



DIETS FOR PSITTACINES

- Keeping your parrot on an appropriate diet is key to ensuring good long-term health. The diet with which your bird is supplied from a breeder or pet shop may not always be the most appropriate diet.
- Traditionally a seed mix has been fed to captive parrots, based on the assumption that most parrots eat seeds in the wild. Unfortunately it is difficult to replicate the type and quality of seeds that parrots find in the wild, and many species also eat a range of other plant material.
- Captive diets with high seed content have high levels of energy and fat and are deficient in many essential proteins, vitamins and minerals. This can lead to a variety of problems including obesity, arteriosclerosis, liver and heart disease.
- Seed mixes may also vary widely in quality. It is important to remember to buy seed that is fit for human consumption rather than animal consumption, because poor quality seed carries many of the fungal and bacterial diseases that birds are susceptible to. You should be aware that millet sprays and honey bars all are basically seed! Nuts are also equally as bad (very high protein and fat) and birds risk getting aflatoxins, particularly from peanuts unless the source is screened. Monkey nuts are just peanuts in their shells.
- Feeding a good diet in the first place can prevent many diseases such as feather plucking and calcium deficiency. Feeding a good quality diet also reduces breeding problems.
- **We therefore recommend feeding a good quality complete pelleted diet.**
- Fresh fruit and vegetables can be fed alongside this for interest but should make up no more than 10% of food fed. Fresh green food is also relished by a number of birds. Watercress, lettuces, chickweed, groundsel, dandelion and dock can all be fed. Just make sure they are free of contaminants.

- Different brands are available, with some being more appropriate for certain species and some for certain life stages. Please speak to any of our vets or nurses for recommendations on the most suitable diet for your bird.
- Water should always be available both for drinking, and in a shallow saucer for bathing. This should be changed daily.
- No extra vitamin or mineral supplementation should be required for birds on a good quality complete pellet diet. The provision of grit is also unnecessary.
- Cuttlefish bone has long been advocated by breeders. Although high in calcium, the ability of the birds to use it can be limited and an individual bird's uptake can be highly variable. If feeding a complete pellet diet, cuttlefish bone is unnecessary.
- Human food is unnatural for your bird so should not be fed as treats. In particular, avocado, bacon, coffee, tea, alcohol, salty foods and chocolate are toxic to birds.
- Changing a 'seed junkie' onto a pellet diet can be difficult and perseverance is required.

CONVERTING YOUR BIRD ONTO A PELLET DIET

- **Think positive**

When trying to encourage your bird to eat a new diet it is essential for you to have a positive attitude. Parrots tend to be suspicious of new food items and if you adopt an attitude of "he won't eat it" then he probably won't! Think positive and devise means of outwitting your bird, after all it is for his own good.

- **Be persistent**

Just being persistent may work; by offering the food repeatedly your bird may get used to its sight and smell and have a taste. By putting the pellet diet on top of the usual food he will at least have to move it before reaching his normal diet. Eventually he may decide that it is an acceptable food item after all.

- **Jealousy**

Many owners share their own food with their bird. If your bird particularly enjoys doing this it can be an ideal way of enticing him to eat the new diet. Allow your bird to watch you eating the food and he will no doubt want to eat it too.

- **Intrigue**

A new food container in your birds' cage, in a new place, that contains only the new diet. This can be in addition to his normal feeding bowl and diet but has been known to create interest in the new diet, perhaps it is seen as special or prized treat from a "higher branch".

- **Disguise**

By covering the new diet in a flavour or colour that you know to be favoured by your bird he is likely to give it a try. Try for example grape or orange juice, banana, peanut butter or honey.