

Feeding Birds

While much has been learned about bird nutrition in recent years, the exact nutritional requirements for parrots are unknown. A majority of birds kept as pets are suffering from some degrees of nutritional deficiency.

All-seed diets do not provide the necessary vitamins and minerals most birds need, especially the larger parrots. They also provide too much fat for captive birds who typically lack the exercise opportunities of their wild brethren. In addition, the typical parrot in the wild does not eat sunflower seeds, safflower seeds, or peanuts in his native land. Obesity is particularly prevalent in certain species including Macaws, Amazons, and Cockatiels. For these birds, it may be beneficial to use low-fat pellets.

There are number of high quality formulated diets are available in the form of pellets. Formulated pellet diets should also be supplemented with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Birds require foods rich in Vitamin A. Vitamin A or its precursor, beta-carotene, is essential for parrots to maintain healthy eyes, skin, feathers, and linings of their gastrointestinal, respiratory and reproductive tracts. Vegetables are the best source of vitamin A. Baby food is another way to give birds foods rich in vitamin A.

Birds also need good sources of calcium. Birds are unable to digest dairy products. Non-dairy sources of calcium include deep green leafy vegetables such as turnip greens, mustard greens, kale, dandelion greens, broccoli, collard greens, kohlrabi, endive, watercress, bok choy, and brussels sprouts.

Seed Mixes – Use only high-quality, human grade seed mixes low in peanuts, sunflower, safflower and other high-fat seeds and nuts. ***Do not use wild-bird seed mixes because they can have pesticides and mold that are toxic to parrots***

Pellets and Low-fat Pellets – Recommend pellet diets include, Lafeber, Scenic, Roudybush or Harrison's pellets.

Fresh food including fruits and fresh/frozen vegetables – Birds should be given a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables daily. Organic fruits and vegetables preferred

Birds need a variety of healthful foods: fruits, vegetables, legumes, and grains.



Commercial Pelleted Diets are formulated for all sized birds.



RECOMMENDED FEEDING SCHEDULE

Mornings:

1. Change water
2. Fresh fruits and veggies offered

Afternoons/Evenings:

1. Change water
2. Remove fresh food
3. Replace dry food

Alternate: Give dry food in the morning and fresh foods in the late afternoon/eveing, removing uneaten portion before bed time. If no fresh food is given, give dry food in the morning and, if needed, top it off in the evening.

Not Recommended: Do not leave fresh food in cage overnight.

Feeding Birds cont.



When it comes to eating, birds follow the flock. Quaker Parrots feeding at Foster Parrots.



Parrots often hold their food, like this Cockatoo enjoying a strawberry.



Millet is a favorite of small birds like budgies, canaries, and finches.

DIET MODIFICATION

Encouraging a bird to eat a more healthy diet can be challenging especially if the bird is accustomed to an all seed diet, but it is important to begin the process as soon as possible. It is recommended that all dry food be removed at the end of the day. In the morning, feed the bird pellets or vegetables and make it available all day. In the evening, feed the bird a treat or some seed. Leave this food in the cage for only one to two hours. Repeat this until the bird is eating the desired, healthier diet.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION

Getting the bird to eat is the first priority upon arrival at the shelter. Birds may refuse to eat when frightened in an unfamiliar place when offered unfamiliar foods. At first, offer foods that the bird is familiar with; then begin the process of introducing a variety of more nutritious foods. Keep in mind that crumbled food is not necessarily a sign that the bird is eating; look for other signs i.e. multiple droppings with solid feces.



Lories require a diet of specially-formulated nectar replacement food

SPECIAL INFORMATION FOR LORIES/LORIKEETS

Lories and Lorikeets require a diet of specially-formulated nectar replacement food (e.g., Nekton, Quiko) supplemented with fruits (except grapes/raisins) and some soft or leafy vegetables. Pureed fruits, natural juices (without added sodium or sugar) and commercial human fruit baby foods can be used as an alternative to fresh produce. Commercial pellets can also be offered (recommended: ground Harrison's pellets, Roudybush Lory Diet, ZuPreem Lory). **Lories and Lorikeets should never be given seed or seed based diets.**



DOVES & PIGEONS

Doves and Pigeons are seed eaters but do not husk their seeds like parrots. They require a commercial mix consisting of seed, cereal, and legumes, and should be supplemented with an appropriate sized formulated pellet diet. They can also be given greens such as lettuce, spinach, and watercress and may also eat fruits like berries, apples, and pears. Smaller doves can be fed a parakeet or canary seed mix, and they also enjoy spray millet.

Because pigeons and doves eat their seeds whole, they require grit to grind seeds in their gizzard. They also require calcium in the form of crushed oyster shell, calcium enriched grit or a cuttlebone.

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Photos courtesy of: MAARS and Foster Parrots