

# Live Food for Lories

by Fred Bauer  
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**W**e are talking about lories here. When you have witnessed these birds at liberty in their daily routine, you will see that they investigate their surroundings in detail. Their keen eye and tongue sample many areas and substances other than flowers and fruit. In fact I was surprised how little fruit (apple, pear, grape) they took from our orchard, preferring flowers. Of course, they were receiving a ration of home brew lory slop every evening and snacks from our plates during outdoor lunches. But I saw Stella's Lorikeets consuming what must have been fungus from a rotting log. I have seen Dusky Lories intently "licking" some unknown substance from conifer needles for an hour at a time. I have seen a male Goldie's Lorikeet carrying spiders to his caged mate. I witnessed Black-capped Lories crushing and lapping the succulence of sedum leaves. But the most amazing observation that appeared at China Prairie concerning lory behavior was the madrone phenomenon.

It didn't take us long to discover how important new tree buds are to all parrots. Green twigs of the madrone tree *Arbutus menziesii*, a north coast native, were the favorite, with willow, grape, rose (with thorns), and mulberry close behind. When the green, flowering madrone twigs were given to lories a truly remarkable display occurred. Remember that these birds had never seen a madrone twig before and there are no relatives of this tree anywhere in the native range of lories; the only other member of the family being the strawberry tree *Arbutus unedo* of the Mediterranean. Within a few seconds after first contact, it was as if a light bulb were switched on the in bird's awareness. The tongue began wild flicking, eyes dilated and vigorous preening ensued. A frenzy developed, the bird rapidly masticating the tissue of the new bright green growth of the twig, ignoring any older bark and leaves - then transferring the liquid secretion first to

its plumage and then to its feet until both glistened with it. The process began to wind down with the bird often lying on its side momentarily as if exhausted. After 15 or 20 minutes, normal behavior returned. Or had the need been met?

What was going on here? Could it be related to anting behavior seen in other avian series with other substances? Was madrone a substitute for a similar compound produced by a plant native to the lories' range? Was it a vital nutrient missing in lory aviculture?

Was it a mesmerizing agent, the avian equivalent to catnip for felines? It is interesting that even handraised lories respond to the madrone substance with equal acuteness. We treated our lories to this ritual for years with no apparent harm, much obvious pleasure, and the resulting beautiful glossy legs, feet and feathers.

Where am I going with this? Caged parrots do not have the choice as to what they consume and in what proportion at a particular time. Captive lories are usually presented with an over-sweet blend of wet or dry material that is the same every day. The birds intelligence to balance itself is lost. Once out of balance, the stress that follows produces abnormal cravings (for sugar and protein) and the resulting physical abnormalities such as overgrown beak and claws, hyperactivity, plumage anomalies (red in black birds and yellow in green birds), and unseen internal ailments.

At China Prairie we recognized the advantage of live food many years ago. The 50 or so species and sub-species of psittacines we have worked with (other than lories) thrived on our all-natural, nearly all-live diets, but it was somewhat by accident that this approach was applied to lories as well.

A young couple came to purchase a pair of Green-naped Lorikeets. They were given the tour of the facility and went home with their new birds having asked many questions about their care.

Three years later I was asked to sell the numerous off-spring from that pair. When I went to pick up the youngsters, I noticed a bowl of sprouts in the adults' flight. The birds looked even better than my own and were obviously productive. I said, "I see you are feeding your lories sprouts also." There was this silence as they looked at each other, then she replied, "Also? You feed your lories more than your sprouted diet?" They had misunderstood and thought that all of the birds at China Prairie were fed our sprouted diet. For three years this pair of lories were fed primarily sprouts. They were breeding prolifically and raising their young on that diet. They were in exceptionally beautiful condition and had a contented and playful manner. We had noticed that young lories in the company of other weaning parrots would eat some sprouts, but had always kept plenty of nectar before them.

Keep in mind that our sprouting system is quite different from ordinary soaked seeds. The items to be sprouted are all human grade, preferred types of grains, seeds and legumes, all of which are hulled, except for the buckwheat which must be in-hull to germinate. Hulling prevents segregation while soaking. It eliminates waste cleanup leaving only a few skins with the buckwheat hulls when fed in appropriate servings. And most important, hulled sprouts can be evenly coated with a completely natural, but highly concentrated supplement, of spirulina, trace mineral marine earth, six herbs and spices, and, six beneficial microbes.

I am sure there are many of you who have tried sprouted food for your birds, but could not control souring or fungal bloom. These hazards are easily dealt with by using a citrus bioflavonoid stabilizer (500 ppm). This extract, originally found in grapefruit seed, is totally non-toxic, and prevents pathogen proliferation in sprouts without the dangers associated with disinfectants such as chlo-

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rine. Success with any sprouting method is only as good as your water. No matter how "clean" seeds are after soaking if they are rinsed with contaminated water, there will be trouble. If your water is not 100% pure, simply don't rinse after the soak. Remember, the stabilizer is non-toxic and the very small residue has an inoffensive taste. Another simple concept must be remembered. Everyone knows that any fresh fruit or other moist food left in the flight will "spoil" rapidly if ambient temperature and humidity are high. Of course the same is true for sprouts, but to a lesser degree because they are alive, still possessing natural defense mechanisms. Feed only amounts that will be completely consumed in the time period pertinent to your environmental conditions.

Dead, dry food is as unappealing to microbes as it is to parrots. You will find that lories fed low sugar, live diets, will have much greater continuance of energy output and will not show hyper or starvation symptoms without food before them all day. In very cold weather, a limited increase in simple sugars, in the form of fruit, and complex carbohydrates will be needed for body heat production.

Converting lories to a live food diet must be done with care. Birds that have been fed refined and highly sweetened diets with synthetic vitamins will suffer if presented with sprouts only, particularly in cold weather. Their digestion and metabolism will adapt gradually. The secret is to reduce the quantity of total daily food. Hunger works wonders on the road to the acceptance of a better diet, for birds as well as people. The keen eye of the aviculturist must guide this beneficial transition. At China Prairie we settled on approximately 90% sprouted

food for our pairs in summer; 75% in winter depending upon each pair's needs.

Another important factor in providing live food for your birds is beneficial microorganisms. They are the living workers that create balance and disease resistance in the intestinal tract. Most often in aviculture only a single strain of lactobacillus is provided. We have found that other microbes are also useful and the combination of six microbes that we use are definitely more successful than lacto alone. Some lories, particularly the Lorius group, relish meal worms. They "juice" the insects, seldom eating the skin and head. This is evidence that lories probably consume insects in some form in the wild. And, of course, lories utilize flowers as food. We have found that they much prefer wild flowers to the larger domesticated ones.

Why feed live food instead of quality cooked food? The power of life is an element beyond the nuts and bolts of its material components. Seeds that sprout carry that potential. The fact that it will sprout at all demonstrates vitality. A small seed weighing a hundredth of an ounce is capable of transforming itself into a plant weighing many pounds. Yes, elements from the soil and the air are incorporated into the plant, but a dead seed has completely lost the energy to participate in this process.

The 6,000 year old Ayurvedic system of health and healing of India identifies this energy as Prana. The Chinese call it Chi. But we all know the invigorating feeling that comes from eating a good salad. Would we consider cooking a salad? This energy is perceived to decline after the "death" of the plant. Both growth and decay are essential to the cycle of life. Which side of the

dividing line do you want your birds on, growth or decay? For those who promote the use of lifeless powdered or pelleted food for their birds, I ask that they eat the human equivalent themselves.

It is true that a sprouted lentil can contain 300% more vitamin C than the same bean unsprouted and that a sprouted radish seed can contain 3,000% more vitamin A than raw radish by weight, but the real advantage in feeding live food is that it carries the message of life itself. We can not recreate nature in a flight cage, but we can provide complex, living food for our birds at little additional cost and with little extra effort. The results are very impressive. ➤

## Runaway Rainbows!

*The zoo facility in the following episode requested not to be identified.*

A zoo keeper in charge of morning nectar feeding had no sooner begun the task in the lorikeet enclosure, when he noticed an extra buzz of excitement. A pair of Rainbow Lorikeets were enthusiastically jabbering and frog-hopping around outside *on top of the cage!* It seems they had burrowed their way through the grassy turf under the base of the aviary wire and were blissfully flying free.

"Oh, oh!" thought the worker, and promptly called staff superiors. A capture party was organized and a net was brought out.

Well, those two Trichoglossus took one look at that net and immediately flew across the lake! That was that for the zoo staff; no catching them now.

Late the same afternoon, the avian exhibit employees were summoned to an entertaining commotion outside the concession stand. Two thoroughly captivating Rainbow Lorikeets were eagerly bouncing from shoulder to dixie cup sampling a "gourmet" luncheon of ice cream and treats. It was a simple matter for the lory keepers to go over and retrieve the escapees. ➤

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