



Feeding Made Easy

by Carolyn Swicegood
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Birdkeepers in general are amazingly devoted to the health and welfare of their avian charges. Many aviary owners devote a great deal of thought and effort into the care of their flock, including their birds' diet. Although a few birdkeepers feed their birds only formulated food (pellets), the great majority of aviculturists offer a wide and interesting array of foods in order to cover all the nutritional bases and to provide their birds the enjoyment of colors, textures, and flavors in their food. A typical daily offering might include freshly sprouted seeds, grains and legumes; fresh fruits and vegetables; a variety of leafy green foods; cooked mixes of corn; beans and grains; whole-grain breads; cornbread; seed mixes; pellets; and other dried foods.

Here are a few tips to make feeding the flock faster and more efficient. Following these tips are some easy guidelines to remind us of those birdkeeping chores that are not a part of our daily routine and therefore, much too easily forgotten.

Food Choices

- **Research** is the first step toward establishing an appropriate diet for each bird species that you keep. Besides inquiring of other established and successful breeders of your birds' species as to what keeps their flock healthy, check out all available sources of information about your species of birds' life in the wild. Looking to Mother Nature is a logical way to arrive at a diet that closely approximates

what your birds would eat in their natural habitat.

- **Pesticide-free** foods are more affordable than one might suppose. Thanks to a report by the Environmental Working Group on the toxicity of produce, it is easier to select foods that minimize the exposure of our flock to toxic pesticide residues. The EWG report outlined the toxicity of the best-known fruits and vegetables. The most toxic fruits and vegetables are strawberries, bell peppers, spinach, domestic cherries, peaches, Mexican-grown cantaloupe, celery, apples, apricots, green beans, Chilean-grown grapes, and cucumbers. The least contaminated produce list includes corn, sweet potatoes, cauliflower, brussels sprouts, domestic grapes, bananas, plums, watermelon, and broccoli. Obviously, the more heavily we feed from the least contaminated foods, the healthier our birds. When feeding foods from the list of most contaminated foods, it is important whenever possible, to choose foods that were grown organically.

- **Sprouting** is a frugal way to provide organically grown food to our flock. Sprouted seeds, grains, and legumes are fresh and inexpensive LIVE foods full of vitamins, minerals, and enzymes. Sprouts cost no more than twenty to forty cents per pound and they grow easily in limited space without soil, sunlight, or fertilizer. The feeding of sprouts can revolutionize our bird feeding routine and make our

flock healthier and more productive. It is as easy as soaking seeds overnight and rinsing them a few times the next day and feeding them when they developed short tails. What could be easier? When we "grow our own," we can be sure that there is no pesticide contamination.

- **Seasonal foods** not only mimic Mother Nature's way of feeding birds, but by stocking up when they are available, we can take advantage of the low prices that accompany abundant seasonal harvests and special holiday foods. The day after Halloween, hundreds of pumpkins bursting with vitamin A and tasty seeds can often be taken away by the truckload for free. I always freeze as many bags of baked pumpkin flesh as my freezer will hold. I also dry many pounds of pumpkin seeds. After Thanksgiving, the oversupply of gourds and squashes is usually on sale in supermarket chains. After Christmas, most supermarkets slash prices on the nuts that large parrots like Macaws enjoy so much. By feeding daily the current crop of fruits and vegetables, and preserving the oversupply, our birds will be healthier and enjoy a great variety of foods year round.

- While **fresh foods** are always the best way to meet our birds' nutritional needs, natural food supplements including wheat grass powder, barley grass powder, carrot powder, beet powder, wheat germ, cranberry juice concentrate, and a favorite of many parrots – fresh fruit and vegetable juices – can supply the nutrients missing from foods that are grown in nutrient-depleted soil.

Clean and Disinfect Produce

- To reduce the pesticide residue on fresh fruits and vegetables fed to our flocks, the USDA recommends that produce be washed under tap water and that we peel away and discard all outer leaves, skin and rinds. Vegetables like potatoes and carrots should be scrubbed if the fiber-rich skins are to be preserved to feed to our birds.

- Grapefruit Seed Extract (GSE) is an inexpensive and safe disinfectant for cleaning produce. To make a disinfectant soak for produce, add 10 to 15 drops of GSE per gallon of water and submerge the fruits and vegetables for 15 to 30 seconds or more.

Food Preparation

- I use my German-made "Boerner V-Slicer" kitchen gadget for chopping, shredding, dicing, and slicing fresh fruits and veggies for my birds. This model has been available for decades, costs approximately \$30, and is indestructible. The one that I'm using now has been in daily service for 15 years and is still going strong. The blades are still dangerously sharp and I faithfully use the hand protector to guide the carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, apples, pears, and other fresh produce over the various blades. I cannot imagine daily bird food preparation without it. It is my best kitchen gadget.

- Keeping all the utensils and containers for bird food preparation in

one place can save minutes daily, hours monthly, and perhaps days when calculated for the year. Whether we use a mandolin system, a grater, a peeler, a favorite knife or all of the above, storing them with a bowl dedicated to bird food preparation, along with any other necessary tools, can save considerable time.

- If you need to prepare bird food the night before due to an early morning, prepare a "salad" for your flock and refrigerate it overnight. Place a layer of any small shape of dry pasta in the bottom of a glass or stainless steel bowl. Over the uncooked pasta, place a layer of berries, then a layer of greens torn into small pieces, then a layer of shredded, chopped, or sliced veggies, followed by a layer of fruit. Then repeat the layers of berries, greens, veggies and fruits. Refrigerate overnight then toss and serve just before feeding. The nutritious juices soak into the pasta and no nutrients are wasted.

General Feeding Tips

- If possible, maintain two sets of food and water dishes so that they can be rotated daily. One set can be disinfected, cleaned and dried overnight while the other set is in service.

- Organize food supplies such as seeds or formulated diets and keep them as close as possible to the aviaries to save time. Use easy-to-open bins that are clearly labeled with the food they contain. Use appropriately sized scoops and keep them in the bins ready to use.

- A multi-pocket apron is a bird-keeper's dream for saving steps. Rather than walking back and forth to retrieve the various tools needed to service nestboxes, food dishes, water systems, and other aviary systems, why not gather all the necessary tools and place them in the pockets of an easy-on and off apron? Some of the tools that might be included are an egg candler, a flashlight, pliers, scissors, small knife, bag ties, plastic

bags, wire, paper towels, rubber gloves, nail clipper and file, small towel, small spray bottle of sterile water, handi-wipes and disinfectant.

Timely Reminders

It is much easier to remember routine birdkeeping checks and maintenance chores if we schedule them for one particular day of the week or month, a scheduled bi-annual event such as changing the clocks for daylight savings time, or a yearly event such as New Years Day. Once you decide on your schedule, make the notations on your calendar and your important duties will not be forgotten.

Weekly

(Choose your lightest work day to schedule weekly chores)

- Check each bird for signs of health problems. (Check visually every day).

- Clean cages and aviaries and check all equipment.

- Replace damaged fasteners, perches, and locks.

- Check for loose strings on swings, ropes, Boings, and rope perches.

- Rotate toys in cages for indoor birds. Most birds lose interest in toys after a week.

- To prevent boredom, maintain four toy boxes, one for each week of the month.

- Add one new toy to each of the four toy boxes every month.

- Replace the weekly supply of newspapers in all cage trays.

Monthly

- Wing and nail clips should be checked and updated if necessary on the first day of each new month to prevent flight-related accidents such as escape into the outdoors and overgrown nails entrapping toes or feet.

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- Clean and service equipment such as air filters and humidifiers. The humidifier water tank should be washed and sterilized at least once a month.

- Air and water filters should be changed as directed. (Adding a few drops of disinfectant, such as Grapefruit Seed Extract, to the water tank daily, will prevent a buildup of bacteria in it.)

- Evacuation plans and the equipment needed to carry out an evacuation due to extreme weather, fire, or other unforeseen events should be checked monthly and updated, especially if birds have been added to the flock.

Bi-annually

- Batteries in smoke detectors should be checked twice a year when you reset your clocks for daylight savings time in the spring and fall.

- Check veterinary, poison control, and hotline phone numbers that should be kept by your telephone. Remind all family members and bird sitters what to do in the event of an accident or poisoning.

Yearly

- Check all components of your avian first aid kit to be sure they are state of the art and have not outlived their expiration date. Test electrical equipment, such as heating pads.

- Check your will or your instructions for the care of your birds in the event of your death, and update if necessary. People and situations change constantly so it is important that your instructions reflecting your wishes for the future care of your birds is updated yearly.

Note: The Boerner V-slicer can be viewed online:

< <http://www.kingmarketing.com/slicer.htm> >



To Soar With Eagles

by Brent Andrus, AFA Western Regional Director

"I am the Eagle. I live in high country, in rocky cathedrals that reach to the sky Come dance on the west wind and touch on the mountain tops. Sail over the canyons and up to the stars. And reach for the heavens and hope for the future and all that you can be and not what you are." From the "The Eagle and the Hawk" by John Denver.

The eagle has always symbolized majesty and high obtainment. At the Houston Convention last year the "To Soar With Eagles" AFA affiliated club membership contest and fund raiser was introduced. A packet containing the contest and fund raising information was mailed to all club delegates by the end of August.

The American Federation of Aviculture's membership drive allowed it's affiliated clubs to earn money while striving for excellence in gaining membership for AFA. Each club could earn up to \$5 for each new member recruited and for each member it renewed. The contest ran from September 1 through December 31 of 2001.

The TOP CLUB in recruiting new and renewing members receives recognition in the official journal of AFA the WATCHBIRD and will be awarded a plaque and have it's name inscribed on the permanent President's trophy which will be on display at the AFA conventions. The picture of the AFA President awarding the trophy to the top club will appear in the *AFA Watchbird*. In addition the 2nd and 3rd place clubs will also awarded plaques and be recognized in the *AFA Watchbird*. There are two categories of awards – one for clubs under 50 members and one for clubs over 50 members.

I am pleased to announce the winners for 2001:

Category A

(over 50 members)

- 1st Arizona Seed Crackers**
- 2nd Dallas Bird Society**
- 3rd Avicultural Society of America**

Category B

(under 50 members)

- 1st San Diego Bird Breeders**
- 2nd Arizona Bird club**
- 3rd Exotic bird Club of Florida**

A special thanks to these clubs for participating: Arizona Avian Breeders Association, Arizona Avicultural Society, Arizona Bird Club, Arizona Seed Crackers, Avicultural Society of America, Avicultural Society of Tucson, Central Coast Avicultural Society, Charleston Bird Club, Companion Bird Club of Atlanta, Dallas Bird Society, Exotic Bird Club of Florida, Las Vegas Avicultural Society, Oklahoma Avicultural Society, Parrot Breeders Association of Virginia, Pyrrhura Breeders Association, Reno Area Avian Enthusiasts, San Diego Bird Breeders, and Triangle Bird Club. The goal is to have this contest every year. Perhaps your club will "Soar with the Eagles" in 2002!