

Bird Species-Specific Diet Needs

Each pet bird species has specific dietary needs.

By Susan Chamberlain

African grey parrots frequently suffer from calcium deficiency. An avian veterinarian can perform a blood test to measure your African grey's calcium levels. Almonds and broccoli are good sources of calcium for your bird. Use calcium supplements only on the advice of your avian veterinarian. Feather picking in African greys may be linked to a deficiency of the amino acid arginine, and the presence of red feathers where gray ones would normally appear may be due to a deficiency of lysine. Improving your African grey's overall nutrition may alleviate both conditions.

Amazon, caiques and Pionus parrots are prone to obesity and fatty liver disease. Premature deaths are often due to heart problems, fatty tumors or atherosclerosis. Just as people do, birds develop health problems attributable to diet. Amazons in particular, often become junk-food junkies, almost instinctively recognizing potato chip bags and pizza boxes. Plenty of exercise and a carefully monitored diet are recommended for these potential perch potatoes!

Asian birds, such as Derbyan, Alexandrine and moustached parakeets flock to the Pandanus, or screw pine tree, in their southern range. Residents of the subtropical areas in the United States and elsewhere can harvest the big Pandanus fruits from local, unsprayed trees. You'll need a machete to split the tough outer husk! Screw pines (sometimes called screw palms) are sold as ornamental landscaping plants in nurseries.

Budgies (budgerigars or parakeets) often suffer from obesity, fatty liver disease, goiter and hypothyroidism due to poor diets. Encourage your budgie to eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables along with a formulated diet. Budgies often resist converting to a pelleted diet. Introduce a more healthful menu by clipping pellets and biscuits intended for larger birds to cage bars. Watch your little guy gnaw on them!

Cockatiels are prone to vitamin-A deficiencies and fatty liver disease. Supply your cockatiel with plenty of vitamin-A rich fruit and vegetables, and incorporate pellets into their diet. Kale, broccoli, carrots, sweet potatoes and mangoes are good sources of vitamin A.

Conures need a diet rich in vitamin K (turnip greens, broccoli, eggs, and peas).

Eclectus parrots thrive on diets rich in beta-carotene and vegetable protein and need a high dose of vitamin A, derived from whole-natural foods. They are hyper-chromatic, so don't feed them colored pellets, give them the natural ones.

Lorikeets eat fruit, berries, nectar and pollen in the wild. Pet lories subsist on a mostly liquid diet, which results in liquid droppings. Formulated lory diets are available in bird-specialty stores.

Macaws. Hyacinth macaws need hard-shelled nuts in their diets, such as palm nuts. Florida residents can collect these from their unsprayed palm trees. The macaw parrots are attracted to colors, so offer a variety of colors and textures in their food. Fun foods like peas in the pods, green beans, yams and oranges keep macaws entertained. Give them a varied diet offering seeds, fruits, nuts, legumes and vegetables.