

# Beak and Feather Disease

## Introduction

Beak and Feather Disease (BFD) is the common name for Psittacine Circoviral Disease. It affects mainly parrots and lorikeets and related species but has also been observed in other species. It is often fatal to birds that contract it.

## Virus

The virus that causes the disease has been identified in wild populations and is believed to occur naturally. It can affect birds of all ages, but particularly juveniles and young adults.

The virus kills feather and beak cells and may be acute (resulting in death shortly after symptoms appear) or chronic (birds may survive for a longer time and even appear to recover, but they are still infectious). The virus also affects the bird's immune system. Most birds die either from the disease or from infections. The virus is highly contagious and persistent in the environment, for example in tree hollows where parrots nest.

## Symptoms

The disease symptoms vary with the species. In Rainbow Lorikeets, for example, birds typically lose the outermost primary feathers on both wings, and their tail feathers. Although unable to fly they can still climb and run along the ground, hence the disease is also called 'Runners' in Lorikeets. Sometimes people think they are young birds that have not yet learned to fly; but Lorikeet chicks have black beaks that gradually turn red as they mature, and affected Lorikeets will usually have some red in their beaks that indicates they are old enough to be flying.



Cockatoos, by contrast, lose feathers on their body and crest and their beaks become long and twisted, so they cannot eat. They may look dirty, and their beak and feet may appear shiny because they lack powder down feathers.



## Treatment

BFD is not zoonotic (it doesn't affect humans) but it can infect your pet parrots.

A vaccine to protect pet parrots is being developed but as BFD is widespread it will be impossible to eradicate in the wild. When WIRES volunteers rescue birds affected by the disease, we are required to have them euthanased by a vet because if they are released into the wild, they will not only suffer a long and painful death, but they will infect other birds.

If you handle a wild bird affected by Psittacine Circovirus Disease, we recommend you dispose of or thoroughly disinfect any clothes, towels or equipment the bird was in contact with. The recommended disinfectant for this virus is Virkon S, which you should be able to obtain through your local vet.