

Holistic health care of birds: Nutrition plus

By Jennifer Ramelmeier, DVM, Clarksville, Md.

Since nutritional deficiencies result in roughly 70% of the disease in pet birds, it is important to cover this in detail. First of all, one must address the needs of each species differently. A macaw and a cockatoo have about as much in common as do a cow and a horse. There are, however, some basic needs that must be met for all species.

1. **Feed** your bird on a twice daily schedule. This best approximates their normal food gathering in the wild. It is best to feed dry foods with a small amount of veggies, fruit or nuts in the morning. Then take away the food cups around noon. This allows the bird to process his food and detoxifies and allows him to be hungry for his evening meal. Use the evening to feed more of the foods that would normally spoil if left out too long.

2. **Choose** only organic fresh produce! Good, high nutritional choices are cantalope, bananas, papayas, apricots, sweet potatoes, carrots, pumpkin, broccoli, beets, kale and squash.

3. **Change** water bowls twice daily [if use water bowls] and use filtered water.

4. **Feed** a high quality pellet (I recommend Harrison's Bird Diet or other organic pellets). Try not to feed any more than 50% of the daily intake of the bird.

As far as species differences in diet, **canaries** and **finches** are mostly seed eaters, but should have 25% of their diet consist of fruit and veggies. Some canaries and finches also take well to Harrison's fine pellets.

Lorikeets and **Lories** do great on fresh juices made from a juicer. Also offer a commercial lory diet that contains psyllium for fiber and beneficial yeast. Add a "super green food supplement" (e.g., Merritt Naturals Green Alternative).

Macaws do best with large amounts of high-fat nuts. My favorite is walnuts as they are high in Omega fatty acids. I would avoid peanuts, however.

Budgerigars do best on a formulated diet with fresh food. Try to avoid seed in this species as they will reject all other foods in favor of it.

Cockatiels, of all the parrots, tend to need the highest proportion of seed. They still should be offered a variety of fresh foods.

African grey parrots should be offered a little bit of meat three times a week. As greys tend to become low in calcium, feed foods such as eggs, figs, kale, hazelnuts, tofu and carrots that are higher in calcium.

Eclectus parrots do best on diets high in fruits and veggies such as carrots and squash and low in fats and protein.



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Now that we have a good nutritional basis, I want to touch on how I use holistic medicine in my practice.

Even the best diets may not be complete or perhaps a bird may have special nutritional needs due to stress or breeding. In order to ensure there are no deficiencies I normally recommend a combination product that adds additional fatty acids and Vitamins A and B such as Avian Missing Link. Another good product is called Fresh Addition which in addition to the above nutrients includes clay. Clay is often how the large birds get their needed minerals in the wild. Also the occasional addition of Blue green algae or Spirulina can be beneficial as it is high in Vitamins A and B.

Homeopathic solutions

Homeopathy is excellent for treating a variety of conditions such as feather picking, upper respiratory infections, behavioral problems, trauma and gastrointestinal problems. Many cases respond dramatically and immediately, but not all cases are that simple. Some feather picking patients take months to turn around. Homeopathic remedies come as fine sugar pellets, which can easily be given to the bird directly or via their drinking water. Because homeopathic remedies are chosen on current symptoms, past problems, and behavioral traits and problems, veterinarians can work with you by telephone if none are near you. (this vet or www.theavh.org). I do not recommend attempting to treat birds with deep chronic disease such as feather pickers, those with aspergillus, chlamydiosis or any other life threatening disease without the aid of an experienced Veterinary homeopath.

There are many cases where an untrained person can use homeopathy with great success and I am listing several emergency situations where you can implement its use. Of course it is best to have these remedies on hand before such a situation arises and they can be found in most health food stores.

Bleeding - Arnica or Phosphorus.

Blows, falls or crushing injuries - Arnica first and

Hypericum second if neurological system is involved.

Shock - Arnica first and Aconitum second.

Puncture wounds or animal bites - Ledum

Convulsions - Belladonna, Aconitum and Nux Vomica.

Complete collapse - Carbo Veg.

Fractures - Arnica first followed by Symphytum followed by Calc Phos

Dr. Ramelmeier has a neat section on Bach flower usage and herbal therapy which will be published as a separate page.

Dr. Ramelmeier presented this subject at the 2003 Bird Clubs of Virginia convention. A graduate of Ohio State U. School of Veterinary Medicine, a member of AAV, Acad. of Vet. Homeopathy and the American Holistic Vet. Medical Assoc., she makes home visits and phone consultations. 410 531-9213, or holistic.vet@juno.com