

## Nutrients In Bird Seed

### Discover what nutrients bird seed offers

*By Rebecca Sweat*

Amazon parrots are one of the bird species prone to fatty liver disease. Courtesy Dick Woiwode, SC

Nutritionally, seeds primarily consist of carbohydrates and fat, a little fiber and protein, and a very small amount of minerals, usually phosphorous. Most seeds are not nutrient-dense, except for calories.

“Seeds are a high-calorie food — great for energy generation,” said Gregory Burkett, DVM, an avian veterinarian in Durham, North Carolina. Both fat and carbohydrates are important energy sources, he said. With their high metabolic rates, birds need high-energy foods.

Some seeds, however, are higher in fats and carbohydrates than others. At the low end, white proso millet is a relatively low-fat seed with just 3.5 percent fat. Peanuts, Brazil nuts, palm nuts, and canola (rape), flax, safflower and sunflower seeds range from 35 to 50 percent fat and are some of the seeds with the highest fat content. Eating too many high-fat seeds can cause a lot of health problems in the typically sedentary pet bird, Burkett said, including obesity, lipomas (fatty tumors) and hepatic

#### Lipidosis (fatty liver disease)

Most seeds lack one or more essential amino acids, so they don't offer “complete” protein. Seeds also lack many essential vitamins and minerals. In particular, seeds are deficient in amino acids, lysine and methionine; vitamins A, D and B12; riboflavin; and calcium. These nutrients are necessary for healthy bone development, formation of muscle and body tissues, and the proper function of body systems.

This is not to say that you should never give seeds to your bird. “Seeds are not bad; they just shouldn't be the only food you give to your bird,” stated Ted Lafeber, president of Lafeber Company based in Cornell, Illinois. He said seeds in and of themselves aren't bad any more than a banana is bad. “If you only eat bananas, you will have nutritional deficiencies,” he said, “and the same is true with seeds. Most seeds by themselves won't give a bird everything it needs nutritionally. Sooner or later, you're going to have problems if you just feed your bird seeds.”