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## **FEEDING PIGEONS (and DOVES)**

### ***General Information***

Our knowledge of bird nutrition is constantly evolving. This is due to heightened awareness of the importance of nutrition plus increased research. As with all other animals, birds need a proper balance of carbohydrates, proteins, fat, vitamins, minerals and water. Different species of birds often require different foods.



### ***Should I be concerned about what my pigeon eats?***

Nutrition is commonly neglected with pet birds. Too often owners assume they are feeding a proper diet to their pigeon when in fact they are not. This is a common reason for many health problems. It is important to continually strive to improve your bird's diet. This involves constantly educating yourself and a certain degree of **common sense**. It is not sufficient to feed a Pigeon just to maintain life; instead, your goal should be to help it thrive and flourish. Your bird's health depends on how well it is fed.

- Discuss nutrition with your veterinarian!

### ***What does my pigeon naturally eat?***

Pigeons eat a variety of grains, seeds, greens, berries, fruits, and will occasionally eat insects, snails and earthworms in the wild. A well balanced diet must be maintained at all times.

### ***What should I feed my pigeon ?***

#### ***Seeds***

Formulated Pigeon seed diets are available. A commercial diet contains mixed seeds and grains, vegetables and some are enriched with brewer's yeast plus vitamins and minerals. Different diet formulations exist for performance birds, resting birds and breeding birds. Pigeons are susceptible to calcium deficiency from eating only seeds.

- Seeds should only be 50% of a balanced diet, never the entire diet.

### ***Pelleted Diets***



Pellets have been developed to meet all your bird's nutritional needs. Hand raised babies are the easiest to start on a pelleted diet. ***Pellets are the ideal diet***, therefore you are encouraged to slowly wean *seed eating* birds onto a pelleted diet. Pellets should ideally represent approximately 50% of a pigeon's diet. There are many good brands of pelleted foods in the market place.

- Consult your veterinarian if encountering any problems with diet or the health of the bird.

### ***Fruits and Vegetables***

Finely chopped vegetables and greens plus some fruit should be offered as part of the daily diet. Pale vegetables, with a high water composition (i.e. iceberg or head lettuce, celery) offer very little nutritional value. **Avocado is reported to be potentially toxic.**

Fruits and vegetables must be washed thoroughly to remove chemicals. Cut them into manageable pieces depending on the size of the bird. It is not necessary to take the skin off. Offer fruits and vegetables in a separate dish. If your bird appears to develop a particular fancy for one food item, stop feeding it temporarily to promote the eating of other foods.

- Treat your bird like a small child; offer a small piece of a variety of food items daily and never stop trying.

### ***Water***

Fresh clean water must be available at all times. Depending on the quality of your tap water, consider the use of bottled water. Dishes must be cleaned thoroughly every day with soap and water.

### ***What about people food?***

As a general rule any wholesome, nutritious food that you and your family eat, your bird can eat. Follow the general guidelines discussed above and use your *common sense*. Some birds even enjoy a small amount of lean cooked meat, fish, egg or cheese occasionally. Dairy products should be consumed in moderation. It is common sense that *junk food*, chocolate, products containing caffeine and alcoholic beverages be avoided.

### ***Will my bird have any different needs throughout its life?***

Birds that are extremely young, stressed, injured, laying eggs or raising young may have certain special requirements. There are specially formulated pelleted foods available for birds with specific nutritional requirements. Consult your veterinarian regarding these situations.

### ***Do I need to use a vitamin-mineral mixture?***

Does your bird need extra vitamins, minerals or amino-acids? The powdered supplements are often regarded as more stable such as Nekton® (by Nekton-Produkte), Quiko® or Prime® (by Hagen). Mix

these products in water or preferably apply directly onto moist food. Placing these powders on seeds or dried foods is of little value since it will ultimately end up on the bottom of the food dish and not in the bird. One opinion suggests that a bird eating 50% of its diet in the form of pelleted food may not need supplements. Specific vitamins or minerals may be more important at various times during a bird's life (e.g. egg laying - requires calcium supplementation). Calcium supplements are available if your pigeon is determined to be deficient.

- Your veterinarian can help you assess your bird's diet and its particular needs.

### *Does my bird need gravel or grit?*

Controversy exists over the need for gravel. It was believed that grit was necessary for the mechanical breakdown of food in the gizzard as an aid to digestion. Birds seem to do fine without grit. Most pigeons are offered a small amount of grit, crushed eggshell or oyster shell. Some birds will in fact have problems if grit is over eaten.

### *Tips*

- Always monitor the amount of food eaten every day by each bird.
- Offer fresh water every day.
- Offer a variety of fresh foods every day.
- Offer fresh fruits and vegetables every day
- Clean all food and water dishes daily.
- **No** to a food item one day does not mean **no forever** - KEEP TRYING!

**Although not a big part of the diet, some other suggested food items include:**

apple  
apricots  
asparagus  
banana  
beans (cooked)  
• such as:  
    chic peas  
    kidney  
    lentils  
    lima  
    mung  
    navy  
    soy  
beet  
blueberry  
broccoli  
brussel sprouts  
cabbage  
carrot  
carrot tops  
cantaloupe  
cherries (not the pit)  
Chinese vegetables (bok  
choy)

coconut  
corn  
cucumber  
dandelion leaves  
date  
endive  
fig  
grapes  
grapefruit  
kale  
kiwi  
melons  
mango  
nectarines  
orange  
papaya  
parsnip  
peaches  
pear  
peas  
peppers (red/green & hot)  
pineapple  
plum  
pomegranate



potato  
pumpkin  
rappini  
raspberry  
rice (brown)  
romaine lettuce  
spinach  
sprouted seeds  
squash  
strawberry  
sweet potato  
tomato  
zucchini