

## Nourishing the Nest

### Breeding diets benefit both parents & chicks

*By Margrethe Warden*

#### It's Alive!

Maintaining birds on a diet based on livefood usually requires a separate refrigerator or freezer — it's not likely the family will appreciate digging through bags of frozen animals looking for human food. Nor will they enjoy the mouse colony in the garage. Birds-of-prey diets, carnivore diets and even dog food can also be offered depending on the species involved. Carnivorous birds such as the ground hornbills (*Bucorvus leadbeateri*) consume mice and frozen chicks on a daily basis and simply need an increase in the amount served. Schroeder's mynahs also require some adjustments to their diet when breeding.

"Most mynahs will require live food to rear their young, but will feed fruit and soaked pellets to the chicks as well," stated Schroeder. They are fed thawed crickets and live mealworms. Mealworms are provided all year long, but as breeding season approaches the amount offered is increased.

Managing birds whose diet includes live or frozen mice and chicks is not for the delicate or squeamish. Many bird species, such as some hornbills, mynahs, rollers, members of the Corvid family (crows, ravens, magpies) and members of the kingfisher family, including kookaburras, consume a meat-based diet rather than an omnivorous diet with fruits and vegetables. These diets include such delicious items as chicks and, depending on the size of the bird, mice in various sizes ranging from the day-old pinkies to the juvenile size to full-grown adults. Mice and chicks are either live or previously frozen.

The carnivore diet is usually horsemeat-based, and according to Mark Moore, of Hill Country Aviaries in Texas, crows and hornbills will not breed without the carnivore diet. Many breeders who keep these birds make few nutritional adjustments to the daily diet when breeding season begins. Typically, the amount of food is increased as the egg laying starts and is continued while the parents are feeding chicks.