

The "P" Avian Diseases



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written by an avian veterinarian

the information on this care sheet is a basic overview and not a substitute for veterinary care. For more information and to find a qualified avian veterinarian, go to www.AAV.org.

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD)

Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease (PBFD) is caused by a virus (Circovirus). Psittacine refers to the parrot family (parrots, parakeets, budgerigars). PBFD can affect most species of parrots, both old world (Africa, Europe, and Asia) and New World (the Americas). It is thought to have originated in Australia and can be found in wild birds in addition to pet birds on that continent. It is a disease most notably associated with deformed feathers and possible beak abnormalities, hence the name beak and feather disease. Juvenile or young-adult psittacine birds are more susceptible but all ages are able to acquire the disease.

The virus is shed in feces and feather dander and is suspected to be transmitted from the hen to her egg. Psittacine Beak and Feather Disease can present as a short or long term infection. The short term or acute infection can cause death within a week of showing signs of the disease. The signs may include depression, fractures or bending of the feathers, blood in developing feather shafts, or the premature shedding of developing feathers. Acute infection may cause severe illness with the bird not wanting to eat or regurgitating food that it has eaten. Some may die of liver failure before showing any clinical signs.

The long term or chronic infection is more subtle. It presents as progressive abnormally developed feathers replacing normal feathers during each successive molt. Short, clubbed, or deformed feathers and retained feather sheaths are often noted. The beak may grow abnormally long and have fractures. Claw abnormalities may develop after disease of the feathers and beak is apparent. Many parrots with this disease have difficulty eating and therefore lose weight and die.

The virus is very resistant to disinfectants and even high heat but seems to be susceptible to peroxide compounds. There is not currently a cure for PBFD but some birds do make full recoveries. Treatment consists of isolating the affected bird and supportive care such as antibiotics and antifungal medications.

If you suspect this disease in your flock, it is important to

take the affected bird or birds to your veterinarian for a diagnosis. This disease can mimic others such as polyoma (discussed next in this article) or even feather destructive behavior. To prevent your parrots from getting this disease, be sure to practice quarantine procedures of at least two months for any new flock members coming into your household. Your vet can also perform tests on the new addition if the disease is suspected.

Polyoma

Polyomavirus is another virus (Papovavirus) of serious concern. Young psittacines are often affected, especially budgerigars, other parrot species, and finches. It is spread through direct contact between birds, feather dander, feces, urine, and skin. It can also be spread on clothing, hair, skin, toys, and cages as well as from the hen to the egg. The disease has also been reported in wild birds.

While Polyomavirus primarily affects young birds, adults can become infected but usually don't show signs. If an adult is affected, it may also have PBFD (see above). Young birds often show disease at weaning and may die suddenly with no signs of illness. It is possible that the bird will show depression, delayed crop emptying, regurgitation, diarrhea, stunted growth, and feather development problems.

The virus is very resistant to heat, freezing, and thawing but good sanitation can greatly reduce the spread of the disease. Once again, there is no cure for the disease so treatment consists of supportive care. Some birds are able to clear the illness. A vaccine is available for this virus. Talk to your veterinarian about this important disease if you suspect it in your flock. Once again, be sure to quarantine any new birds for at least two months before adding them to your flock.

Psittacosis

Psittacosis also known as "Parrot Fever" or Chlamydiosis. It is unlike the first two diseases because it is caused by a bacteria (*Chlamydophila psittaci*). It affects many species of birds and mammals and can also be transferred to humans. Symptoms in humans are fever and flu-like symptoms. It is important to see advice from your human healthcare professional if you suspect you may have psittacosis.

Many times, this disease presents in birds that have recently been purchased or exposed to large congregations of other birds. It is spread through the ingestion or breathing in of particles of feces, urine, nasal discharge, tears, or mucus. It can also be transmitted from the hen to the egg.

Any age bird can be affected and may show respiratory signs, trouble breathing, discharge from the eyes or nose, regurgitation, vomiting, and green diarrhea. Sometimes the disease may only show up as inflammation of the eye or be as severe as sudden death. In a flock situation, some birds may remain unaffected. These birds may still pose a danger as they can still transfer the disease to other birds that may become affected. Many signs are nonspecific and can represent a whole range of diseases such as not wanting to eat, ruffled feathers, or drowsiness.

The bacteria is susceptible to many common disinfectants

including bleach, alcohol, and ammonia compounds. Thorough cleaning and disinfection is crucial to preventing the birds from reinfesting themselves. This is a disease with a treatment, a specific class of antibiotics, usually given for an extended period of time. Again, be sure to quarantine new additions to your flock for at least two months to observe for any illness.

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