



AFRICAN GREY DIET AND NUTRITION

IN THE WILD African Grey Parrots eat a variety of seeds, nuts, fruits, berries and vegetation in the wild. They will clamber from branch to branch while feeding instead of flying. They especially treasure the fruits of the oil palm.

African Greys are vulnerable to calcium and vitamin A deficiencies and obesity. A large number of health problems (including behavioural, feather picking, liver and kidney disease, skin and respiratory issues) can be avoided or improved with feeding a correct diet.

Formulated diets

Pellets have been developed to meet all your bird's nutritional needs. Different formulations are available for different life stages and for the management of certain diseases. Hand raised babies are the easiest to start on a pelleted diet. Pellets are the ideal diet, therefore you are encouraged to slowly wean seed eating birds onto a pelleted diet. Pellets should ideally represent approximately 60-70% of the bird's diet. There are many good brands of pelleted foods in the market place. Pellets come in different flavors, colors and shapes. Avoid highly colored pellets; food coloring is added to visually appeal to owners, it adds nothing to the nutritional value of the pellet, and occasional birds may develop allergies to these artificial colouring ingredients.

Vegetables and Fruit

Fruit, vegetables, and greens should account for approximately 30 - 40% of the daily diet. Pale vegetables, with a high water composition (i.e. Iceberg lettuce, celery) offer very little nutritional value. Avocado is reported to be toxic. Feed more vegetables than fruit, fruit is high in sugar and can potentially lead to obesity and diabetes if fed in excessive amounts.

Fruits and vegetables must be washed thoroughly to remove chemicals. Cut them into manageable pieces depending on the size of the bird. Offer fruits and vegetables in a separate dish. If your bird appears to develop a particular fancy for one food item, reduce its volume or stop feeding it temporarily to promote the eating of other foods.

Treat your bird like a small child; offer a small piece of a variety of food items daily and never stop trying.

A balanced diet should be made up of **60-70% GOOD QUALITY PELLETS**, and **30-40% VARIETY OF FRUITS AND VEGETABLES**. Nuts and seeds should only be fed in small quantities, and make great training tools and treat foods.

SUNFLOWER SEEDS AND PEANUTS

are very high in fat and low in nutritional content and vitamins. Birds that eat a predominantly seed diet will suffer a number of nutritional deficiencies. The so-called **DONUT DIET!**

GREYS ARE SELECTIVE EATERS!

Many African Greys will selectively eat the sunflower seed and peanuts, in preference over all other food in the cage. So even though there may be a buffet of healthy food available to your Grey, it may be selectively eating only that which it prefers. It's important to pay attention to what the bird is actually eating of the foods offered. A bird can have a cage full of healthy food and still suffer from a nutritional imbalance if he is selectively eating only 1 or two things that is being offered.

FLAX SEED Your veterinarian may recommend flax seed in the diet. This is especially useful in birds suffering from high cholesterol (yes, they can also suffer from fat clogged arteries and heart problems if their cholesterol is too high!). It can be used to restore the balance between Omega-6 and Omega-3 essential fatty acids in your African Grey's diet. Eating whole flaxseed is better than flaxseed oils because you get the whole package: the protein, fibre, minerals and phytochemicals along with the omega-3.

try something new.

Home cooked food

In the wild, African Greys eat fruits, leaves, insects, bark and flowers. In captivity, they should eat a varied diet of fruits, vegetables supplemented with some seeds and nuts. Home cooked foods such as rice, cooked beans, corn, mash potatoes, tortillas, pasta, potatoes, bread and cooked chicken etc are all acceptable as part of the Grey diet in small quantities. Avoid foods high in salt, oil or spices. Minimize high calorie food such as pastas and rice. In obese birds, or birds exhibiting inappropriate breeding behaviour, such high calorie foods should be avoided.

Now, the difficult task of getting him to eat his new diet.

How do I convert my bird to a pelleted diet?

Converting seed eating birds (seed-aholics) onto a formulated diet is not always easy. Initially, pellets are not likely even identified as food. Slowly wean the bird off seeds over a period of 4-8 weeks while having pellets constantly available in a separate dish. It is not appropriate to starve birds into eating what you desire. Instead, you need to appeal to their playfulness and curiosity. Texture and presentation are often more important than taste.

TIPS AND TRICKS

Try cutting carrots and broccoli stems into 50 cent sized slices, then stringing together and hanging the string in the bird's cage. Try stuffing rice and cooked beans into rolled cardboard and taping them to the cage.

Offer a bowl of seeds in the morning and the evening for 30-60min at a time. For the rest of the day, remove the bowl and only leave a bowl of pellets and veggies in the cage for the bird to nibble on if it gets hungry or bored.

Mix the pellets with a fruit puree that the bird likes. Mix pellets with a vegetable mash of carrots/peas or potato.

Add some hot water to the pellets and allow it to cool down swell out before feeding (a bit like a morning cereal). Remove all uneaten food from the cage by the end of the day.

If your bird likes human food, pretend to eat the pellets yourself – it may make them more appealing.

With smaller birds such as budgies it often helps to place a mirror on the floor of the cage and sprinkle pellets over it. Then they can see the “other bird” eating the pellets.

Take away all perches except one and place food bowl next to the one perch

It may take days, weeks or months to modify a bird's diet. Never withdraw seeds entirely without first being certain the bird is eating the pellets plus some fruits and vegetables. Birds are stubborn, but can be trained!

Consult your veterinarian if encountering any problems with this transformation or the health of the bird. **Remember that you train the bird, do not let it train you!**

Good vegetables choices for your African Grey

- Sweet potatoes
- Carrots
- Yellow and Butternut squashes
- Collard greens
- Broccoli (good source of calcium)
- Kale (also a good source of calcium)
- Peppers – green, red, chili
- Celery
- Zucchini
- Cucumbers
- Green beans
- Peas – garden and snow

Good fruit choices for your African Grey:

- Melons
- Kiwi
- Apples
- Banana
- Cherry
- Cranberry
- Dried dates
- Figs
- Mango and Papaya (with skins removed)
- Grapes
- Guava
- Kiwi fruit
- Lychee (Litchi)
- Mandarin
- Mango
- Nectarine
- Oranges
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Pomegranate
- Red Currants
- Berries – blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries

Feed **more vegetables** that fruit! Fruit is high in sugar.