

# Bird Basics

## Nutrition:

If given free choice to eat whatever they want, most birds would eat a diet of only seeds. Unfortunately, birds that eat only seeds will develop serious illnesses and often will die, because of poor nutrition and vitamin deficiencies. A seed-only diet is high in fat, low in water soluble vitamins and deficient in protein and carbohydrates. And so, the most important thing you can do to maintain your bird's health is to encourage it to eat a variety of foods.



With dogs and cats, we are almost always encouraging people to feed them less table food and more of their pre-prepared diet. Birds, on the other hand, will readily eat stuff like cooked chicken, or scrambled eggs, or cooked pasta. Even stuff like breads and cereals are helpful in getting birds off of their seed fixation, and help with maintaining a balanced diet.

Many people make the mistake of buying mixes with seeds and pellets and dried fruits and veggies all mixed together. What usually happens in those situations, is that the bird picks out the seed and leaves the rest to be thrown away. Pellets have all the nutrition that a bird needs in them, but it is extremely hard to get a bird to eat a pellet only diet.

What we recommend are three different approaches to feeding your bird.

First, use a water-soluble vitamin to put in the drinking water. Powdered vitamins to put on the food rarely stay in place long enough to get ingested, so the water is a better place to put them. Change the water every day, as most vitamins spoil in direct light. A cuttlebone is a great source of calcium, and most birds readily eat from it. Make sure your bird has one in its cage.

Second, encourage your bird to snack, particularly on high protein and high carbohydrate foods. As seeds have tons of fat in them, greasy stuff is not necessary, but a bird that shares your steak, chicken and eggs, is guaranteed to get the more protein than it would get from seeds alone. Fruits have a lot of sugars in them, but for the most part are empty calories, and not necessary.

Third, the best way to buy foods that force birds to eat all the good stuff along with the seeds is to buy foods where the seeds are glued together with the pellets and the high protein. Lafeber makes foods called Avi-Cakes, and Nutriberries which work using this principle. As the birds try to pick the seeds out of the pellet, they are forced to eat the stuff, which is good for them as well.

## Housing:

The most important thing with the cage is to be able to clean it properly. In the wild, birds pass stool and then move on, in captivity they are forced to stay in close proximity to their stool. This can promote disease, either in the form of bacterial infections or parasites.

Papers are generally the easiest way to quickly and frequently clean the cage. Most birds benefit if their cage papers are changed every other day. Then once weekly wash the whole cage down and clean it thoroughly with soap and water, or a quaternary ammonium compound (Like Wipe Out 1). Avoid products like Lysol, because the fumes can be toxic to some birds.

A lot of pet stores are promoting using bark or sand or a form of wood chip as the substrate in the cage. The selling point is that you can leave them in longer and clean the cage less. This approach is entirely wrong. The longer stool sits in a cage, the more germs breed in

it, and the more risk to your bird. I prefer something easily changed like paper, and a grid at the bottom of the cage so the bird does not end up standing in their own waste. If you use bark or woodchips, still clean the entire cage out every other day.

### **Temperature:**

Most birds held in captivity in this country are tropical. This means that in a normal household they are at sub-optimal temperatures for growing. Despite this, most birds do quite well at room temperature. However, make sure to keep them shielded from drafts and also it is nice to have them in a room where they are exposed to direct sunlight. Some people also set up a light during the day where they can bask in the heat and get warmed up. This can just be a regular lightbulb, or if you wish a bulb designed to emit ultraviolet rays to mimic the sun.

When your bird is sick it is extremely important to make sure the temperature of his cage is higher, 80-85 degrees in most instances is helpful. It promotes healing when their body temperature is closer to normal.