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A Balanced Ration For Lovebirds

by Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.

Proper nutrition is the most important single factor in ensuring a long healthy life and complete physiological efficiency of any animal.

The cage bird is totally dependent upon the aviculturist to provide this proper nutrition in the form of a complete and balanced ration. The ration should supply the proper amounts of all the nutrients required for vigorous growth, normal development, reproduction and resistance to diseases.

Growth is not only manifested by an increase in size, but it also involves continuous multiplication of body cells and their differentiation to perform the different functions of the body organisms. Maximal size of the bird may be limited by heredity, but maximal development can be achieved only by continuous realization of the full growth potential by proper feeding throughout the

growing period. Love birds raised in aviaries where selective breeding is practiced and where a high level of proper food elements is provided, show a marked increase in size when compared to the same species in the wild.

Failure to provide the proper food elements results in dietary stresses upon both the parents and young which may be reflected in poor egg hatchability, improper growth, and decreases resistance to disease and parasites.

Food elements are broken down into different classes which include carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins and minerals.

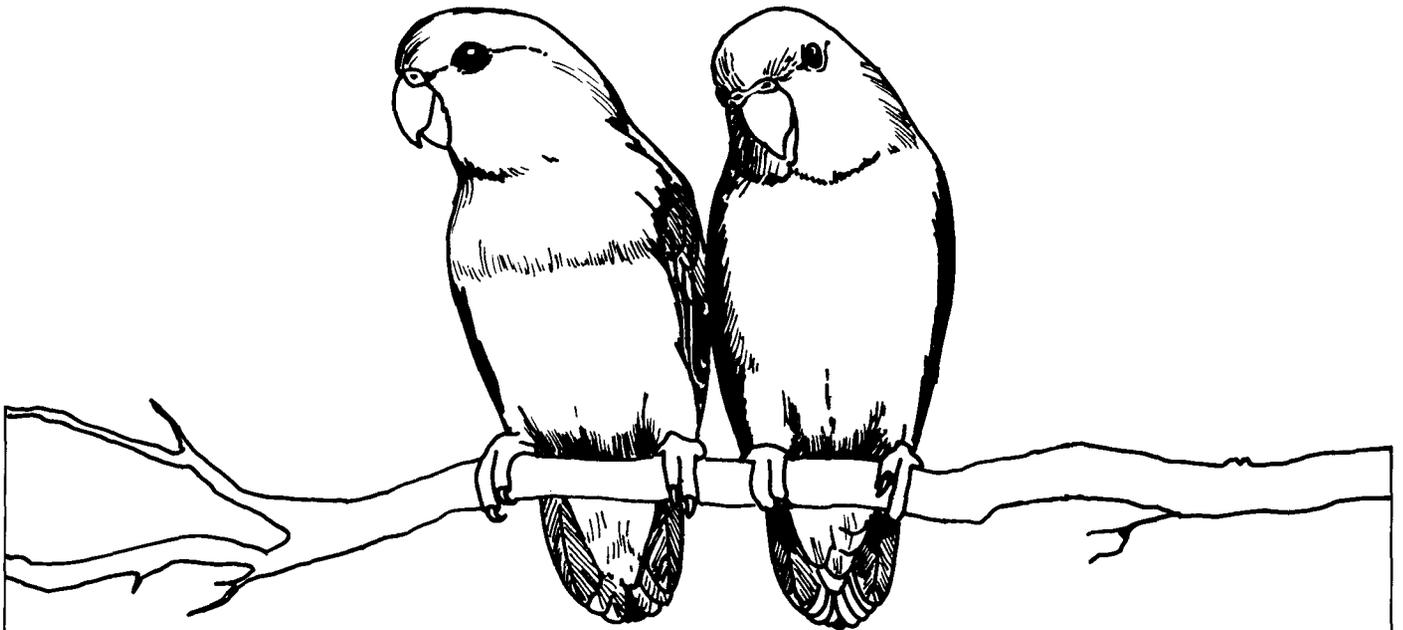
Carbohydrates, in the forms of sugars and starches, and fats function mainly as sources of energy and heat.

Proteins, as the "body builders", form a large part of muscles, body organs, feathers, skin, beak, claws, and eggs. Pro-

A handful of healthy youngsters. These babies were raised in the aviaries of L. Horton/R. Dubuc. They know the value of, and applaud, Dr. Baer's good nutritional advise. Three Blue Masked at top, Black-cheeked in center, Nyasaland on lower right.



Photo by Steve Clause.



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QUARANTINE STATION)

teins are composed of relatively simple units, the amino acids. Some amino acids (the "non-essential" amino acids) can be manufactured by the bird; others (the "essential" amino acids) can be obtained only from the diet.

Vitamins are required in very small amounts, but deficiencies in them can result in major disturbances in the health of the bird. Fortunately most practical diets contain adequate amounts of vitamins and they can be easily provided in readily available vitamin supplements.

Minerals have many functions and are as necessary to life as the other food elements.

Grit or gravel is needed by all seed eaters. It should not be considered a source of minerals, but rather the minerals should be provided separately.

Besides the food elements, birds require water which is usually obtained by drinking and eating succulent foods.

The basic ration of the love bird consists mainly of seeds, which should be supplemented with greens, fruit and additional mineral and protein supplements.

Seeds are sometimes classified as starch (carbohydrate) seeds or oil seeds. Starch seeds include the cereal or grass seeds (such as the millets, canary seed, oats, etc.) and buckwheat. They generally contain less protein than the oil seeds and are low in the essential amino acid "lysine". Common millet is deficient in the amino acid "tryptophan" while canary seed is a fairly good source of this amino acid. On the other hand, canary seed is deficient in "methionine" while this amino acid is found more abundantly in millet; so, the proteins of millet and canary seed tend to supplement each other with respect to their amino acids.

The oil seeds (which include niger, sesame, safflower and sunflower) generally contain more protein (up to 20-25%) which is of a higher biological value and they provide somewhat more of the essential amino acid "lysine" than do the starch seeds. Niger is one of the most useful of the oil seeds.

A balanced ration for love birds should contain a mixture of starch and oil seeds. Commercial Budgerigar seed mixes used by many love bird breeders as a feed for their birds is generally a 60-40-10 ratio of common (proso) millet, canary seed and oat groats. As millet is lower in protein, it would be well to increase this food element in the ratio by bringing the canary seed content up closer to 50%. Additional protein increase can be obtained by the addition of small kibbled dog biscuit (Ken-L Ration brand) to the ration. This kibbled biscuit contains at

least 22% protein in the form of wheat feed flour, meat and bone meal, and soy bean meal (all rich in the essential amino acids, especially "lysine"), and it also contains vitamin concentrates and minerals including the trace minerals.

Additional vitamins can be added to the ration in the form of water soluble liquid concentrates (Lambert-Kay Co., "Avitron" — 8 drops per qt. of water), or of water soluble powders (Whitmoyer's "Headstart" poultry powder) added to the drinking water. Whether the soluble liquid or powder is used, a fresh solution should be prepared daily to prevent mold, bacteria and other micro-organisms from using the enriched media for their own development. Either of these vitamins may be added to protein supplements or nestling food given to the birds instead of putting it in the drinking water.

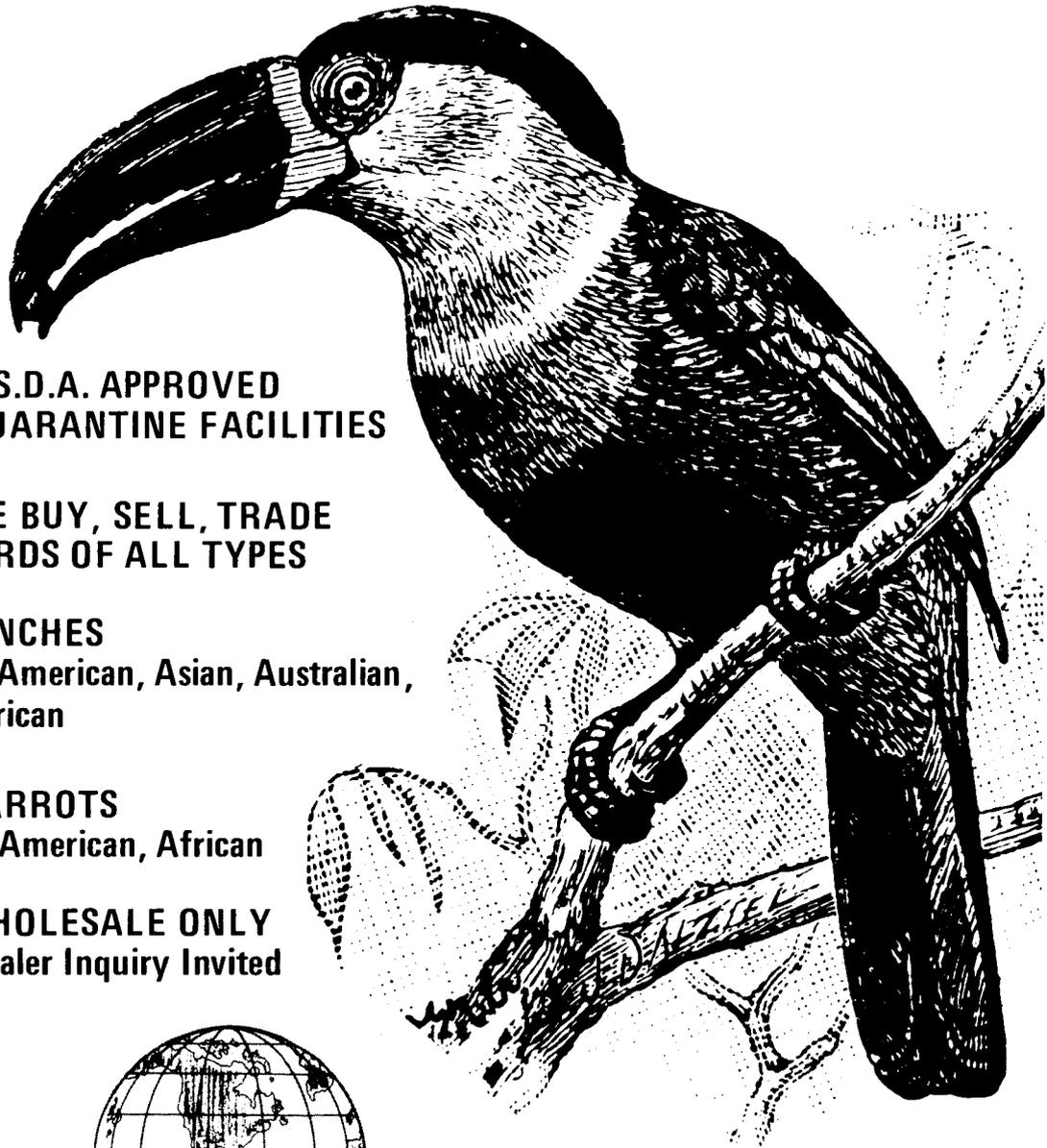
A vitamin mineral powder (Vionate by Squibb) may be added to the seed mixture of the ration instead of incorporating it into the drinking water or a protein supplement. Here approximately a two quart mixture of the small seed is coated with four tablespoonful of Linatone (a liquid vitamin for dogs by Lambert-Kay) and to this is then added two tablespoonful of Vionate. The effect is that the Linatone will coat some of the seed hulls and the Vionate powder will adhere to this oil coating. The bird in "tongueing" the seeds when it eats will ingest some of the Vionate-Linatone mixture.

Green leafy greens such as endive lettuce, spinach, kale, comfrey, etc., should form a part of the daily ration; and minerals in the form of oyster shell, crushed egg shell and cuttlefish bone should always be available. Rabbit salt spools will assure the additional availability of trace minerals.

One good balanced ration for love birds is that containing a mixture of ten parts canary seed, eight parts millet, one part oat groats, one part niger, one part small kibbled dog biscuit and one part buckwheat. The buckwheat serves to replace some of the oat groats in the mixture and is added for variety. Sunflower seed is provided apart in a separate container, free choice, to avoid seed wastage. In another container greens, apple and dried wheat bread can be provided.

Love birds eat apple readily when reared with this fruit in the diet. They prefer the ripe sweet varieties such as Red and Golden Delicious. Birds not accustomed to eating fruit may refuse apple when first offered, but if it is placed before them daily, they will learn to like it. This is especially true if they are housed with or next to other birds

Continued on page 46



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rail, but a Jacana, or Lilytrotter, related to but not a true Rail.

Many Thanks
Sheri Williamson
Ft. Worth, Texas

We slower folks have a world of problems. Here when my one-track mind thought everything was going well, I get de-railed by a Rail. And not a true Rail at that. The photo was not identified and we couldn't contact the photographer so your humble one-track servant had to do the research. Of all the books I went through, Ripley's "Rails of the World" has the closest pictures. I knew the bird was not in the book and I couldn't find my Lilytrotter volume so I called it a Rail. We sincerely appreciate your fine observation, though, and the trouble you took to correct us. I hope we never get away with a mistake. Editor

A BALANCED RATION FOR LOVE BIRDS

Continued from page 10

who do eat apple. Their reluctance will soon be overcome by curiosity.

Dry whole wheat or cracked wheat bread is an excellent supplement to the ration. The sliced bread is cut into one inch squares and allowed to dry or it can be crumbled and mixed with grated carrot and vitamin concentrate. Hard boiled egg added to the latter makes a good nestling food. The average love bird will eat about one of the dried squares or its equivalent daily along with its other feed. Birds feeding young will consume double or more this amount together with greatly increased quantities of greens and apple.

Birds kept in flights may be provided the different seeds in separate dishes to cut down on waste. Birds kept in breeding cages must be fed a seed mixture as space limits the number of receptacles that can be accommodated. A minimum of five receptacles is necessary to properly feed birds kept in breeding cages, including the container for water. The other four receptacles are necessary for the small seed mixture, and sunflower seed fed apart, the container for greens, apple and dried bread, and the one for oyster shell.

Other seeds, both starch and oil, greens, vegetable, fruits, and supplements, may be fed the caged bird provided the ration is nutritionally sound and balanced and that it is accepted by the bird. Availability and cost play a large part in this selection and variation in the ration from time to time may make it more interesting to the bird.

NEW MUTATIONS

Continued from page 42

yellow shoulders and flights. No young with pied markings have been produced from such birds, but efforts continue and hopefully this variation will someday be established.

In the old books dealing with the Agapornis during the 1920's and 1930's, mention has been made of hybrids between many different species, such as Peach Face x Masked, or Fischer's and even crosses between Madagascar x Black-cheeked, etc. These publications state the young so produced are fertile. In recent years we have known that hybrids within the eye-ring group are fertile, but crosses with Peach Face and others are thought to be mules. There needs to be a great deal of work done to document

hybrids and their fertility. This information is very valuable to us for future work with our birds.

Possibly the African Love Bird Society could set up a committee to deal with this subject, and club members could participate. So much can be done, work that should have been done years ago. We have long needed an organization to help improve our Agapornis, by setting standards, and helping to educate through shows and publications.

If we do our job well, that is, keep good records, close band our birds, foster carefully controlled experiments, and cooperate with various avicultural organizations, we will have the African Love Birds with us for a long time. These delightful little birds will continue to add variety and color to grace our aviaries. The future looks good.

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