**Nutrition for Psittacine Birds**

It is a common misunderstanding that seeds are a sufficient diet for
companion birds. While birds do eat seeds in the wild, they also consume a huge variety of other food items as well. Unfortunately, in captivity our pet birds tend to pick their favorites out of a seed mix, quickly leading to an unbalanced diet. Seeds are comparable to other treat foods for us, like cheeseburgers, cookies, and candy. Seeds are very high in fat, and deficient in other nutrients such as vitamin A, calcium, and vitamin D. A parrot that eats nothing but nuts and seeds over the long term is susceptible to liver disease, skin and feather problems, obesity and many other medical conditions. What should we feed our pet birds?

Our current dietary recommendation for most parrot species includes a combination of a pelleted bird food, healthy fresh foods, and a small amount of treat foods. Pelleted diets are made by several reputable pet food companies and are widely available in pet stores or from veterinarians in most areas. These diets are formulated based on current knowledge of the dietary requirements of birds. The brands we recommend are Harrison’s, Lafeber, Zupreem, and Roudybush because they have the most long-term science and testing behind them.

We recommend that pellets comprise 70-80% of your birds diet. 20-30% of the diet should be a variety of fresh, healthy foods. This group can include fresh fruits and vegetables along with raw or cooked beans and grains. Things that you should not feed your bird include, chocolate, avocados, onions, and high-fat, sugary, or salty foods. Treat foods should make up less than 5-10% of the diet. Included in this category are seeds, treat sticks, spray millet, and nuts. Some table food like plain popcorn, plain pasta, or rice can be an OK treat too. Moist foods such as pasta, fruits and vegetables should be offered in a separate dish from dry foods, and should be removed from the cage after several hours. These foods will support the rapid growth of bacteria if left in the cage long term. We do recommend researching the needs of your individual species of bird and talking to your vet, as there are some species that require an adjustment in the proportions of each food group listed above.

Now, how do you get your bird to eat this healthy new diet? The most important thing is to make any dietary changes ***gradually***. Birds can be very stubborn, particularly if they are accustomed to eating only seeds. Some birds may actually starve themselves before they will eat an unfamiliar diet, so make sure you see your bird eating and monitor its droppings as you are introducing diet changes!

There are several techniques for converting a bird to pellets and some birds it can take weeks to months to convert, so stick with it! If you try one technique for conversion and aren’t having success, sometimes trying a different method of conversion or way of offering the pellets makes a difference. Similarly, if you are offering one brand of pellets without success, sometimes trying a different brand or different size of pellet will help. Birds definitely have difference preferences!

Some of the techniques we recommend for
conversion are as follows:

* Start by placing a layer of your pet’s regular diet in his regular food bowl, and cover it with a layer of pellets. Mixing foods simply teaches your bird to select what he prefers out of the dish, so layering is preferred. In addition, add a second food dish near your bird’s favorite perching spot. This will usually be near the highest perch in the cage or out on a stand. Put just the pelleted diet in this dish. As they start sampling more of the pellets, gradually increase the amount of pellets and decrease the amount of seed.
* Eat new foods (or pretend to eat!) with your bird to encourage them to try new things. This works for both pellets and fresh foods. Many will accept new foods from you before they will try them from a bowl as most birds like to eat what you are eating.
* Try offering just pellets in the morning when your bird is most hungry. If they are not eating, give them back their regular diet after lunchtime, as remember we don’t want them to go hungry. If they start sampling the pellets, you can gradually extend the interval of when you offer the old food.
* Try soaking the pellets in the juice of a favorite fruit or crushing them and mixing with a favorite soft food like plain oatmeal, cooked sweet potato, etc. Then over time gradually increase the amount of pellets and wean out the other foods.
* Try using Birdie Bread as a transition diet. Harrison’s Bird Foods has this commercially available, but there are other recipes online made from crushed pellets. Birdie Bread is like a muffin or biscuit made from pellets, and some birds who like bread will transition from seeds to this bread and then from the bread to pellets. If they like the Birdie Bread you can also sneak other fruits & veggies into your recipe!
* Fresh fruits and veggies can be offered in large chunks your bird can hold with their foot, chopped finely and mixed together, or in larger pieces hung on the side of the cage in a clip or clothespin for the bird to nibble on throughout the day. Try different ways to see what they like!

Monitor your birds eating habits and be creative! Try new things if you aren’t having success and talk to your vet if you have any concerns. Many birds can take weeks to months to convert, and most all birds can be converted even if they have been eating seeds for years. Keep at it as it is the best thing you can do for the long-term health of your bird!

**Additional Resources:**

<https://www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com/new-to-harrisons.asp>

Also click each diet conversion link

<https://zupreem.com/avian-conversion/>

Three step by step conversion plans to make it easy!

<https://lafeber.com/pet-birds/bird-food-guide/>

There are also several good topics under the Diet & Nutrition Tab

<https://roudybush.myshopify.com/pages/switching-to-roudybush>