronic Egg-laying in Your Pet Bird
- Signs of Illness in Companion Birds\*
- Ultraviolet Lighting for Companion Birds
- When Should I Take My Bird to a Veterinarian?\*
- Zoonotic Diseases in Backyard Poultry\*

*\*Available in multiple languages. All others are available in English only at this time.*

## Online Resources

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Our website, [www.aav.org](http://www.aav.org), offers a Find-a-Vet tool to help pet bird owners locate avian veterinarians around the world. We also offer a variety of resources such as basic bird care instructions and more. Visit the website today!