

## To Each Their Own Bird Diet

**These species-specific diet recommendations can help keep your bird on track**

*By Rose Gordon*

Finding the right balance in terms of maintaining a healthy weight for your bird depends on multiple factors, namely your bird's species, level of exercise and eating habits. Unfortunately, some birds are more prone to obesity than others. Cockatiels, budgies and Amazons are repeat offenders in the overweight category, according to Larry Nemetz, DVM, owner of the avian-only Bird Clinic in California, so you'll need to be particularly aware of what these birds eat. An accurate gram scale is a must, too, Nemetz added. Here's what bird owners and breeders of some of the more popular species shared with BIRD TALK in regards to diet.

### African greys

Jean Pattison, a breeder of African greys and other species for 20-plus years, feeds her greys a mix of 70-percent pellets and 30-percent "a good parrot seed mix, with dried fruit, almonds etc." She uses a 13 of a cup of base the mix a day, and offers fresh foods as treats throughout the day.

### Amazons

Shari and Terry Beaudoin are co-owners of Parrot Island, an avian-only store in Minnesota, and the owners of several Amazons. Shari is also the president of the Amazona Society and an IAABC certified parrot behavioral consultant. Both are loath to say there's one diet that fits all Amazons. They recommend you use an accurate gram scale, measure out your bird's portions relentlessly and adjust your bird's diet based on the time of year, its individual energy needs and its weight patterns. The Beaudoin's three double yellow-headed Amazons all receive varying amounts of food, but about 30 percent of their diets come from a formulated pellet (approximately a 1/4 to a 1/3 cup), 20 percent of whole-dried foods (seeds, nuts, fruits and vegetables) and 40 percent comes from fresh vegetables and fruits.

### Canaries

Debbie Eaton, a breeder of song canaries for 25 years and a board member for the National Cage Bird Show, said her canaries' basic year-round diet consists of a canary seed mix, a pelleted food and song food several times a week as well as greens, broccoli, shredded carrot or peas about twice week. "A single bird would be offered the equivalent of a tablespoon of each type of food," she said. Her breeding birds receive additional nourishment.

### Cockatiels

Diane Grindol, a BIRD TALK columnist and author of *Cockatiels for Dummies*, feeds her six non-breeding cockatiels 3/4-cup Roudybush Daily Maintenance mini-size, 2 tablespoons of cockatiel seed mix with sunflower, plus parsley sprigs. "So that's about 3 tablespoons of formulated diet and 2 teaspoons seed per bird," she calculated.

### Conures

Cheryl Burns, president of the International Conure Association, who mainly keeps Aratinga conures, said you'll rarely see a fat conure because they're so busy. Her pairs have a constant supply of pellets, plus a mix of any one of the following food dishes (split between two birds), which she rotates in as needed: 8-ounces fresh chopped fruits and veggies; 6-ounces soaked seed; 8-ounces cubed birdie corn bread; 6-ounces frozen (thawed to serve) mixed veggies with pasta; 1/4 cup of premium seed mix with dried fruit for each bird (a little more for the larger birds).

Burns finds that her active conures self-regulate their diets quite well. Of the 8-ounce bowlful of pellets each day, "They rarely eat more than 1/4 to 1/2 of this bowl between two birds."

### Eclectus

Laurella Desborough has specialized in Eclectus parrots for 20 years, and she has their feeding down to the last morsel. No. 1, she says, they all need more greens and less pellets. She counts out the 10 to 12 natural ZuPreem pellets that each of her pairs receive daily mixed into a custom-made Volkman seed mix. She recommended feeding a maximum of 1 tablespoon of pellets to a pet Eclectus. Along with the dry food, which she feeds in the evening (1/4 cup in the summer; 1/3 cup in winter), Desborough offers about a 3/4 cup of fresh foods to each pair in the morning. This bowl might contain cooked legumes, whole-grains, cucumber, papaya and watermelon with seeds, various in-season berries, broccoli, endive, celery and more greens.

### Macaws

Liz Wilson's elderly blue-and-gold macaw, Sam, eats with her about three times a day. In the morning she receives 13 to 1/2 cup of pellets, which make up about 70 percent of Sam's diet. Vegetables, such as yams, winter squash and tomatoes, also accompany the morning pellets, making up another 20 percent of the diet. The other 10 goes toward nuts, seeds and treats, which Sam forages for during the day (about two to three nuts and 1 teaspoon of sunflower seeds).

#### Quakers

Ellen Krueger, editor of the Quaker Parakeet Society's (QPS) newsletter *The Sentinel*, gives her single quaker parakeet 2 tablespoons of pellets each day, but she doesn't finish it. She also offers a whole-grain "mush" and fresh veggies and fruits with the occasional treat of a sunflower seed or two. "Because she is so active, weaving and moving her toys around the cage, I'm not too concerned with her overeating," Krueger said.

Catherine Warren, another QPS member, feeds about 2 to 3 tablespoons of birdie bread (of which they eat about half or more, about 2 tablespoons of pellets, and an additional 2 tablespoons of veggies per bird per day. "Sometimes they will eat all of the pellets over a 24-hour period, but sometimes two tablespoons of pellets will last two days." Her birds have little interest in seeds, she added.