BIRD NUTRITION

Over the years there has been much controversy over the best diet for birds. We know that the diet choice makes the difference between a bird living a long healthy life and one that dies early because of nutritional deficiencies. Nutritional needs vary from bird to bird, just as they do from person to person. For this reason, the below information is not meant to be taken as a set-in-stone rule for the feeding of all birds. Be sure to do your homework on the particular species of bird you own.

In general, just remember that birds need a variety. You should also try to feed them as close to nature as you can. You don't find pellets growing on a tree in the wild, do you? Pellets can be offered as a supplement, but please do not make this the main portion of your birds diet. Seeds are also fine, in a limited quantity. All birds usually love seeds and would eat that above most other foods if given that option but this is not healthy for them, so please limit the amount you give them. Sprouted seeds are always a better choice than dry seed, since the sprouted seed is actually "live food."

Since we are a rescue, we have birds of all types, sizes and health conditions living here at the Haven. Each bird is fed according to what we believe he/she needs for their particular situation. When a bird is first brought to us, they are usually accustomed to an all seed or all pellet diet. Our number one goal at this point is to convert them over to a more "balanced" diet. We continue adding the pellets or seeds in large enough quantity so that we know they are getting enough to eat, but they have to "dig" to find it. Therefore, while digging to find the food they are accustomed to they will inadvertently taste some of the new, more healthy choices that we know they need. We will then start a slow "weaning" process, by removing a little more of their favorite food each day, until such time they are eating the balanced diet at their own will.

There are dietary differences among birds

Feeding pet birds the right foods is important for their health. A balanced diet based on sound bird nutrition recommendations is the key. Balancing a parrot's diet from the beginning will prevent many health and behavior problems. But it's never too late to get your pet bird on a sound nutritional footing. It is something you will want to do since an unbalanced diet is the main cause of disease and early
death in pet birds. Malnutrition is a human-made disease. Fortunately, it is also preventable. When feeding pet birds, we must realize that the species of birds we have as companion pets do not all have the same dietary needs. Just as our North American wild birds such as chickadees, woodpeckers, and hummingbirds do not eat the same foods, neither do our companion birds. In general, parrot diets can be classified according to their normal diets. Most psittacines (members of the parrot family) are florivores, meaning the main portion of their diet is obtained from plants. Among florivores, there are granivores (birds that eat grain and seed), and frugivores (birds with diets based on fruits). Some pet birds are omnivores, whose diet can consist of both plant and animal components. There is a special class of florivores called nectarivores, who eat mostly nectar.

**Pet Bird Dietary Classification/Primary Diet/Species**

Florivore: Seeds, fruits, nuts, bark, roots, berries (Military macaw, Blue and gold macaw, Red-faced parrot)

Granivore: Grains, seeds (Budgerigar, cockatiel, Hyacinth macaw)
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)

From the above list, you can see that even among related birds, such as macaws, diets differ. Additionally, among each bird classification there will be different nutrition recommendations. For instance, even though both are considered granivores, in the wild, Hyacinth macaws eat mostly palm nuts, while budgies eat mostly seeds. See "birdy personalities for more information on what each different type of bird needs as his/her diet.

**The "4" Nutrient Groups for Excellent Avian Nutrition**

**Proteins:**
Eggs--white and yolk should be scrambled or hard-boiled and grated
Cooked Chicken--small bits are occasionally okay
Cooked Legumes
Soy Products such as soybeans, tofu--use sparingly as some birds have experienced digestive problems with tofu
*No red meats, pork or shellfish should be given.

**Carbohydrates:**
Cooked Pasta (preferably whole grain)
Cooked Rice (preferably brown)
Cooked potatoes

**Fat Sources:**
Seed mixture dependent on species (little to no sunflower seeds)
Nuts high in fat--use only dependent on species of bird
Corn
*Use NO dairy or cheese products. Birds can't break down the lactose and it can cause obstructive disorders or inflammation.

**Vitamins/Minerals:**
There are hundreds of vitamins and minerals a body needs and the sources of foods in which to find them. Two of the biggest deficiencies facing exotic bird species are:
Vitamin A. Suggestions of high Vitamin A content are: carrots, sweet potatoes, jalapeno peppers, kale, chard, spinach, squash-buttternut, dandelion greens, sweet red peppers. Vitamin A found in the above products is one of the most common deficiencies in pet birds diets, especially in South American species (amazons, conures, macaws). At least one of these foods should be fed to your bird daily. Remember, birds can discern color and texture, as well as taste, so changing the form and presentation of the food can make a big difference in whether the bird will or will not accept the new food. There is an instinctive fear of new foods, especially in older birds. This is a protective mechanism against being poisoned in the wild, so offer new foods often and in the same manner before attempting a new method. Alternative methods to try are hanging food on the side of the cage or preparing foods in different ways such as peeled, or unpeeled, cooked or raw, and placing multiple foods on the same dish. Most birds usually take upwards of 2 weeks seeing a new food every day before first investigating and/or playing with the food and then actually trying to eat it. Above all, be patient with your pet bird when it comes to new foods!

**Calcium:**
Suggestions of high calcium content are: turnip greens, green cabbage, chinese cabbage, mustard greens, watercress, kohlrabi, chard Calcium is the predominant mineral in the body and yet is the most common mineral deficiency found in pet birds diet. Calcium is used by the bird for bone formation, blood clotting,
and egg shell production. Calcium also affects heart, muscle, and nerve function as well as enzyme systems in the body. As expected, most of the calcium is stored in the bird's skeleton. All birds are susceptible to long term deficiencies if fed inadequate diets. "Grit" sold in the pet trade is not a decent source of calcium. DO NOT SERVE YOUR BIRD GRIT. A safe source of calcium for smaller species is the backbone from the cuttlefish "cuttlebone" mineral blocks, or ground oyster shell. Larger species can be offered cooked chicken bone in small amounts or mineral blocks. Some birds, such as conures and African Grey parrots, are more sensitive to calcium deficiency, but do not need extra supplementation if placed on a well-balanced diet. Also, like humans, as some birds age their calcium demand increases. The foods listed above are only to be used as indicators of Ca: P supply, however no single food is bad when evaluated in an entire dietary management program created by you and your avian veterinarian. Above all, always offer your bird a calcium source.

Remember: A good balanced diet can extend the life of your bird by 50% or better compared to a diet of only commercial type products. Always offer a variety and try to keep their foods as close to nature as you can.