

General Management at the Parrot Breeding Centre

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Diet is a very important part of the management of any aviaries. What we put in the food we feed our birds is what we get out of them: good health, happiness and good breeding. We prefer to spend more on good quality foods than risk sicknesses and having to spend so much more in treatments and eventually losing a valuable bird.

But before I go any further, one thing must be clear: whatever is written in this article is what we do at the Parrot Breeding Centre. It works well for our parrots, but it does not mean it is the only way of feeding these birds. I just want to share with you our experience.

Sprouting the Seeds

The reason why we sprout our seeds is that we firmly believe the closer we get to a natural diet the better. Sprouted seeds are of great nutritious value because the oil content of the seed is lowered considerably. As the sprout grows, it uses this reserve of oil as does an embryo absorbing the egg yolk to develop. Second, in the process of germination, the vitamins are brought to activity for the growth of the sprout. Live vitamins are irreplaceable, and this is where the breeders giving only cooked beans are facing big trouble. Adding artificial vitamins is good as long as the general diet provides live ones.

But sprouting seeds takes time unless one can train the staff to do it the right way. It is crucial to do it properly otherwise fungi or germs can develop. Also, this food must be discarded when the evening feed is brought or, at the latest, the next morning. Our staff cleans all the dishes early in the morning and this avoids the seeds going sour.

This is how we do it: the seeds are soaked in a large bucket of water to which has been added calcium propionate. This is absolutely necessary to avoid the development of germs or fungi during the germination pro-

cess. We do not always know where the seed bags have been stored nor in what conditions, before they reach us. If one does not have the time or the means to do it the proper way, the best is to stick to dry seeds.

Sunflower seeds are soaked for 24 hours with calcium propionate and rinsed very carefully the next day, then left in the same bucket but without water. In winter, it may take another day for the sprouts to be apparent. Oats will have to soak for 48 hours in water with Safe Sprout but this mixture will have to be changed after the first 24 hours. Then it will take another two to three days. Wheat is soaked for 24 hours, then rinsed and left without water for three days.

All seeds will have to be rinsed every day whether they are left to soak or without water. Sometimes we sprout Mung beans. Wheat is reduced after the breeding season and increased again just before. It contains vitamin E which induces the birds into breeding condition, provided they are ready. Oat is quite high in protein and sunflower is a good, nutritious base. It contains many vitamins and minerals.

Every morning, six large buckets are prepared carefully with two parts sunflower, one part oat, half part wheat. This represents three-fifths of the total amount of food given in the morning. To this is added two to three tablespoons of a calcium supplement in the form of powder.

One tablespoon of Biorhem is also added, it contains dried *lactobacilli* which are friendly bacteria that help reduce the pathogenic bacteria. Several veterinarians, especially Dr. Kim Joyner, are still studying the real effects on psittacines. One tablespoon of kelp is alternately added, this seaweed powder is very high in calcium and all vitamins and minerals, with Beeffee Powder.

The seeds are then well mixed together with those powders. In the mean time, fruits such as apples, oranges and pawpaws are cut into small pieces. These are fed daily. Yellow fruits are very high in vitamin A and consequently are excellent for African Gray Parrots and especially Eclectus Parrots.

Other fruits given in season: figs, grapes, plums.

Grated vegetables offered daily include carrots, beet roots with their tops, sweet potatoes, turnips, and fresh lucern. Fruits and vegetables

represent two-fifths of the total amount of food given.

Dried corn cooked for three hours (or 1-1/2 hours in a pressure cooker) is added daily and soya beans, cooked in the same way, are added once a week.

All this is mixed together with the sprouted seeds in the buckets, and fed to the birds immediately.

We feed them ourselves because the amount varies from species to species and even from pair to pair. For example, Spectacled Amazons out of breeding season require more fruits and vegetables than seeds, otherwise they grow too fat. It also allows us to check on every one of the birds. A sick bird requires quick action. Slices of corn on the cob are given daily to the Palm Cockatoos and to the Eclectus Parrots.

In the evenings, two to three times a week, we give them Avi-Sup mixed with warm water. We have found that they will eat more readily if it is offered warm and especially when the weather is cold.

Avi-Sup is a South African product which consists of pre-cooked, easily digestible, human-grade quality ingredients that have been blended together in the correct balance of proteins, fats, carbohydrates, fibres, vitamins and minerals.

At the start of the breeding season, Avi-Sup is fed every evening to the breeding birds. When the chicks have hatched, we add scrambled eggs, but they have to be well cooked to avoid any eventual germs.

Available at all times in a second dish are dry seeds containing a mixture of canary, millet, sorghum, linseed (in small quantities: it is quite oily but helpful in preventing egg-binding conditions). Every single pair, from the smallest conure to the largest macaw, gets it and they all enjoy it. In winter and at the start of the breeding season, the larger parrots get pecan nuts regularly.

This diet works very well at our Centre. It is essential to provide the birds with top quality foods as well as a diet correctly balanced in order to prevent diseases, poor breeding, poor hatchability, egg binding and all problems related to any deficiencies. What would be saved on food would be spent ten times more in medicine and veterinarian costs. It is essential to work with an avian veterinarian or dietician to make sure the diet is the right one for the type of birds one keeps. ●