**Veterinary Viewpoints**

 compiled by Amy B. Worell, D.V.M.
 West Hills, California

**Question #1:** I understand that African Greys need more calcium than other parrots. Why is this and how can I supply this in the diet if all the birds will eat is a seed diet?

*C. Hysell, California*

**Answer #1:** It is not that African Grey Parrots need more calcium than other birds, but rather that African Greys, for some unknown reason, have a high incidence of hypocalcemia. Hypocalcemia is a lower than normal level of circulating calcium in the blood. Adequate calcium levels are necessary for normal muscle functioning. When calcium levels drop to levels well below normal, the patient exhibits weakness, trembling, seizures-like activity and collapse. Seeds are deficient in calcium. For birds to utilize calcium, vitamin D3 must be present in adequate amounts. Birds housed outdoors with sufficient sunlight exposure produce adequate vitamin D3. Since window glass filters out ultraviolet light rays, birds kept indoors need vitamin D3 supplements as well as calcium.

Calcium can be provided in a number of ways. I would implore you to make the effort to convert your birds to a more complete and well balanced diet of pellets, fruits, vegetables and protein foods. Additional calcium can be supplied in the form of mineral blocks and cuttlebone for birds to chew on. Calcium can also be added to the drinking water. NeoCal glucon, a soluble product used by nurseries and available at your local pharmacy, can be added to the bird's drinking water at the rate of one teaspoon per four ounces of drinking water.

*James M. Harris, D.V.M.
 Oakland, California*

**Answer #2:** African Grey Parrots appear to develop signs of calcium deficiency including seizures, fractures and egg binding in adults and folding fractures in juveniles, quicker than other types of parrots on the same imbalanced diet. Calcium absorption from the diet requires the presence of Vitamin D3 and is inhibited by large amounts of phosphorus and fat in the diet. It is unknown if Greys require higher quantities of calcium or vitamin D3 in their diet than other parrots, or if they are unable to remove calcium from their bones when needed as other parrots are more able to do. Regardless of which mechanism is at work, both adult and juvenile African Greys do not become calcium deficient on most commercial pelleted diets containing 0.5 to 1.0% calcium dry weight. Most Greys can be converted to a commercial pelleted diet, or a seed diet can be supplemented with calcium utilizing cuttlebone, mineral blocks or mineral grit (oyster shell), as well as cheese and other high calcium vegetables. Greys that are already deficient or who have been unwilling to convert to a balanced diet can be supplemented using a readily absorbed calcium product such as Avimin, NeoCal, glucon or calcium gluconate. These products can be given directly or added to the drinking water; however, they are expensive when used in the correct dosage and a better alternative in the long run is to convert the birds to a balanced diet. Regardless of which calcium product is used, it is important to supplement with vitamin D3 to limit the fat and phosphorus in the diet.

*Nicole VanDerHeyden, D.V.M.
 Indianapolis, Indiana*

**Answer #3:** African Greys are seemingly unique in their utilization of calcium. As calcium metabolism is a fairly complex subject involving potentially different forms of calcium, vitamin D, and phosphorus, a simple understanding of an apparent calcium deficiency in an African Grey Parrot is not readily available.

It is thought that African Greys excrete excessive amounts of calcium through their kidneys and, hence, out of the body. This, therefore, renders them easily deficient in the amount of available calcium circulating in the body that is available for sustaining and maintaining the body's normal functions. Further, it has been suggested that African Greys are not able to mobilize (remove) calcium from their bones as readily or efficiently as can other avian species. African Greys, then, may actually require more calcium in their diets as they lose more in their urine!

Providing a well rounded and balanced diet is optimally the ideal method for ensuring that an African Grey will not develop problems related to low circulating blood calcium. Converting these birds to a supplemented pelleted diet should be strived for. My personal recommendation involves converting birds to a free choice commercially available pelleted diet that is supplemented with a protein based soft food mix, such as "Soak and Cook." A variety of fruits, vegetables and other nutritious table food can be added to this daily offered soft food mixture, as well as dry kibbled dog food and a powdered vitamin supplement.

The supplemented pelleted diet approach has worked well in numerous Greys to maintain them in good nutritional status in both pet and aviary situations. Supplementation of breeders prior to and during breeding season with cuttlebone or mineral blocks should also be considered, as this recommendation is also applicable in any egg producing birds.

*Amy B. Worell, D.V.M.
 West Hills, California*

**Question #2:** Could you please advise me as to which materials are safe for parrots to chew? I have a Quaker Parrot and Grey Cheek. My birds enjoy chewing paper products. Are balsa wood toys safe? Do bits and pieces become dangerous for parrots to ingest?

*S. Robinson, New York*
Answer #1: Parrots in the wild chew and shred trees, leaves, hulls and bark in large quantities and without obvious deleterious effects. In captivity, parrots can be offered untreated, unpainted, unstained woods (2 x 4 pine works great but hardwoods are fine, too), rawhide, cleaned hooves, horn and antler and cardboard. Most paper products are printed with non-toxic soy inks these days but, to be safe, unprinted paper should be used. Rarely, parrots will ingest large quantities of undigestible material, especially bedding, and become impacted requiring medical or surgical intervention. However, I have yet to observe a problem associated with chewing wood, rawhide, or paper products.

Nicole VanDerHeyden, D.V.M.
Indianapolis, Indiana

Answer #2: Parrots are provided by nature with a most marvelous tool, their beak. With it they preen, grasp, touch, crack, split, pry, pull, crush and bite. They need to use their beaks and, if not given enough things to do, they direct their attention to their plumage. They overpreen themselves and often become compulsive feather chewers or pluckers.

There are a wide variety of objects that are safe for parrots to chew. Foods such as nuts, corn on the cob, and cooked chicken bones give the beak a workout. Paper products, such as the cardboard core from paper towel and toilet tissue rolls, as well as cardboard, make good toys and things to chew on. Wooden objects should be non-toxic wood that is on the hard side. Clothes pins without the metal springs, dowels, fruit wood branches, and maple blocks are all satisfactory. Balsa wood is too soft and redwood splinters are dangerous. You might also consider non-toxic plastics such as ring sets or plastic keys made for infant crib toys. There are large numbers of excellent toys with moveable parts now on the market that will keep a parrot's attention for long periods of time. Remember that after awhile the bird will become bored with the toy, so divide your non-destructible toys into three or four groups and switch them in the cage weekly. Birds will rarely ingest bits and pieces of things they chew up. So long as you use non-toxic cardboard and non-toxic woods, there should not be a problem, even if small amounts of material are eaten.

James M. Harris, D.V.M.
Oakland, California

Answer #3: Parrots, by nature, enjoy chewing (and destroying!) most any item within their reach. Supplying them with safe things to chew on is an important part of maintaining parrots in captive situations. Items to be considered include fruit tree branches, eucalyptus tree branches, untreated 2x4 pieces, and rawhide chews. There are numerous specially designed toys on the market, comprised mainly of wood and rawhide, that are generally safe for most parrot type birds. Certain toys contain clips or rings that a clever bird will get lodged on a lower beak or body part, and may need assistance removing. When offering a new toy or chewable item, it might be a good idea to observe the bird intermittently for the first few hours to be sure no harm has occurred.

Amy B. Worell, D.V.M.
West Hills, CA

You’ll love Bed-o’cobs Litter because it’s all natural. It’s compostable too, because it’s totally biodegradable! We make Bed-o’cobs Litter from corncobs — an annually renewable resource grown by North American farmers. And it contains no additives.

Birds love Bed-o’cobs because it keeps them walking on a dry surface. Liquids drain through the top layer of litter to be absorbed from the bottom up. Bed-o’cobs' texture feels completely natural to birds, because that’s exactly what it is! And it’s also the perfect bedding and litter for your small animals and reptiles.

Look for Bed-o’cobs at your favorite pet supply store. Choose between the standard 1/4-inch particle size or the finer-texture 1/8-inch size. You can’t miss the brightly colored lorikeet on the package.

And for larger birds, try The Andersons Corn-on-the-Cob™ Pet Treats- a 100% natural snack that doubles as a play toy!

Remember The Andersons for your natural choice in pet products.

Bed-o’cobs is a registered trademark of The Andersons ©1993 The Andersons

afa WATCHBIRD 25
Avian Trade Shows & Seminars

Tennessee Valley Exotic Bird Club (host club for the National Convention of the American Federation of Aviculture in August, 1994)

Tennessee Valley Exotic Bird Club invites you to our

1st Annual Fall Exotic Bird Fair
August 21 & 22, 1993
Knoxville Convention Center, World's Fair Park
For more information, contact:
Gary Reid (615) 694-0613
or John Rich (615) 84-7273,
or write to:
TVEBC, P.O. Box 51425,
Knoxville, TN 37950-1425

Birds Exotic All Bird Club's Summer '93 Bird Mart Extravaganza and Bird Sale
August 28 & 29, 1993
Washington County Fairgrounds
Hillsboro, Oregon
For Information, contact:
Dick and Kathy Freas (215) 644-9337
or Dwight Greenberg (407) 631-9800
or write to:
CDC, PO Box 3953, Wichita, KS 67201-3953

Central Alabama Avicultural Society's Annual Show & Fair
September 4 - 5, 1993
Governors House Hotel
2705 E. South Blvd., Montgomery, Alabama
For Information, contact:
Charles Reaves (205) 892-2204
Lorene Clubb (205) 857-3817
Lisa Goode (205) 279-6829

The Alamo Exhibition Bird Club's Annual Show and Sale
September 10 & 11, 1993
9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Seven Oaks Hotel, 1400 Austin Hwy.
San Antonio, Texas
Rooms $55.00
Call (210) 824-5371 or (210) 333-2733

Northwest Ohio Exotic Bird Club's Fourth Annual Bird Fair
September 11, 1993
Saturday only, 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Lucas County Rec. Center
Maumee, Ohio
For more information, call:
Chris Schwind (419) 693-4956
3240 Stafford Dr. or N.W.O.E.B.C., P.O. Box 167326, Oregon, Ohio 43616

Palmetto Cage Bird Club
Anderson, South Carolina
hosts the
Carolina Classic Bird Show & Sale
September 11 - 12, 1993
ABS, NCS, NFS, SPBE
Judging both days and repeated every other month
For Information, call:
John Hince, publicity officer
Ringwood Performing Arts & Convention Centre, Melbourne, Australia
For more Info, contact:
John Hince, publicity officer
John Hince, publicity officer

Avicultural Society of Puget Sound Bird Show
September 25, 1993
Seattle Center Flag Pavilion
For Information, contact:
Ann Jones (206) 868-7871 or Carla Ritchie (206) 862-3558
or write to:
Rote FOB, P.O. Box 3953, Wichita, KS 67201-3953

Chester County Bird Breeders Combined NCS/ACS Bird Show now including American Singers and Type Canaries
September 25, 1993
Valley Forge Convention Plaza
(Mezzanine level), 1200 First Avenue, King of Prussia, PA 19406
For details, contact:
Lorraine LaBoyne (215) 269-6003
Art Granger (215) 272-2072
Dick and Kathy Freas (215) 644-9337

Town & Country Feathered Friends Annual Show and Sale
September 10, 1993
Watertown Fairgrounds, Ann Arbor, Saline Road
Saline, Michigan
11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
For more information, contact:
Nancy K. Egger (313) 272-6503
11533 Newman Rd., Brighton, MI 48116

Central Florida Bird Breeders Annual Fall Bird Sale & Swap Meet Sunday, September 26, 1993
Sheraton Inn in Orlando, CT
For more information, contact:
Art Godfrey, president
(203) 899-9988

Central Florida Bird Breeders Annual Fall Bird Sale & Swap Meet Sunday, September 26, 1993
Sheraton Inn in Orlando, CT
For more information, contact:
Art Godfrey, president
(203) 899-9988

Avicultural Society of Tucson presents its 8th Annual Bird Fair
October 17, 1993
Tucson Convention Center Exhibit Hall A
9:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
For information, call:
Terri Morgan (evenings) (502) 721-4768

Missouri Cage Bird Association's Annual Bird Show November 5 & 6, 1993
Day's Inn
15 Hilltop Village Center
Eureka, MO 63025
Phone (314) 938-5565
Contact Dianne Groves, show secy.
12470 Sparrow Wood Dr., St. Louis, MO 63146
(314) 576-4136
or Bonnie Reynolds, MCBA secy.
3417 Minnesota Ave., St. Louis, MO 63118
(314) 772-5142

Avian Research Association Avian Handfeeding Lab starting in January 1993 and repeated every other month Chaminade University of Honolulu 3140 Waialae Ave., Honolulu, HI For Information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Avian Research Association Basic Avian Pet Ownership and Care starting in February 1993 and repeated every other month Chaminade University of Honolulu 3140 Waialae Ave., Honolulu, HI For Information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Avian Research Association Bird Mart & Swap Meet June 13, 1993
Sept. 12, 1993
Chaminade University of Honolulu 3140 Waialae Ave., Honolulu, HI For Information:
Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Birds Exotic Spring '94 Bird Mart Extravaganza & Sale March 5 & 6, 1994
Hillsboro, Oregon
For more info, contact:
Ron Marks, manager
19235 SW Pilkington Road
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
(503) 684-3799

Seventh National Avicultural Convention of Australia March 11, 12, 13, 14, 1994
Ringwood Performing Arts & Convention Centre, Melbourne, Australia
For more Info, contact:
John Hince, publicity officer
7th National Avicultural Convention, Donnybrook, Pipers Creek Rd., Kyneton, Victoria 3444, Australia

26 August / September 1993