

FEEDING BIRDS

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Companion birds encompass a very diverse group of species which can range from canaries and finches to parrots, macaws and cockatoos to fruit eating soft billed birds to raptors, geese, ducks, chickens, emus and ostriches, and on and on. Thinking of pet birds as a single group is like thinking of pet mammals as a single group. The feeding of pet birds has been one of the most challenging aspects of their care. Partly because so much of the disease seen in avian species is attributable to dietary deficiencies, a great deal of research has been done in the last 20 years to create balanced formulated diets that owners might use to keep their pets healthy. Simply said, a seed diet is totally inadequate to maintain the health of pet birds.

FORMULATED DIETS are available from numerous manufacturers as a convenience to the owner and to ensure a more nutritionally balanced diet than that of seeds alone. The trend currently is toward specific formulations addressing age, activity, therapeutic and stress related needs of the individual. Birds have special nutritional needs during molting, egg laying, and raising young. Feeding practices must be optimal all year long, not just in the short term. Converting a seed eater to a formulated diet must be done with great care. Birds often become habituated on high fat, high carbohydrate diets (JUST LIKE PEOPLE) and may not even recognize the new food as edible when it is first introduced. There are techniques or protocols that can be followed to safely wean your bird away from seeds.

HOMEMADE DIETS have been attempted where commercial formulated diets are not available. While not ideal, these usually represent an improvement over an all seed diet. Overall, however, homemade diets are often deficient in calcium, iodine, selenium, protein, balanced omega 3 and 6 fatty acids, fiber, pigments, and vitamins A, B complex, E and D3. Instead, most home cooked diets have an excess of carbohydrates and phosphorus. Homemade diets with moist ingredients also tend to spoil, to grow bacteria and mold, to lose nutrients when stored in advance of its use. The time and effort needed to prepare a truly balanced diet makes well made home cooked diets impractical for the owner. Owners who choose to feed fresh food tend to offer too much variety and quantity which allows birds to pick out what they like. Birds will not eat a balanced diet if given free choice.

FEEDING TIPS

- Always monitor food intake, dropping amount and consistency every day.
- Weigh your bird often on a good gram scale. Weight loss is the first sign of a sick bird.
- Grit is not necessary for most birds although it is still used in pigeons, canaries, finches.
- Salt licks and salt blocks are not necessary and are not used in birds.
- Some birds have "SPECIAL DIETS". Lories and Lorikeets eat nectars and have special prepared foods available, some birds have requirements for low iron foods (mynahs, toucans). Commercial diets are available for soft-billed birds, waterfowl, poultry and game birds.

CONSULT YOUR AVIAN VETERINARIAN FOR THE METHODS TO USE TO GET YOUR BIRD OFF SEEDS