

BIRDS FEEDING AND MANAGEMENT PET CARE SHEET

Half of all diseases seen in birds are caused directly or indirectly by poor nutrition. Birds require protein in their diets (provided in the wild by insects) – this is not provided in all seed “parrot food”. Seed diets are also deficient in vitamin A and calcium and have a high fat content, which can cause heart disease through clogging of the arteries in older parrots. Parrots may be fed a complete pelleted diet gradually introduced over a few weeks, which will provide all the nutrients needed. If a complete diet is not fed there may be a risk of nutritional deficiency so it is wise to increase the amount of protein in a seed based diet by adding the following foods: cheese, milk, fish fingers, dried dog food, fruit, chickweed, bread, (toast and marmite). In addition a vitamin supplement e.g. Nutrobal (adult birds) or Arkvits (young birds) should be given.

Management

The best environment for birds is in a well constructed aviary – but it is essential to acclimatize indoor birds before putting them outside – warm nest boxes are required during the winter and heating is necessary for some species. Failing an aviary use the largest possible cage furnished with fruit tree branches of varying diameter (providing cover and something to chew) and a secluded “hide” area. Try to provide mental stimulation for your bird as many birds like company and may feather pluck if bored - food can be hidden (eg in paper bags or small boxes) or scattered in the cage to encourage the normal foraging behaviour of birds. Feed peanuts in their shells, pomegranates and corn on the cob. Remove toys at the end of the day and introduce new toys daily – after a cycle of about 2 weeks the original toy will be treated as new. Leave the radio or TV on while you are out, consider a companion bird, and allow plenty of exercise outside the cage. Bathing (or spraying daily) in body temperature water improves feather health. It is wise to worm birds kept in outdoor aviaries once a year. Clean your bird’s accommodation regularly using a disinfectant approved for use with birds

Nursing sick birds

It is essential to keep sick birds warm (30 deg C / 80 deg F) and quiet and to ensure that feeding is maintained – small birds eg finches will eat approximately 30% of their bodyweight daily and will die if starved for only a few hours. Birds vary in their fluid requirement but can quickly become dehydrated when sick – make yourself aware of your bird’s drinking habits so you will know if the intake is reduced or increased if illness strikes.

Wing clipping

The feathers from both wings are clipped – these will regrow when the bird next moults. It is important to restrict birds that have just been clipped as they may injure themselves if they attempt to fly – they will soon realize that flight is not possible and not attempt it.

