

Pressure Sores

Peter S. Sakas DVM, MS

Niles Animal Hospital and Bird Medical Center

7278 N. Milwaukee Niles, IL 60714

(847) 647-9325 FAX 847-647-8498

www.nilesanimalhospital.com

One of the most common problems that we see in pet birds, especially the smaller varieties, are pressure sores on the bottom of the feet. It is usually due to improper perches and through changes in the perches can be corrected.

Birds are unable to form calluses on the bottom of their feet so through chronic wear the scales will wear thin. What you will notice is that there will be red sores on the bottom of the feet with the loss of the normal round scales. In severe, chronic cases there can be ulcerations through the skin which can produce lameness.

Pressure sores usually develop in birds that are kept on perches of the same diameter or in birds that are rarely given freedom outside the cage. Their feet will wear in the same area and over time will wear through the scales on the bottom of the feet. Small diameter perches will cause pressure sores to develop in the middle of the foot while large diameter perches will cause wear on the underside of the hock (ankle). Pressure sores on the hock tend to be more dangerous due to the potential damage of the tendon running beneath the hock. We have seen this type of hock ulceration most often in cockatiels.

Pressure sores can be easily prevented. Provide your bird with a variety of perch diameters so that the wear can be more evenly distributed. Small and large diameter perches should be placed in the cage. Flat, wide perches are also recommended. Commercially available perches, such as "Comfort Perches" are useful because you can set them to provide either a narrow or wide perching surface. Branches from outside of variable diameter can also provide the opportunity for better wear.

For smaller birds, rubber or plastic tubing can be useful as it will provide a wider and softer surface. In small birds, especially canaries/finches, that constantly flit from perch to perch, non-rigid perches should be available. Swings, tubing or clothesline are excellent perches that will "give" as the bird jumps about and is easier on their feet.

To determine if your bird has pressure sores pick it up and look at the underside of the feet. Determining the wear will enable you to make a educated decision for the proper perching needed. If sores are evident the padding of the perches should be undertaken until the sores heal. Perches can be padded with paper towels and scotch tape, Dr. Scholl's moleskin, or some type of toweling/fabric; care taken so it does not shred/unravel and provide an opportunity for the toenails to get caught. Severe cases, ulcerations, may require that the feet are bandaged and possibly the use of antibiotics.

Pressure sores are easily avoided through proper perching and also allowing your bird(s) freedom outside the cage with the opportunity to be on a variety of surfaces. Take your bird out and look at their feet. It is much easier to prevent this problem or identify it early rather than having to treat ulcerations and the resultant "bumblefoot".