



Pellets are ultra-processed food

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Standard disclaimer: I've never advocated a 100% seed diet for birds. I do believe they can part of a healthy "real food" diet for birds that can contain vegetables, fruits, insects, nuts, and other wild foods.

Whether intentional marketing or not, the pet food industry has always used words like "kibble" for processed dog and cat food and "pellets" for processed bird food.

First off, let's look at one of the most comprehensive studies on processed food consumption from the British Medical Journal. This article defines what it calls "ultra-processed food" and documents the downsides.

Ultra-processed foods are industrial formulations made mostly or entirely from substances derived from foods and additives, with little, if any, intact food. [Editor note: Pellets are ground up ingredients and additives, which are then extruded into pellet form]

Participants in the highest quarter of ultra-processed food consumption had a 62% relatively higher hazard of all cause mortality compared with those in the lowest quarter. For each additional serving of ultra-processed food, all cause mortality increased by 18% [Editor note: Holy crap]

Prospective cohort studies in adults found a link between the consumption of ultra-processed foods and a higher hazard of developing cancer, irritable bowel syndrome, obesity, and hypertension.

[Association between consumption of ultra-processed foods and all cause mortality: SUN prospective cohort study—British Medical Journal—2019 May 29](#)

If you read the whole study, it just gets worse from there. The important takeaways here are:

- Processed food are a health disaster
- Bird pellets are ultra-processed food

I'll choose the following popular processed food product for medium-sized birds to use as an example.



— Ingredients

Ground corn, Soybean meal, Ground wheat, Wheat germ meal, Sugar, Vegetable oil (preserved with mixed tocopherols), Dicalcium phosphate, Calcium carbonate, Iodized salt, DL-Methionine, Choline chloride, Vitamins (Vitamin E supplement, Niacin supplement, d-Calcium pantothenate, Riboflavin supplement, Pyridoxine hydrochloride, Thiamine mononitrate, Vitamin A acetate, Vitamin D3 supplement, Menadione sodium bisulfite complex (source of Vitamin K activity), Vitamin B12 supplement, Folic acid, Biotin), L-Lysine monohydrochloride, Mixed tocopherols (preservative), Vegetable juice (color), Paprika (color), Carmine (color), L-ascrobyl-2-polyphosphate, Minerals (Manganese oxide, Zinc oxide, Copper sulfate, Calcium iodate, Sodium selenite), Annatto extract (color), Rosemary extract

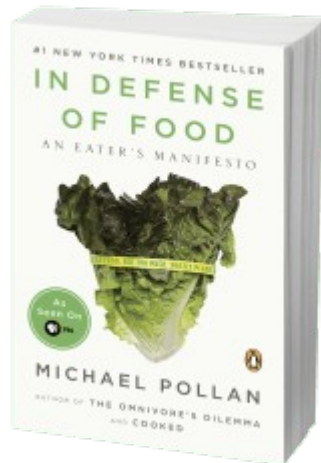
Let's look at the top ingredients: **Ground corn, Soybean meal, Ground wheat, Wheat germ meal, Sugar.** It does have fruit in it, but it's ground up so you get the sugar without the fiber to balance it. On top of that, it's loaded with artificial colors. It's breakfast cereal.

Take a box of any processed human food and look at the top ingredients and that's what they will look like. Sugar and processed grains (which are predominantly carbohydrates, also known as sugar).

For cats and dogs, diets have shifted away from kibble to wet foods as well as raw foods, but bird diets have not evolved in the same fashion.

Virtually no research has been done on the impact of feeding birds diets that are predominantly processed food (more on this in a future article) . Sure, [Count Chocula](#) is fortified with vitamins and minerals so we get “everything we need”, but is that a good diet?

For humans, there are excellent books you can read like “In Defense of Food” that describe the disastrous effect processed food has had on our health. This book is thoroughly researched and cited.



[Link to author's website.](#)

It's easy to be seduced by claims that a processed diet will have all the nutrients your bird needs, but what are the costs to their health? This is something I've explored in a number of the related articles listed below. More are planned.

Consider this food for thought. Processed food held a lot of promise for humans but the detrimental effects now seem to outweigh the benefits. Could the same be true for bird diets?

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