



## FEEDING COMPANION BIRDS

It is a common thought that all birds are granivorous when in fact most wild parrots are opportunistic omnivores. In the wild, birds will fly great distances to spend many hours foraging for a varied diet. Items that may be ingested during a parrots search for food include foliage, bark, sap, flowers, nuts, nectar, seeds, fruit, dirt and insects. Companion birds fed on a poor diet are often malnourished, obese and moody.

### Seeded Diets

A bird's lifespan is considerably shortened when fed exclusively on seeds. Seed mixtures contain mostly grain fillers of various colours so they appear to be generous in variety. The oil seeds such as sunflower and safflower are the most popular with parrots, containing around 40% fat – more than five times the amount required by most species. Commonly fed grains are deficient in 32 essential nutrients. Seeds, unless freshly harvested, are even more deficient. Many "supplemented" mixes are available but often the added vitamin fortified pellets are ignored and vitamin coated hulls are discarded.

### Formulated Diets

A quality manufactured diet, combined with natural vitamin/mineral rich fresh food is the most effective way of ensuring your bird's nutritional requirements are met. Manufactured pellets, nuggets or crumbles may be purchased from well informed pet stores and veterinarians. Premixed seed/fruit combination diets are not recommended. Caged birds will not choose a balanced diet if given free choice, as they are genetically programmed to select the most fattening food items available to them. There is no need to provide supplemental vitamins when offering a high quality commercially prepared diet. Seeds may be offered as treats and used for training once the bird is converted.

### Home Made Diets

While home made diets are not ideal, they usually offer an improvement over seeded diets. Homemade diets often lack calcium, iodine, protein, selenium, lysine and vitamins A, B, E and D3. These diets commonly contain excess levels of carbohydrates and salt. Consult your Avian Veterinarian before feeding such a diet.





### **Nectivores**

In Australia, evergreen vegetation is common, as a result of this it's possible for birds to specialise as nectar feeders i.e. lorikeets. Their tongues, instead of being hard and leathery, have a brushy tip (the papillae) so they can lap up nectar. The papillae can be damaged by de-husking seeds.

Commercially prepared nectar mixes are currently on the market. The purchase of a premium quality blend is advised as they are usually sweetened with fructose rather than cane sugar. Select a diet that may be offered dry as wet preparations can spoil quickly in warm weather. Not limiting your lorikeets daily intake of nectar mix can result in obesity.

### **Fresh Foods and Presentation of**

Fresh food can make up to 50% of your bird's diet. Red, orange and yellow vegetables are a good source of vitamin A and dark-green leafy vegetables contain vitamin A as well as highly digestible calcium. By including fruit and vegetables in your bird's diet you are not only providing vitamins, but adding a range of tastes, textures, shapes, colours and activity to your bird's day. The search for and manipulation of food occupies a large part of a wild parrot's day. Fruit skewers and food encasing foraging toys are highly recommended to encourage this natural behavioural trait. A wild bird's diet changes dramatically over the seasons, consider this when shopping for your pet's fresh foods. A bird is more likely to accept fruit and vegetables currently in season and will often neglect out of season produce. All meats and eggs should be offered fresh and well-cooked. All processed human foods and foods formulated for other animals should be avoided. Avocado and rhubarb leaves are toxic to birds.

### **Foliage**

Native Australian foliage should be offered to your bird as often as possible. This will introduce your bird to some of the foods naturally eaten as well as provide exercise for their beak and feet. Foliage provides a sense of protection as well as mental stimulation. If you select foliage away from polluted areas (such as busy roads) and ensure it is free of wild bird's droppings there is no need to wash it.

### **Grit**

The need for grit is cause for some debate, as research is scarce. Most commercially available grit consists of ground marine shell, which often contains harmful compounds and toxins due to being collected from a polluted environment close to shore. The shells are porous and have been shown to absorb the toxins in their environment. Grit poses a health risk when ingested. Grit Impaction occurs when the gizzard or crop is obstructed as a result of grit consumption. This problem is often detected as a secondary condition when ill parrots are x-rayed.