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CONVERTING YOUR BIRD TO A FORMULATED DIET

A pelleted (formulated) diet should make up approximately 80% of your bird's diet. Unfortunately this can be easier said than done if your bird is a seed junkie. The following guide gives some options to try. The key is perseverance. Birds can be stubborn but with time and patience a healthy, well balanced, formulated diet can be achieved.

Whichever method you use it is very important that your bird continues to eat. Monitor your bird's droppings during the diet change – they may change colour but the volume should not change. Also monitor your bird's weight – ideally using scales that weigh to the gram. If your bird is losing weight then slow down the diet conversion. Never starve a bird – if the bird will not eat the pelleted diet or if it loses weight then immediately offer the original diet.

There are several formulated diets to choose from and it may be helpful to try more than one to see which your bird prefers. Recommended brands include Harrisons, Kaytee and Nutriberries.

Gradual introduction

- 10% of the new food is added to the old food each day. The new food can be mixed in or added as a layer over the top of the old food, which the bird has to forage through to get to the original diet.
- So day 1 is 90% old diet, 10% new diet. Day 2 is 80% old diet, 20% new diet and so on.
- Some birds need a more gradual introduction so try reducing to just 5% of the new diet.

Substitution

- Offer your bird the usual diet in the morning, but replace with the pelleted food an hour before bedtime.
- Birds naturally eat more before nightfall so this method takes advantage of that.
- Alternatively try feeding the pellets first thing in the morning when your bird is hungriest.
- Providing the bird is eating the new food, gradually increase the amount of time the new food is fed (by approximately 15minutes each day).
- Monitor droppings and bodyweight to ensure your bird is eating enough of the new food.

Flock foraging

- This technique works well for species that feed on the ground such as budgies and cockatiels.
- First thing in the morning place a mirror or piece of white paper on the floor of the cage and scatter with the pelleted diet. The diet will be easy to see on the white background. If using a mirror the bird may be tricked into thinking another flock member is eating the pellets which can encourage them.

- With tame birds it can be helpful to pretend to eat the diet yourself as birds are very social and forage in groups. You can make a loose fist with your hand and using your thumb and forefinger 'peck' at the pellets on the paper to encourage your bird to do the same.

More tips for larger parrots

- Some birds prefer to eat from the highest food bowl in the cage so try placing the pellets in a high up bowl
- Pretend to be eating the pellets as part of your meal and share some with your bird
- Soaking in fruit juice can make the pellets more tempting
- Try different sized pellets to see which your bird prefers

More tips are available on the Harrisons website (www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com).

Whichever method you use be persistent and be consistent. With time and patience you will be successful.