



PARROT HEALTH and NUTRITION

IN THE WILD Parrots eat a variety of seeds, nuts, fruits, berries and vegetation in the wild. Specific diets will vary from breed to breed. It is very important that you as owner is well educated about the needs of your specific parrot species. Many health and behavioural problems can be avoided with the correct nutrition, husbandry and interactions.

Most parrots are vulnerable to calcium and vitamin A deficiencies (especially Eclectus parrots) 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 flavours, colours and shapes. Avoid highly coloured pellets; food colouring 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.

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 parrots diet.

A bird's living **environment** should be clean, free of draughts and moulds, temperature controlled, free of smoke or any aerosolised products. Bowls should be cleaned daily and any clean fresh water always available.

Birds need
ENTERTAINMENT!
See our handout on
foraging and puzzle
toys.

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!**

PARROTS ARE SELECTIVE EATERS!

Many parrots 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 parrot, 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.

VEGETABLES can be fed raw, cooked, steamed, grated, mashed, dried or frozen. For birds that are reluctant to eat vegetables, offering it in different forms and textures may encourage them to try something new.

Parrots need sunlight. Without sun, parrots simply cannot absorb everything properly. It is a necessity, as much as fresh fruits and vegetables are in a parrot's diet.

Sunlight plays three important roles

1. Supply the correct UV light (needed for the vitamin D synthesis, calcium metabolism, absorption of minerals, colour – birds see colours that we can not see)
2. Brightness. Without adequate brightness their environment looks very grey and depressing.
3. Light also plays an important role in regulating their metabolism.

What is the impact of going without sun?

- Increased aggression and biting
- Plucking, barbering, and other destructive feather habits
- Malnutrition and calcium deficiencies – Vitamin D, which is gained from the sun, is responsible for the absorption of calcium and other vitamins and minerals; without it, birds don't get full nutrition
- Poor feather quality
- Compromised immune systems
- Reduced vision – UV light enhances your parrot's vision, so without it their world is thought to look very grey
- Increased anxiety and depression

Simulating FORAGING behaviour

This cornerstone of daily activity includes the search for food and the act of extracting, eating, and processing it. This can occupy as much as 6-18 hours of a wild parrot's day. The activity of foraging also engages the bird's mind as it flies, takes in all of the sensory information, watches for predators, learns from its flock members, and concentrates on discovering, manipulating, and extracting food items. In contrast, a pet parrot may only spend 20-30 minutes a day simply eating out of a bowl in isolation from others. During periods when social interaction is limited, as is often the case when we, the surrogate flockmates, are away earning a living, other maintenance behaviours such as foraging and feather care should be increased to fill the time. This in turn may be very beneficial as a part of behavioural modification treatments for abnormal behaviours such as feather picking, screaming, or pair-bonding behaviours. Scott L Ford, DVM, Dip. ABVP-Avian

Trick training By asking your bird to perform a desired behaviour for a reward, you are, in essence, providing a modified foraging activity for your bird. In addition, you are also having a lot of fun, and are satisfying your bird's need for social interaction. See our **CLICKER TRAINING** handout for a fun activity to do with your bird!

Good fruit and vegetables choices for your parrot

- Sweet potatoes
- Carrots
- Yellow and Butternut squashes
- Broccoli (good source of calcium)
- Peppers – green, red, chili
- Celery
- Zucchini
- Green beans
- Peas – garden and snow
- Kiwi
- Apples
- Banana
- Figs
- Mango and Papaya (with skins removed)
- Grapes
- Guava
- Kiwi fruit
- Lychee (Litchi)
- Oranges
- Papaya
- Peach
- Pear
- Pineapple
- Pomegranate
- Berries – blueberries, blackberries, raspberries, strawberries

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

Things that are bad for your parrot

- Smoke (cigarette, fireplace and BBQ)
- Aerosolised sprays such as deodorants, perfumes, air fresheners
- Burnt incense
- Teflon pans
- New heaters or fireplaces
- Insect sprays
- Mosquito repellent sprays (including wall plug in)
- Mould
- Dust
- Chocolate, alcohol, sugar, caffeine