

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, seizure-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 syrup, a soluble product used by nursing women 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 dairy products, kale, collards, 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, Neocalglucon 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 and 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*

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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*



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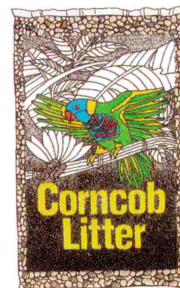
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Avian Trade Shows & Seminars

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

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) 690-0613
or John Rich (615) 694-7793,
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
(Portland area)

For information, contact:
Ron Marks, manager

19235 SW Pilkington Road
Lake Oswego, OR 97035
or call (503) 684-3799

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 room reservations.
Call (210) 632-8025 or (210) 333-2733
for vendor or show information.

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

For information, call:
Earl Owen (803) 855-3193

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) 862-3358

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
Fifth Annual Exotic Cage Bird Fair

Sunday, September 26, 1993

Washtenaw County Fairgrounds
Ann Arbor Saline Road

Saline, Michigan

11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

For more information:

Nancy K. Egerer (313) 227-6503
11533 Newman Rd., Brighton, MI 48116

Rose City Hookbill Society's
2nd Annual Bird Show

September 26, 1993

Sheraton Inn in Norwich, CT

Judges:

Dr. Al Decoteau and others from
American Budgerigar Society,
National Cockatiel Society,
and Society of Parrot Breeders
and Exhibitors.

For more information, contact:

Art Godfrey, president
(203) 889-9988

Central Florida Bird Breeders
Annual Fall Bird Sale & Swap Meet

Sunday, October 3, 1993

9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Admission \$3.00, children under 6 free
Kissimmee Valley Livestock

Exhibition Hall,

Highway 192/441, next to
Silver Spurs Rodeo Grounds,
1.2 miles west of FL turnpike entrance,
25 minutes from Orlando Int'l. Airport

For more information, contact:

Bert & Susan Gottfried (407) 777-7363
or Dwight Greenberg (407) 631-9800

Kansas Avicultural Society, Inc.
11th Annual Bird Show

and ACS Specialty Show

October 9, 1993

Ramada Broadview
400 W. Douglas, Wichita, KS 67202

Contact person:

Lynda Warren, c/o KAS
P.O. Box 3953, Wichita, KS 67201-3953

Pomona Bird Mart
November 28, 1993

(see ad - page 38)

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)
(602) 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 secty.
12470 Sparrow Wood Dr.,

St. Louis, MO 63146

(314) 576-4136

or Bonnie Reynolds, MCBA secty.

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 Waiialae 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 Waiialae Ave., Honolulu, HI

For information:

Dave DeWald (808) 735-4726

Avian Research Association
Bird Mart & Swap Meet

June 13, 1993

Sept. 12, 1993 Dec. 12, 1993

Chaminade University of Honolulu
3140 Waiialae 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