

Bird Care: Nutrition and Pellet based diet conversion

Bird nutrition is vital to good health and longevity. Some species such as cockatoos and galahs can live around 80 years in captivity! Proper nutrition prevents obesity, gives your bird a brighter plumage, keeps them active, and for breeders can result in improved fertility and reduced reproductive diseases. There are still varying opinions on the optimal diet for each species. A general guideline for feeding birds is outlined below.

Avoid an all seed diet

An all seed diet is high in fat and carbohydrates which is why birds love it! This can lead to health problems such as a fatty liver which can cause masses, as well as other diseases. An all seed diet also lacks important minerals (eg, calcium), vitamins (vitamins A and D), and protein. Although some owners will counteract this deficit by adding fruits and vegetables, birds will tend to eat the tastier items, leading to an overall poor diet.

Pellet-based diet

We recommend most bird species eat top quality pellets as the major component of their diet. Each pellet contains all essential macronutrients, vitamins and minerals, hence your bird will not be able to pick and choose their favourite food within it! Exceptions are nectar feeding birds such as lorikeets which require special powdered or liquid formulations.

	Most Psittacines	Budgies, lovebirds, cockatiels	Finches, Canaries
Pellets	~80-90%	~50%	~70-80%
Vegetables ¹	~10%	~15-20%	~10%
Fruits ²	~5%	~5%	~3%
Quality seed mix	nil	~20-30%	~10-15%
Nuts ³	~3%	nil	nil

1. Asian greens, rocket, cauliflower, spinach, silver beet, chili, beetroot, corn, capsicum, squash, broccoli, carrot, beans, peas, sweet potato, pumpkin, tomatoes, zucchini.

2. Kiwi, strawberries, blueberries, raspberry, lychee, passion fruit, guava, mango, pawpaw, rock melon, pomegranate, banana, orange, cherry, grapes, apple, mandarin, melons and stone fruit without the seed, pear.

3. Natural unsalted nuts such as cashew, walnut, macadamia.

Toxic foods

DO NOT FEED avocado, chocolate, onion, garlic, rhubarb, or all foods that contain caffeine.

Converting your bird to a pellet diet

Bird are creatures of habit and often do not like to try new things. Transitioning your bird to a pellet-based diet may take 1-2 months, hence patience is essential. It is recommended to weigh your bird regularly as well as monitor any changes in droppings, and the total amount of food eaten. Never change the diet suddenly as you may starve your bird, nor attempt this while your bird is thin or unwell.

Tricks to convert your bird to a pellet-based diet

- For the easily convinced: place a bowl of pellets next to or higher than the seed bowl and you will notice that your bird will gradually eat more pellets at which point you can reduce the amount of seed provided.
- For the less easily convinced: Mix seeds and pellets in the same bowl, starting with 10% pellets. Every few days you can increase the pellets by increments of 5-10%.
- For the very stubborn birds: you can try to sprinkle the pellets over seeds, or crush some pellets in with water and then add to the seed mix. This will clump together so that your bird will eat some of the pellets and gradually acquire a taste for them.
- Bird are social eaters. For budgies or cockatiels, placing mirrors above the pellets may trick them into thinking another bird is eating those tasty and healthy pellets.
- **You can pretend to eat the pellets yourself before offering them to your bird or use mealtimes to give your bird pellets only, making them more appealing and increasing the chance for your bird to get a taste for them.**