



## **FEEDING AN AFRICAN GREY PARROT**

### ***General Information***

Our knowledge of bird nutrition is constantly evolving. This is due to heightened awareness of the importance of nutrition plus increased research. As with all other animals, birds need a proper balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fat, vitamins, minerals and water. Different species of birds often require different foods.

### ***Should I be concerned about what my African Grey eats?***

Nutrition is commonly neglected with pet birds. Too often owners assume they are feeding a proper diet to their African Grey when in fact they are not. This is a common reason for many health problems. It is important to continually strive to improve your bird's diet. This involves constantly educating yourself and a certain degree of **common sense**. It is not sufficient to feed an African Grey just to maintain life; instead, your goal should be to help it thrive and flourish. Your bird's health depends on how well it is fed.



Discuss nutrition with your veterinarian!

### ***What does my African Grey parrot naturally eat?***

African Grey Parrots eat a variety of seeds, nuts, fruits, berries and vegetation in the wild. They will clamber from branch to branch while feeding instead of flying. They especially treasure the fruits of the oil palm. African Greys are vulnerable to calcium and vitamin A deficiencies and obesity. A well balanced diet must be maintained at all times.

### ***What should I feed my African Grey Parrot?***

#### Seeds

Wild African Grey Parrots would have limited access to tropical seeds but a greater variety of seed types in the wild as different plants come into season. A commercial all seed diet tends to be high in fat and provides a decrease or imbalanced source of many nutrients that could lead to ill health and potentially shorten the life of your African Grey. Often, your bird will pick through a large bowl of commercial seed mix and selectively eat 1 or 2 "favorite" types of seeds. Peanuts and sunflower seeds are often chosen preferentially but are particularly high in fats and deficient in calcium, vitamin A and other nutrients. This leads to malnutrition. Seeds are highly palatable, preferentially sought after but nutritionally they are like giving candy to a child.

Seeds should only be a small part of a balanced diet but should never be the entire diet. A couple of nuts can be offered daily as well.

Gradually offer fewer seeds and your bird will start eating other foods.

#### Pelleted Diets



Pellets have been developed, to meet all your bird's nutritional needs. Different formulations are available for different life stages and for the management of certain diseases. Hand raised babies are the easiest to start on a pelleted diet. **Pellets are the ideal diet**, therefore you are encouraged to slowly wean *seed eating* birds onto a pelleted diet. Pellets should ideally represent approximately 75-80% of the bird's diet. There are many good brands of pelleted foods in the market place. Pellets come in different flavors, colors and shapes.

### ***How do I convert my bird to a pelleted diet?***



Converting seed eating birds (**seed-aholics**) onto a formulated diet is not always easy. Initially, pellets are not likely even identified as food. Slowly wean the bird off seeds over a period of 4-8 weeks while having pellets constantly available in a separate dish. Some people mix the pellets in a reduced amount of seed to aid its acceptance in the cage, but be aware, the bird will not accidentally eat a pellet. It may take days, weeks or months to modify a bird's diet. **NEVER** withdraw seeds entirely without first being certain the bird is eating the pellets plus some fruits and vegetables. Birds are

stubborn, but can be trained. This can be a stressful time for you and your African Grey.

Consult your veterinarian if encountering any problems with this transformation or the health of the bird.

Remember that you train the bird, do not let it train you.

### Fruits and Vegetables

Fruits, vegetables and greens should account for approximately 20 - 25% of the daily diet. Pale vegetables, with a high water composition (i.e. Iceberg or Head lettuce, celery) offer very little nutritional value. **Avocado is reported to be potentially toxic.**

Fruits and vegetables must be washed thoroughly to remove chemicals. Cut them into manageable pieces depending on the size of the bird. It is not necessary to take the skin off. Offer fruits and vegetables in a separate dish. If your bird appears to develop a particular fancy for one food item, reduce its volume or stop feeding it temporarily to promote the eating of other foods.

Treat your bird like a small child; offer a small piece of a variety of food items daily and never stop trying.

### Water

Fresh clean water must be available at all times. Depending on the quality of your tap water, consider the use of bottled water. Dishes must be cleaned thoroughly every day with soap and water.

### ***What about people food?***

As a general rule any wholesome, nutritious food that you and your family eat, your bird can eat. Follow the general guidelines discussed above and use your *common sense*. Some birds even



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enjoy a small amount of lean cooked meat, fish, egg or cheese occasionally. Dairy products should be consumed in moderation. It is common sense that *junk food*, chocolate, products containing caffeine and alcoholic beverages be avoided.

### ***Will my bird have any different needs throughout its life?***

Birds that are extremely young, stressed, injured, laying eggs or raising young may have certain special requirements. There are specially formulated pelleted foods available for birds with specific nutritional requirements. Consult your veterinarian regarding these situations.

### ***Do I need to use a vitamin-mineral mixture?***

Does your bird need extra vitamins, minerals or amino-acids? The powdered supplements are often regarded as more stable. Mix these supplements in water or preferably apply directly onto moist food. Placing these powders on seeds or dried foods is of little value since it will ultimately end up on the bottom of the food dish and not in the bird. One opinion suggests that a bird eating 75 - 80% of its diet in the form of pelleted food may not need supplements. Specific vitamins or minerals may be more important at various times during a bird's life (e.g. egg laying requires calcium supplementation). Calcium supplements are available if your African Grey is determined to be deficient.



Your veterinarian can help you assess your bird's diet and its particular needs.

### ***Does my bird need gravel or grit?***

Controversy exists over the need for gravel. It was believed that grit was necessary for the mechanical breakdown of food in the gizzard as an aid to digestion. Birds do fine without grit. Some birds will in fact have problems if grit is over eaten.

#### Tips

Always monitor the amount of food eaten every day by each bird.

Offer fresh water every day.

Offer a variety of fresh foods every day.

Offer fresh fruits and vegetables every day

Clean all food and water dishes daily.

**No** to a food item one day does not mean **no forever** - KEEP TRYING!



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Some suggested food items include:

apple	cherries (not the pit)	pear
apricots	Chinese vegetables (bok	peas
asparagus	choy)	peppers (red/green & hot)
banana	coconut	pineapple
beans (cooked)	corn	plum
such as:	cucumber	pomegranate
chic peas	dandelion leaves	potato
kidney	dates	pumpkin
lentils	endive	rappini
lima	fig	raspberry
mung	grapes	rice (brown)
navy	grapefruit	romaine lettuce
soy	kale	spinach
beet	kiwi	sprouted seeds
blueberry	melons	squash
broccoli	mango	strawberry
brussel sprouts	nectarines	sweet potato
cabbage	orange	tomato
cantaloupe	papaya	zucchini
carrot	parsnip	
carrot tops	peaches	

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*This client information sheet is based on material written by Rick Axelson, DVM & Shawn Messonnier, DVM  
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