

Avian Nutrition

One of the most common causes of disease in captive birds is lack of proper nutrition. In the wild, birds eat a wide range of foods to meet their nutrition requirements. Because captive birds depend on us for their food, we must try to offer them all of the necessary nutritional needs (protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and water) in their diet.



Recreational feeding:

Be creative with your feeding choices. Birds spend most of their time caged, so use feeding to fill some of their time. Devise ways of presenting and hiding food that takes time and mental energy for the bird to acquire it. Try hiding peanuts, stuffing rawhide with peanut butter, or any other safe idea to encourage your bird to forage and work for their food.



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Nutritional requirements of caged birds

Table Foods

FRESH VEGETABLES and TABLE FOOD should make up 20-50% of the diet. Care should be taken with fresh table food as they tend to spoil quickly. Unconsumed portions should be removed promptly to prevent consumption of spoiled goods. The main deficiencies found in caged birds are vitamin A (found in yellow vegetables such as carrots and sweet potatoes) and calcium (found in dark green leafy vegetables). Be patient and creative when offering healthy vegetables: chop them into different sizes, squeeze them into cage bars or toys and let the bird watch you or other birds eat them.

◆Safe table foods include: Cilantro, mustard and collard greens, romaine, carrots, zucchini, apples, sweet potatoes (raw or cooked) beans, berries, whole grain pasta, granola and cereals. Peanut butter is a favorite of birds and can be used to coax them into eating healthy snacks by smearing onto items such as vegetables, whole grain cereals, breads and crackers.

◆Feed in moderation: Parsley, celery, kale, broccoli, spinach, citrus fruit, brussels sprouts, cauliflower, corn, scrambled eggs, cabbage, nuts, seed or canned food.

◆Avoid: Shellfish, milk, caffeine, avocado, chocolate.

◆Use only as occasional treats: Cheese, cooked chicken, turkey and other meats.

Seed:

Commercial avian SEED DIET may be advertised as complete but are not scientifically formulated and generally do not meet all of the birds needs. Seed should only make up a small portion of the diet, depending on the type of bird. For larger birds, only about 10% of the diet should contain seed, whereas smaller hook bills, canaries and finches should be fed up to 40% seed.

Pellets:

PELLETED FOODS such as Harrisons, Roudybush and ZuPreem are all well formulated and will meet most of your birds nutritional requirements. Pellets should be the base diet for your bird and make up 60-90% of the diet. However, feeding pellets alone does not allow for recreational feeding and occasionally is not accepted by some birds. Please consult your veterinarian for advice if needed.

Grit:

GRIT is not needed for hook billed birds, it is only essential for doves, pigeons, fowl and some soft bills. Regardless of your opinion on grit, always remove all grit from the cage of any sick bird (they may excessively eat it and impact their G.I. system).

Vitamins:

A VITAMIN SUPPLEMENT is recommended if your bird is not on a pellet based diet. If a supplement is added to the water, wash dishes carefully once or twice daily to prevent bacteria growth. Vitamin supplements for budgies must contain iodine to prevent goiter.

Minerals:

MINERAL SUPPLEMENTS in the form of mineral blocks, cuttlebones or powders are recommended for birds that do not eat a lot of dark green vegetables and for breeding birds. Breeding birds and feather pluckers should be provided with ULTRAVIOLET light so that they make better use of the calcium that they ingest. All birds benefit from exposure to UV lighting. During nice weather, occasional exposure to natural lighting should suffice or simply purchase a UV lamp from your local pet store.