

SUCCESSFUL FEEDING OF PET BIRDS

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Feeding plays an important role in the management of pet birds. However, it is never too late to get the pet bird on a sound nutritional feeding and an unbalanced diet is the main cause of disease and early death in pet birds.

Dietary differences among pet birds

All companion pets do not have the same dietary needs. (Table 1)

From the above table we can see that even among related birds, such as macaws, diets differ. Moreover, among each bird classification there will be difference in nutritional recommendations. For instance, even though both Hyacinth macaws and Budgies are considered granivores, in the wild, Hyacinth macaws eat mostly palm nuts, while budgies eat mostly seeds.

Pelleted diets

The food is a blend of grains, seeds, vegetables, fruits, and various types of proteins, as well as additional vitamins and minerals. The ingredients are mixed and then baked. This formulated diet may be in the form of pellets, crumbles, or nuggets. For

most species, pelleted food should be 65-80% of the diet, vegetables should make up 15-30%, and the remainder can be seeds and fruits.

Fresh fruits and vegetables

Commonly fed fruits include apples, bananas, berries, cantaloupe, green or red grapes, mangoes, oranges, papayas, pears, strawberries and watermelon. Commonly fed vegetables include corn, carrots, cooked yams, cucumbers, green beans, peas, pea pods, yellow squash. In addition, birds should be fed fresh greens daily, such as spinach, dandelion greens, turnip greens, beet tops and chard. Wash all vegetables and fruits thoroughly before feeding.

Millet spray

Almost all birds love millet spray, and it is a safe treat for all birds. The sprays make an excellent weaning food for baby birds. There is a variety of millet hangers on the market, so the spray can be hung on the side of the cage.

Food supplements and vitamins

If a well balanced diet, including pellets is fed, most pet birds do not need any additional food

Table 1: Dietary differences among pet birds

Pet Bird Dietary Classification	Primary Diet	Examples
Florivore	Seeds, fruits, nuts, bark, roots, berries	Military macaw, Blue and gold macaw, Red-faced parrot
Granivore	Grains, seeds	Budgerigar, cockatiel, Hyacinth macaw, Budgies
Frugivore	Mostly fruit and flowers; some nuts and seeds	Blue-throated macaw; Green-winged macaw
Omnivore	Seeds, fruits, insects, invertebrates	Sulphur-crested cockatoo, Red-tailed Amazon
Nectarivore	Nectar, pollen; some insects and seeds	Lorikeet, lory

supplements or vitamins. Excess of vitamins can be highly toxic to birds.

Cuttle fish bone or other supplement containing calcium should be readily available especially during the breeding season. (Hens consume more quantity of lime as laying period approaches)

Grit

While not a food, grit is something people think all birds need. They do not. If it is overeaten, grit impaction can occur leading to digestive disorders. Finches and canaries may benefit from a few grains of grit in a couple of months, but most budgies, cockatiels, and other parrots do not need it.

Foods to avoid: Some foods are on the do-not-feed list. These include:

- High-fat junk food (potato chips, doughnuts, etc.)
- Chocolate
- Alcohol or caffeine
- Fruit pits
- Table salt
- Onions
- Apple seeds

Feeding times

Natural feeding time in birds are about a half hour after sunrise and again at 5-6 pm in the evening. Sticking close to these feeding times will be most natural for the companion bird. Larger breeds can have vegetables or fruits left in the cage throughout the day for snacking and entertainment. Smaller breeds eat more frequently throughout the day due to their higher metabolic rate and energy needs and will typically have seed/ pellets left in the cage throughout the day.

Feeding methods

Open type / Hopper type feeder shall be used.

A container holding 30 Gms of feed is adequate for birds like budgerigars / lovebirds. Feeder should be kept away from the perch on the top in order to avoid direct falling of the dropping.

Birds in the wild spend at least 1/3 of their day foraging for food. Simply putting food in a dish deprives them of that physical and mental stimulation. Try using foraging toys and other methods to enliven your bird's eating times.

Water

Fresh, clean water should be always available for the birds. If a water bottle is used, the water should be changed daily and the tip should be checked daily to be sure it is working. Dehydration is a serious problem that can occur within a day or two if water is unavailable.

Hygiene

Dishes should be washed daily in hot soapy water. No food should remain in the cage for longer than 24 hours to avoid the risk of fecal contamination and putrefaction.

Conclusion

A bird should never be allowed to go hungry. In addition to nutrition, food provides stimulation and pleasure for pet birds.

References

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