

# PFMA

## Nutrition for pet birds

### BIRDS CAN MAKE GREAT PETS WITH THE RIGHT CARE

Birds make wonderful pets and caring for them can be extremely rewarding. There are currently over half a million pet birds in the UK. In addition to being beautiful to look at, birds are inquisitive, intelligent and have a great capacity for learning. Most are highly sociable, eager to learn and can develop strong bonds with their owners. The enjoyment of caring for pet birds can last a lifetime, with larger birds sometimes living for 60 years or more. Smaller birds can live for around 15 years. Each type of bird has their own nutritional and housing requirements, Nicole Paley at the Pet Food Manufacturers' Association (PFMA), talks about the nutritional needs of pet birds to help retailers keep owners well informed.

### THE IMPORTANCE OF A BALANCED DIET FOR BIRDS

A balanced diet is very important for pet birds and it's nearly impossible to achieve this using human food or scraps. Bird food products are formulated, based on existing evidence, to meet the nutritional needs of those birds they are intended for. Owners are encouraged to follow the feeding instructions provided by the manufacturer, and supplement the diet with suitable leafy vegetables and fruits to provide stimulation and foraging opportunities.

Please note; some human foods may be unsuitable or harmful for birds, for example, birds cannot digest lactose, so milk, cheese and other dairy products might make them ill. Avocados, onions, chocolate, red meat and processed foods should not be fed.

### DO ALL PET BIRDS EAT THE SAME THING?

The range of birds is enormous and they may have different dietary requirements. Most companion birds (hard-bills) are seed eaters. These are Canaries, Budgies, Finches, Cockatiels etc. Soft-bills, which include Mynahs, Ornamental Starlings, Thrushes, Blackbirds and Pekin Robins, eat mainly non-seed diets including insects, fruit, flowers, leaves and nectar. PFMA members produce diets, supplements and treats for different species of birds making it easier to ensure a balanced diet.

### SELECTIVE FEEDERS

Birds are considered selective feeders. Given the chance to select from, they will choose their favourite food only, so providing a variety is important for a balanced diet.

### ARE SEED-BASED DIETS A VIABLE OPTION FOR PET BIRDS?

While seeds alone are a popular choice, they may not provide all the nutrition the pet your bird needs. Being selective feeders, it is important to adjust portion size to the bird's ideal body condition, follow the feeding guidelines on the pack and make sure the bird eats all the components of their food. A seed-based diet, if correctly blended by the manufacturer and fed according to the instructions, will provide the majority of the nutrients necessary. Remember, the blend needs to be suitable for the bird species, and fed along with fresh leafy greens.



### SUPPLEMENTING THE DIET

Seed-based tonic mixtures can supplement the diet and should be fed according to the manufacturer's guidelines. Cattlefish bones and millet sprays will provide additional calcium and carbohydrates respectively and will also provide entertainment for smaller species such as Budgerigars and Parakeets. There are many dietary supplements available on the market in both mineral and water-soluble forms. Please read the instructions, and consult the manufacturer or your vet if you have any questions.

### PELLET FEEDS

Pelleted feeds are usually complete diets, which means they have the necessary nutrients such as vitamins and minerals added to them. Pellets should also be chosen based on their suitability for the bird species kept, and fed according to manufacturer's guidelines. It is also possible to feed birds pellets and seed mixes, while additional vegetables, fruits and greens should also be provided to them daily.

### SEED STICKS AND TREATS

In the wild, birds eat millet sprays fresh from the branches, and millet sprays can offer both a source of entertainment and a healthy treat for pet birds within the home. Other treats, such as 'seed sticks' provide vitamins and minerals but also are a great source of activity for the birds. As with all additional sources of nutrition, care should be taken to avoid any overfeeding and treats should form no more than 10 percent of their calorie intake.

### USEFUL RESOURCES:

PFMA Bird Size-O-Meter – help owners keep their birds in shape [www.pfma.org.uk/bird-size-o-meter/](http://www.pfma.org.uk/bird-size-o-meter/) 

