

## 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 Harrison's, Kaytee and Nutriberries. Harrison's bird bread can be used to assist conversion – this can be baked with the familiar seed mixed in, then try mixing in fine Harrison's pellets. The bird bread should help the bird get the 'taste' for Harrison's.

More tips and videos are available on the **Zupreme website** ([www.zupreem.com/avian-conversion](http://www.zupreem.com/avian-conversion)) and the **Harrisons website** ([www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com](http://www.harrisonsbirdfoods.com)). 3 methods for diet conversion are listed below.

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

### **THE STAGED CONVERSION – A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE**

This is widely considered to be the most effective method for the most stubborn birds. Follow each step and use the weight table to record your bird's weight each morning before feeding for the safest and most effective method.

- 1) Remove all seed from their existing food bowl and replace this with their new formulated pellet diet
- 2) Buy a new, different bowl and put this in a new, different place in their cage – this bowl will contain their seed ration each day
- 3) Each day put **1 heaped teaspoon of seed** into the new seed bowl. Each day empty the bowl and give a fresh heaped teaspoon

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- 4) After the first week, reduce the seed ration in the bowl to a **rounded teaspoon** once a day
- 5) After the second week, reduce the seed ration to a **level teaspoon** once a day
- 6) After the third week, reduce the seed ration to **half a teaspoon** once a day
- 7) After the fourth week you can **stop providing seed** as routine daily diet

#### **IMPORTANT POINTS:**

- **DO PERSEVERE!**
- DO provide normal fresh vegetables and fruits during conversion
- **DO monitor your bird's weight daily** and record this in the table attached – if your bird **loses more than 10% of their body weight** during the conversion then you can slow the current stage down by a week before continuing the seed reduction
- DO use seeds as treats or rewards for training or foraging
- **DO NOT MIX seed and pellets** – they will just pick out all of the seeds!!

#### **OTHER OPTIONS SUITABLE FOR YOUNG AND VERY INQUISITIVE BIRDS, LARGE BIRDS (>150G) OR LARGE GROUPS:**

##### **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.
- 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.
- Small piles of up to 3 different pellets can be offered, to see which your bird prefers.

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- 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.
- Once you determine which of the pellets your bird prefers, these can be offered in a food bowl in the cage. The original diet can be withdrawn once your bird is eating the pellets but monitor their weight to ensure adequate consumption.

#### **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

