

Scaly Leg and Face Mite in Birds: Signs, Transmission, Diagnosis, and Treatment

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Mites of the genus *Knemidokoptes*, commonly known as the "scaly leg and face mites," are parasites of the skin and beak of birds. Scaly leg (also called 'tassel foot') and scaly face are common conditions in smaller pet birds. Note: the name of the mite may also be spelled *Knemidocoptes* or *Cnemidocoptes*.

What are the signs of a knemidokoptic infestation?

In budgerigars, canaries, and other small birds, the infestation with scaly leg mites (mange) causes scaly gray or white crusty lesions on the nonfeathered skin, especially on the legs, feet, and around the beak. In budgies, the lesions usually start at the commissures (corners) of the beak and have a honeycombed appearance. Foot lesions are common in canaries, in which white, tassel-like projections stick out from the legs and feet. Lesions may also occur on the cere (fleshy tissue above the beak) and around the eyes and vent. In severe cases, the beak, feet, and toes may become malformed. In other species of birds, the scaly leg mites may cause itching and feather loss, but no scaly lesions.

How are knemidokoptic mites transmitted?

The scaly leg mites apparently spend their entire life cycle on the bird. They burrow into the epithelium (top layer of the skin) and form tunnels. The mites are transmitted from bird to bird through prolonged close or direct contact. Some experts feel that the mites are transmitted to the unfeathered offspring in the nest, and will cause disease if the bird is genetically susceptible, stressed, or has a suppressed immune system.

How is knemidokoptic mange diagnosed?

A diagnosis is made by identifying the scaly leg mites or the eggs in a skin scraping taken from the affected area.

How is a knemidokoptic mite infestation treated?

Treatment of choice for birds with scaly leg mite lesions, and all birds that have had contact with them, is [ivermectin](#). It may require 2-6 treatments at 10 day intervals to completely eliminate the mites. The ivermectin may be applied on the skin behind the neck, given orally, or injected. Moxidectin has also been used topically. It is very important to use the proper concentration of both of these drugs, so always check with your veterinarian before treating a bird. Some other treatments are less effective and can be very toxic if they are ingested or get into the eyes. In the past, mineral oil has been applied to the lesions, but it is messy and can result in unwanted side effects, including oily feathers and aspiration of the mineral oil. In addition, since the mites can be anywhere on the body, just treating the affected area with something like mineral oil will not kill all the mites. If open lesions are present, antibiotics may be given to prevent or treat secondary bacterial infections.



The cage, bowls, toys, and other items should be cleaned and disinfected. Items that cannot easily be disinfected should be removed and replaced.