What's Missing in Your Bird's Diet?

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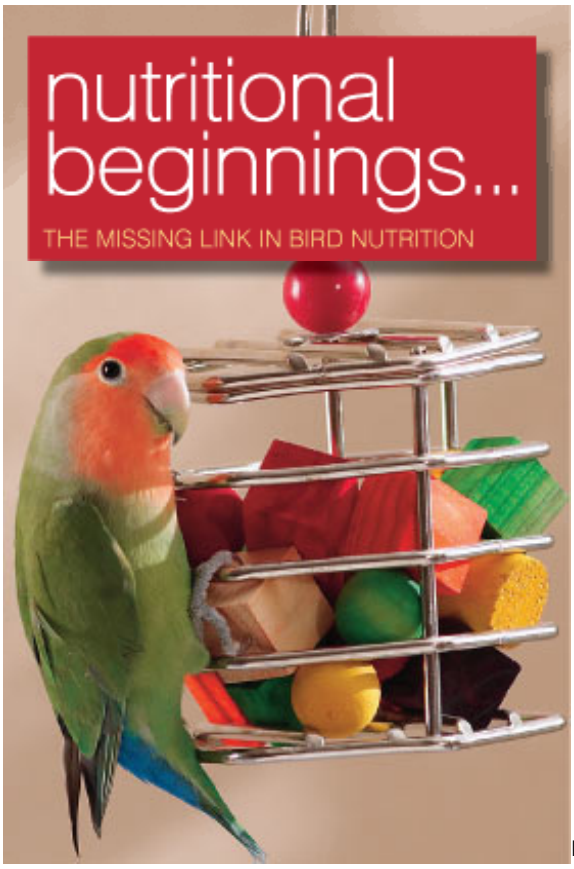

Good nutrition is the most important aspect of a bird's health, yet many bird owners miss the boat entirely on a crucial piece of avian nutrition – foraging.

Many experienced bird enthusiasts agree that the fledgling stage is a good time to start offering a bird solid food. At this stage, birds are capable of learning very quickly – and must do so to succeed in their native habitats. Fresh foods offered in the fledgling stage, though played with at first, are oftentimes eaten and, if so, likely to be accepted for the rest of a bird's life. It is important to introduce many new foods at this stage. This is also the time to introduce a formulated diet. Work with your veterinarian to select a couple different pelleted varieties that you can alternate for your bird's main source of nutrition.

nature's methods

However, good nutrition isn't as easy as placing pellets and fresh foods in the dish. Depending upon your bird's species, her native relatives spend anywhere from 1/4 to 3/4 of their time each day foraging for food. In nature, food isn't always easy to find. And, once found, may not be suitable to eat in its present state (i.e., shelled nut). Birds are very good at problem solving with their beaks and claws. Foraging behaviors – like digging, clawing, biting, tearing, shredding, and more – are the methods they use. If your pet dines on ready-to-eat foods out of a dish, she'll spend less than an hour each day on foraging behavior – not nearly enough to satisfy her instinctive nature. Many companion birds replace foraging behaviors with feather picking or excessive preening. Over time, your bird is likely to develop feather damage and other undesirable behaviors such as screaming or biting. If she does, she's probably crying out for help; she needs more challenge.

mealtime workout

Satisfy your bird's foraging needs by finding ways to make her work harder at mealtime – without changing the foods you offer:

- Get a manzanita perch, drill holes in it, and stuff some of your bird's pellets or a small piece of nut into the holes.
- Use nontoxic paper and "wrap" your bird's pellets, dried veggies or fruits, or small pieces of nuts the way a piece of candy is wrapped, twisted at both ends. This way your bird will have to chew through the paper to get the surprise.

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Some wrappers can be empty too.

- Wrap a few layers of paper around your pet's food dish, so mealtime involves scratching and pecking through the paper first. The first time or two, you may need to put a small hole in the paper, so that she sees the pellets underneath.
- Mix her pellets with inedible items like wooden toy pieces and cotton and leather strips. Place everything in a small box, so that your bird has to sift through the inedibles to find her food.
- Make her earn a treat by placing it within a challenging toy like Rings of Fortune, and see if she can solve the puzzle to earn her reward.

Feed foods in their natural state – small pieces of nut treats in the shell, carrot tops with the greens attached, peas in the pod, etc. When you let your bird do what comes naturally at mealtime, you'll enhance her daily life and help prevent compulsive or destructive behaviors in other areas of her life.

We Recommend

Rings of Fortune
makes treat time more challenging.

Treat Piñatas
offer hours of playful pecking fun.

Manzanita Perches
are an ideal foraging tool - drill holes into them and wedge in pellets, seeds, and other treats.

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