A balanced ration for Lovebirds

by Richard E. Baer, D.V.M.

Proper nutrition is the most important single factor in ensuring a long healthy life and complete physiological efficiency of any animal.

The cage bird is totally dependent upon the aviculturist to provide this proper nutrition in the form of a complete and balanced ration. The ration should supply the proper amounts of all the nutrients required for vigorous growth, normal development, reproduction and resistance to diseases.

Growth is not only manifested by an increase in size, but it also involves continuous multiplication of body cells and their differentiation to perform the different functions of the body organisms. Maximal size of the bird may be limited by heredity, but maximal development can be achieved only by continuous realization of the full growth potential by proper feeding throughout the growing period. Love birds raised in aviaries where selective breeding is practiced and where a high level of proper food elements is provided, show a marked increase in size when compared to the same species in the wild.

Failure to provide the proper food elements results in dietary stresses upon both the parents and young which may be reflected in poor egg hatchability, improper growth, and decreases resistance to disease and parasites.

Food elements are broken down into different classes which include carbohydrates, fats, proteins, vitamins and minerals.

Carbohydrates, in the forms of sugars and starches, and fats function mainly as sources of energy and heat.

Proteins, as the "body builders", form a large part of muscles, body organs, feathers, skin, beak, claws, and eggs. Pro-
Love Birds of the Finest Quality

All Species

and their mutation

Birds closed banded with official ALBS REGISTERED BANDS.
(African Love Bird Society)
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Most birds bred in individual pairs, large cages no less than 6 feet.
All birds matured and rested in 15 foot outside aviaries.

All birds raised and fed daily on the finest seed, fruit, greens, vetetables, and
vitamine based egg food

Only two clutches of young per pair are taken in a 12 month period.

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protein are composed of relatively simple units, the amino acids. Some amino acids (the “non-essential” amino acids) can be manufactured by the bird; others (the “essential” amino acids) can be obtained only from the diet.

Vitamins are required in very small amounts, but deficiencies in them can result in major disturbances in the health of the bird. Fortunately most practical diets contain adequate amounts of vitamins and they can be easily provided in readily available vitamin supplements.

Minerals have many functions and are as necessary to life as the other food elements.

Grit or gravel is needed by all seed eaters. It should not be considered a source of minerals, but rather the minerals should be provided separately.

Besides the food elements, birds require water which is usually obtained by drinking and eating succulent foods.

The basic ration of the love bird consists mainly of seeds, which should be supplemented with greens, fruit and additional mineral and protein supplements.

Seeds are sometimes classified as starch (carbohydrate) seeds or oil seeds. Starch seeds include the cereal or grass seeds (such as the millets, canary seed, oats, etc.) and buckwheat. They generally contain less protein than the oil seeds and are low in the essential amino acid “lysine”. Common millet is deficient in the amino acid “tryptophan” while canary seed is a fairly good source of this amino acid. On the other hand, canary seed is deficient in “methionine” while this amino acid is found more abundantly in millet; so, the proteins of millet and canary seed tend to supplement each other with respect to their amino acids.

The oil seeds (which include niger, sesame, safflower and sunflower) generally contain more protein (up to 20-25%) which is of a higher biological value and they provide somewhat more of the essential amino acid “lysine” than do the starch seeds. Niger is one of the most useful of the oil seeds.

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who eat apple. Their reluctance will soon be overcome by curiosity.

Dry whole wheat or cracked wheat bread is an excellent supplement to the ration. The sliced bread is cut into one inch squares and allowed to dry or it can be crumbled and mixed with grated carrot and vitamin concentrate. Hard boiled egg added to the latter makes a great nesting food. The average love bird will eat about one of the dried squares or its equivalent daily along with its other feed. Birds feeding young will consume double or more this amount together with greatly increased quantities of greens and apple.

Birds kept in flights may be provided the different seeds in separate dishes to cut down on waste. Birds kept in breeding cages must be fed a seed mixture as space limits the number of receptacles that can be accommodated. A minimum of five receptacles is necessary to properly feed birds kept in breeding cages, including the container for water. The other four receptacles are necessary for the small seed mixture, and sunflower seed fed apart, the container for greens, apple and dried bread, and the one for oyster shell.

Other seeds, both starch and oil, greens, vegetable, fruits, and supplements, may be fed the caged bird provided the ration is nutritionally sound and balanced and that it is accepted by the bird. Availability and cost play a large part in this selection and variation in the ration from time to time may make it more interesting to the bird.

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yellow shoulders and flights. No young with pied markings have been produced from such birds, but efforts continue and hopefully this variation will someday be established.

In the old books dealing with the Agapornis during the 1920's and 1930's, mention has been made of hybrids between many different species, such as Peach Face x Masked, or Fischer’s and even crosses between Madagascar x Black-cheeked, etc. These publications state the young so produced are fertile. In recent years we have known that hybrids within the eye-ring group are fertile, but crosses with Peach Face and others are thought to be mules. There needs to be a great deal of work done to document hybrids and their fertility. This information is very valuable to us for future work with our birds.

Possibly the African Love Bird Society could set up a committee to deal with this subject, and club members could participate. So much can be done, work that should have been done years ago. We have long needed an organization to help improve our Agaporns, by setting standards, and helping to educate through shows and publications.

If we do our job well, that is, keep good records, close band our birds, foster carefully controlled experiments, and cooperate with various avicultural organizations, we will have the African Love Birds with us for a long time. These delightful little birds will continue to add variety and color to grace our avariums. The future looks good.

African Love Birds

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