



CHARISSA REXROAD D.V.M.

TERESA GREGORY D.V.M.

JERRY SUDDETH D.V.M.

YOUR BIRD'S QUALITY OF LIFE

Unlike dogs and cats, even the tamest cockatiel or Amazon is not a domestic animal. Since captivity is not the "normal" state of existence for your bird, it will find many situations stressful that may not seem to be a problem from our perspective, such as chronic boredom. Many of our larger parrots are reported to have the intelligence of a two or three year old child. They need challenging mental activity and change. Stress from boredom and other factors can lead to behavioral problems such as feather picking and screaming. There are many aspects to consider in keeping your bird happy and mentally healthy.

HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENT

Your bird's environment should be as rich as possible. The largest cage possible should be provided, but no cage is truly "big enough". Your bird should be out of the cage whenever you are there to provide supervision. It is extremely important that a bird should not be forced to undergo solitary confinement day after day. Birds that are subjected to this existence will become "cage bound" - becoming neurotic and terrified of change. Placing the cage near a window so the bird can see out and leaving the radio or television on while you are out will help. Placing a nontoxic tree or large potted plant near the cage so the bird can climb on it and chew will also be helpful.

TOYS

A variety of toys should be provided both inside and outside of the cage: visual toys with bright colors and interesting shapes, physical toys such as ladders and swings, and mental toys such as puzzles with treats. Don't get discouraged if your bird quickly chews up toys; it is an important part of play with birds. Be sure that the toy doesn't shatter into small sharp pieces which could injure your bird, and pick toys that are appropriate for your birds size. Avoid toys with sharp edges or metal hooks that are not sealed. There is no perfect toy, even the best ones can have a small potential to be harmful, so monitor your bird carefully when first introducing new toys to be sure your bird does not find a way to hurt itself with the toy. Check toys often for signs of wear that could result in making them harmful. Offer a few toys at a time and rotate them every week or two to provide variety and avoid clutter.

6321 WEST HIGHWAY 146
CRESTWOOD, KENTUCKY
40014

502-241-4117
FAX 502-241-9777

crestvet@bellsouth.net
www.crestwoodvethospital.com



Photo from <http://aviaries.babybirds.com/lakeviewparrots/logo%20lake%20view%20parrots.gif>

DIET

In the wild, most of a bird's waking time is occupied with the search for food. Their brains are adapted to perform this task. In captivity, many birds will continue to eat even if they are no longer hungry, resulting in obesity and medical problems such as arteriosclerosis and fatty liver syndrome. To avoid this, if you have a bird that is prone to being overweight, it is best to feed it two separate meals a day instead of leaving food out all the time.

Your bird needs both a nutritious and an interesting diet to stay healthy. 80% of the diet should consist of a good quality formulated pellet with the other 20% can be nutritious "people food." Seed is a very poor diet for your bird because it is deficient in vitamins, calcium, etc., and can have excessive fat and calories. Seed should only be used as a treat for training purposes.

Birds that have never been exposed to pellets and other foods may not initially recognize them as food. It will take time and patience to convert your bird to a better diet. The ideal situation is to wean a young bird on to a varied diet, including several types of pellets, so it will recognize them as edible. If you have an older bird on a seed diet, there are several methods that you can use to reeducate it about nutrition. Remember to never starve your bird to a pelleted diet. Some need time to recognize new things as food.

Initially, mix a small amount of the pelleted diet into the regular seed mix. The bird's usual response will be to throw most of the pellets onto the floor first, but the bird will become accustomed to seeing the pellets in association with the food, and may even get a taste of the pellets while trying to get rid of them. Watch closely to see if any pellets are being eaten; if so then gradually increase the amount of the pellets and decrease the amount of seed.

If the bird doesn't start eating the pellets after the first few weeks of mixing it with seed, remove the seed each morning and put a dish of pellets in the cage. It is more likely to eat the pellets when it is hungry if there is no other food around. Be sure to replace the seed and pellet mixture for an hour or so in the evening so the bird does not go hungry.

For birds that are very bonded with their owners, it may be possible to entice them to try new foods by allowing them to see that you are eating (or pretending to eat) and enjoy the new food item.

Table food can be introduced in a similar manner. The most nutritious foods include dark green and orange vegetables, such as carrots, winter squash, broccoli, green beans, and sweet potatoes. Small amounts of low fat dairy products, pastas, and fruit can be offered as a treat. Vegetables can be hung in the cage so that the bird has to work a little to get to them. All foods that are safe for humans are safe for birds except chocolate, products containing caffeine, avocado, and onion.

Larger parrots enjoy cracking walnuts, Brazil nuts, etc. and extracting the kernels. Smaller birds will enjoy it if you crack the nut for them and let them pick out the kernel. However, do not feed too many nuts for they are high in fat. Some birds, such as macaws, have a higher need for dietary fat and can have a few more than obesity prone birds such as Amazons.

When implementing any diet change, be sure to monitor your bird's weight carefully. Ideally, weigh it every few days on a gram scale. If that is not possible, you can feel the amount of muscle over the keel (breast bone). The bone should not feel overly prominent or sharp. If it appears that excessive weight loss is occurring, feed the bird more of its accustomed diet and proceed more slowly.

INTERACTION

Most psittacine birds are social creatures, adapted to life in a flock. As pets, their owners are their "flock". They require a lot of contact and attention to stay happy and mentally healthy. The bird's cage should be located in an area of the house where there is a lot of activity, and the bird should have plenty out of cage time to bond and socialize with the family.

Are you looking for more information? For your convenience, the following book is available at Crestwood Animal Hospital. It can also be purchased at most book stores including Amazon.com. It is relatively inexpensive and has very helpful information for bird owners.

***** *The Guide to the Well-Behaved Parrot* Author *Mattie Sue Athan***

Teresa Gregory, DVM