

Avian Keratin Disorder



Photo from [Corvid Research website](#).

Avian Keratin Disorder (AKD) is a disorder affecting Chickadees, Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, Crows and other members of the corvid family. It was first identified in Black-capped Chickadees in Alaska in 1998¹ and, by 2008, it was estimated that 6.5% of Black-capped Chickadees and 17% of Northwestern crows had AKD.

AKD results in deformities in the beak². In all of the species that are suspected to have avian keratin disorder, the beak is elongated, sometimes crossed, and often has irregularities on the surface keratin. This disorder is present in the Pacific Northwest and it can be fatal by restricting the bird's ability to feed and groom³. Recent research suggests AKD is caused by a virus⁴.

It is important to document and report AKD observations. The Alaskan researchers report that they have had some reports from crows and other corvids in BC, but few from chickadees or other species commonly affected in Alaska. It's not clear if this is because avian keratin disorder simply doesn't occur as frequently in BC, or if affected birds are not being observed/reported.

Information for Banders

If you catch a bird with such a deformity please document it in the comments section of the banding record and, if you feel it appropriate, use a non-300 status code. Take photos showing the deformity. Send the photos, species, date, time, location and any other pertinent information to the [USGS Reporting site](#). Note that despite the error message you may receive the reports are being sent.

Ensure you sterilize your hands and all equipment after handling such birds. Everyone who handled the bird should also sterile their hands.

Information for Bird Watchers

If you see a bird with a beak deformity similar to that described above please take note of the species, date, time, location and behaviour. If possible get some pictures of the bird. Please send this information to the [USGS Reporting site](#). Note that despite the error message you may receive the reports are being sent.