

# Commercial Bird Pellets Good Nutrition??



Finally, I have noticed an ever slowly but increasing amount of skepticism among my bird owning friends towards the many commercial bird foods available these days. Many of the manufactures of these pre-packaged and processed foods claim that their diets duplicate nature or even boast that they are an improvement over nature itself. PLEASE!!!

Is it really realistic to think that we finite humans could duplicate nature in its wholeness and complexity? Improve upon nature?? Are they serious??? How in the world could a dry, processed, fabricated diet ever match or exceed the outstanding quality that can be found in foods God produces in a natural foods diet?

With all the pre-packaged, prepared food choices now on the market, many bird owners have become somewhat dazed about the dos and don'ts of good avian nutrition. From the comments and emails I get, it is clear to see that confusion and frustration abound! While most feed products are touted to be "balanced" or "complete". (just like processed dog and cat food) the manufactures all say that their products are superior in quality. But, are they really?

For some reason, people think that just because a food product is advertised in a magazine or is on your favorite store's shelf that it is safe and healthy to feed your feathered companions. Unfortunately, this is far from the truth. If you haven't already done so, it is time you take a closer look at these feed product labels and make sure you can define each ingredient for the future welfare and love of your birds. I will warn you though; you may be very surprised and not very happy with what you find.

The way in which you feed your birds is of course a very personal choice. However, this choice should be based on information gathered from many sources and some research on your part. I know that you have heard from your bird's Breeder, your veterinarian and even your well meaning friends, as well as advertisements in avian publications that will all influence your decision. Just remember though, while you may receive advice on feeding from well-meaning individuals, you need to do your homework and research this advice before putting it into action.

Many bird owners have decided recently that they do not want to feed their birds a dry, fabricated diet (pellets), as it does not meet their standards as a quality or a "natural" diet. Some bird owners have never fed a fabricated/processed diet to their birds, but have always fed a whole foods diet that is fresh and varied in content. This natural diet usually consists of fresh sprouts and organically grown foods when they are available. Certified organically grown produce is usually your best option and can supply your bird(s) with the top quality nutrition they deserve. Why would anyone want it any other way?

Along with the invention of the "scientifically" formulated feeds ("meals in a bag") so in demand these days, more and more bird owners, with good intentions, are relying on pellets and manufactured handfeeding formulas. They have come to believe these to be the proper source of all nutrients and are so convenient. Sure, the manufacturers promote their products in a very convincing manner with the "nutritionally complete" written in bold print on the label and after all, a pellet diet is a neat, convenient

meal in a bag, sure to stay fresh for months while waiting for you to purchase it off the pet store or veterinary office shelf. And of course, they claim that this bag consists of wonderful ingredients that could not be found anywhere else on earth and includes everything your birds will ever require for health and a long life. Come on people! Really! Some of these meals in a bag are also very pretty in color, they are sure to brighten up any birdcage with their presence, even if they don't brighten your bird's appetites. Sheesh!

Do you ever stop to wonder what on earth made them so colorful? Could it be fresh fruit and vegetable juices? Or, maybe it's the chemical dyes so commonly used in these products to make them so eye appealing. Was that the color No. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 40, or all of the above? Shouldn't you also be questioning what magic trick was used to keep these foods fresh on the shelves for who knows how long?

Then finally, don't forget that they have to make sure those little shapes in the bag taste good. Is artificial flavoring used as well? Or perhaps just a scoop or two of sugar is added to each "healthy" batch of feed. Yes, that will make the product complete! almost... whoops, now don't forget to add all those synthetic nutrients and vitamins since any true nutrition that may have been in the ingredients in the first place has now been cooked away. Just a scoopful of pellets a day keeps the doctor away. Again, PLEASE! This is certainly not what I would put my faith in for a healthy avian species appropriate diet.

There are surely, many bird enthusiasts that use commercial diets and therefore, the manufacturing of such "food" is BIG business. But does their "guaranteed adequate nutritional balance" automatically come with the convenient pellet form? How many wild parrots you have seen on T.V. fly down to their local pet shop and buy pretty colored pellets for the week?

There are so many nutrients, live enzymes and natural medicinal components that have been discovered in fresh foods, so many more that are currently being investigated and some that we aren't even aware of yet. So to call a commercial feed complete and even close to nature is a huge exaggeration to say the least!

Here are just some of the risks involved in feeding your birds some of the commercial bird feeds available.

It is nearly impossible to provide your birds a healthy diet out of a bag, jar or canister. Extruded and heat-treated diets leave much to be desired. Most all of these feed products undergo extreme high heat in order to kill any bacteria that may be lurking in the ingredients used. The heat-treatment destroys the naturally occurring enzymes contained in the original food, which had they remained would have assisted in the digestion of those foods. Food enzymes are an important factor in your bird's diet and they come from fresh raw, uncooked foods.

Feeding a dry, fabricated, pellet diet is kind of like feeding a crushed vitamin and mineral supplement without the fresh foods required for digesting and assimilating it. No enzymes will lead to impaired digestion and in turn lead to a weakened immune system and disease.

Remember, that in order to maintain a shelf life, the majority of these diets contain potentially toxic chemical preservatives, i.e., BHT, BHA, and Ethoxyquin. BHT and BHA are used in rubber and petroleum products. Ethoxyquin is used as a pesticide for fruit. These synthetic antioxidants are used in human and animal foods to preserve their fat content. They help break the chain of "free radicals" and prevent microbiological spoilage and rancidity.

This one really cracked me up, one of the major brands BRAGS the following: "Extrusion cooking enhances carbohydrate bioavailability. More digestible than cold-pressed pelleted diets or seed mixtures, and offer maximum digestibility and nutrient absorption". This is nuts! Birds were not designed to eat cooked foods, ever seen a parrot roasting grain or frying a bug with some flowers? Cooking grains may enhance carbohydrate bioavailability for a human but not for a bird!

Have you looked at the ingredients used to make the pellets? Listed below are the ingredients of the most popular pellets on the market today. While you read through the ingredients, remember, these are not only cooked ingredients but ask yourself if these are things a wild parrot would seek out and eat in the jungle:

\*Ground Shelled Sunflower Seeds, \*Ground Hullless Barley, \*Ground Soybeans, \*Ground Shelled Peanuts, \*Ground Green Peas, \*Ground Lentils, \*Ground Yellow Corn, \*Ground Rice, \*Ground Toasted Oat Groats, Psyllium, \*Ground Alfalfa, Calcium Carbonate, Spirulina, Montmorillonite Clay, Ground Dried Sea Kelp, Vitamin E Supplement, Sea Salt, Vitamin A Supplement, Vitamin D3 Supplement, Niacin Supplement, Vitamin B12 Supplement, Riboflavin Supplement, d-Calcium Pantothenate, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, d-Biotin, Thiamine Mononitrate, Sodium Selenite. \*CERTIFIED ORGANIC INGREDIENT

Ground corn, soybean meal, cracked wheat, wheat germ meal, vegetable oil, sucrose, dicalcium phosphate, calcium carbonate, iodized salt, DL-methionine, choline chloride, ascorbic acid, natural mixed tocopherols, rosemary extract, citric acid, natural and artificial colors, artificial flavors, zinc oxide, copper sulfate, manganous oxide, calcium iodate, sodium selenite, vitamin A, vitamin E, vitamin D3, vitamin K, vitamin B12, thiamine, niacin, calcium pantothenate, pyridoxine hydrochloride, riboflavin, Ground Wheat, Peanut Meal, Soy Oil, Soy Meal, Hydrated Sodium Calcium Aluminosilicate, Yucca schidigera Extract, Salt, Calcium Carbonate, L-Lysine, DL-Methionine, Mixed Tocopherols, Rosemary Extract, Ascorbic Acid, Citric Acid, Lecithin, Silicon Dioxide (carrier for liquid antioxidants), Sodium Selenite (on Calcium Carbonate), Niacin, Alpha-Tocopherol Acetate (Source of Vitamin E), Biotin, Manganese Sulfate, Calcium Pantothenate, Zinc Oxide, Riboflavin, Pyridoxine Hydrochloride, Vit. A Acetate, Thiamine, Menadione Sodium Bisulfite Complex (Vit K), Cyanocobalamin (VitB12), Vit D3 Sup., Folic Acid, Ethylenediamine Dihydrochloride, Propionic Acid, Ammonium Hydroxide, Acetic Acid, Sorbic Acid, Tartaric Acid and natural apple flavoring.

Now looking at these ingredients, please consider these questions.

"Do YOU know if the feed package ingredients you are serving your birds lists chemicals?" (If not, it is time to read the label.)

"Do you know whether or not chemical preservatives were added to the ingredients BEFORE the manufacturer purchased them and created the final feed product?" (If the manufacturer didn't add the chemicals to the feed then they do not have to list them on the label.)

Were you aware that sugar is often added for palatability in the form of sucrose or corn syrup and artificial coloring to please YOUR eye? Did you realize that artificial colors are derived from coal tar dyes or petroleum. Both refined sugar and chemical dyes can cause short term as well as long term damage, by weakening your bird's immune systems and compromising their complete line of defense. For example, over the short term, sugar can cause illnesses, such as yeast (Candida) infections and long term has the potential to cause other health threatening diseases.

Since most of the ingredients in bird foods are actually foreign to them in the wild or even toxic to the body, your bird's body attempts to expel them through the process of detoxification and elimination in the liver and kidneys. Over the long term these nonnutritive ingredients and synthetic as well as chemical additives can cause enlargement of vital organs, hormonal dysfunction, immune system

disorders and degenerative diseases, thus a shorter lifespan.

Why take chances to begin with when much safer and more natural foods and diets are available. The important thing to do, is to look for a natural alternative rather than figure out what the acceptable chemical level might be.

Since all products are not created totally equally and there are different levels of quality, you are responsible to your bird and its health to take a careful look at processed packaging and question these products before you buy them. If you are interested in providing a preservative free, species specific diet to your birds, then check all labels of products before buy and not only define each ingredient for yourself but ask yourself if it something your parrot would find and eat in the wild.

This whole dilemma over bird diets began several years ago when exclusively dry seeds were compared to pellets. Why not compare a whole foods diet consisting of fresh fruits, vegetables, sprouts, flowers, and insects to seeds and/or pellets? Certainly the whole foods diet is superior!

After all is said and done, you, the bird owner must form your own opinion about what is best to feed your birds and have confidence in the choice of bird food you decide to feed.

I personally feel that the best diet in the world for birds is one that emulates their natural diet in the wild; I mean, doesn't it just make sense that these are the foods that God created for our birds to be biologically correct?. A natural home-prepared diet is really not difficult to do correctly and efficiently, and the health rewards for the birds are both great and obvious.

To achieve the best long-term health results, fresh natural foods should make up the majority of your bird's diet. For those who feel they must feed a commercial diet, I personally do not recommend that it make up any more than 10-20% of any bird's diet total diet and of course, find one that is freeze dried or dehydrated vs. extruded and has whole food ingredients, not just cooked cereal!

If one is going to supplement a bird's diet with pellets, then I recommend BirD-icious.

Let's get back to nature and offer the fresh foods that our parrots were intended to thrive on. By doing this, you can keep your parrot's immune systems strong and its body resistant to disease and infection. The basic truths of nutrition are simple, and easy to apply once the understanding is gained. A natural fresh diet has no nutritional competition and is part of what only nature can provide us. After all, God's gifts of nature are the ultimate gifts we can offer our birds.

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# Pelletized Grain V's a Well Balanced Seed Diet



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The paranoia/delusion of the Pelletized Grain Diet for cage birds began in the late 80's. Ironically the delusion about pelletized grain as a complete (?) cage bird diet is still eulogized by a few individuals even these days, close to the Millennium. These few individuals have managed to brain wash some pet bird owners to believe that pelletized grain are the only way to feed a nutritionally complete (?) diet to cage birds.

Unfortunately this controversial issue is the subject of many bird discussions at bird club meetings, at bird conventions and lately in the bird chat room over the internet. Let's further analyze in detail the facts about seed eating birds' nutrition.

Most of the following article was written in the late 80's and early 90's. Because many new developments have occurred in the last decade, which means the paranoia/delusion have become more intense, I am compelled to revise this article.

Bird fanciers, bird breeders and pet bird owners should know that birds are divided into three categories: seed eaters; insectivorous and carnivorous. (This is my definition. Perhaps other bird experts may use different analogy?) I didn't go to any college to learn about birds. This is what I learned from my own practical and personal experience which spanned over 60 years.

Seed eaters nourish themselves by cracking and shelling seed. It is their natural instinct. This is what they know how to do best and they are very happy cracking and shelling seed. (Seed eaters hate to crack pelletized grain. If birds are forced to eat pelletized grain, in many cases, they become frustrated, unhappy and most birds in frustration they pluck their own feathers and sometimes they eat their own feathers), while chickens, turkeys, ducks, etc., swallow the seed as well as pelletized grain whole.

If pet birds such as parrots, macaws, large and small hook bills, budgerigars, canaries, finches, or any other seed-eating cage birds would eat and swallow like chickens, or even turkeys, ducks, pigeons, doves or quails, perhaps properly made pelletized grain containing not only a variety of grain and seed, but also many other ingredients--nutrients consisting of a variety of nuts, fruits, vegetables, plus animal protein in the form of meat and fish, and of course the proper ratio of vitamins and minerals. Introducing the vitamins and minerals into the diet after the extruding process when everything is cooled off. Then the pelletized or extruded concoction could be used as part of the diet for cage birds. However the pelletized formula must be heavily supplemented with fresh fruits and fresh vegetables. Even a pelletized concoction as mentioned above should not be considered as a complete diet.

Remember, for many years pelletized grain has been widely used in the poultry industry, as well as in some animal feeds. Poultry

and some other animals in general are allowed to have a very short life span, i.e., from the day they hatch from the egg or the day they are born to the day they reach the consumer's table as food. This process for many species, either chicken or animal, takes less than a year, and therefore, pelletized grain used as their main diet may have some economical advantages?

Have you ever noticed over the years that some of the better chicken producers in their advertisements have compared the quality of their chicken meat to the quality of the food the chickens are fed? One specific sales pitch says more or less, "I FEED MY CHICKENS GRAIN AND NOT CHICKEN SCRATCH." Plus other sales pitches in regard to feeding the chicken whole grains. I made some inquiries as to how the poultry meat producers feed their chickens and I learned that the better chicken producers feed their chickens grain and not chicken scratch or pelletized grain feed.

Usually, in some cases many varieties of grain and other food products which are not suitable for human consumption are used to manufacture poultry and other animal feeds and in many cases these rejected raw materials are used to make pelletized diets. This perhaps is fine for poultry or animals such as pigs, goats, cows, etc., because once again, let me repeat, the life span of poultry and most other animals mentioned is not like that of cage birds who on the contrary can live several decades.

For example, cheap bread crumbs are made from leftover old bread. In fact I observed in some places in the world old bread being ground up with the plastic wrapping, as well as paper wrapping on it. I questioned that method of grinding and I asked the person, "What about the plastic and the paper?" He replied, "We grind it very fine; you won't see either the plastic or the paper." This very particular place was making cage birds' nestling food and hand feeding formula. I told the person at that time, "I don't think that I would have my birds eat that kind of stuff." Grains of all kinds which become buggy, moldy or spoiled get ground up and pelletized and in many cases are used for some animal feed?

Many times over the years I visited feed mills in many parts of the world. The primary reason for visiting these mills was to learn what they do; sort of snooping around. In many of the mills I visited they manufactured, among other things, well-known brand names of chicken feed and pelletized grain feed. Some of the ingredients that I saw in some of these mills that make pelletized grain feed were simply disgusting. In my opinion, some of those ingredients were only good for making garden compost. I would not want to go into detail as to what else I saw in some of these places because the details could