

Seed Sprouting

For a long time aviculturalists have used sprouted seed to supplement the diet of breeding birds. The benefits of sprouted seed cannot be disputed, however, a perfect technique is necessary to eliminate the potential problems associated with the sprouting process.

The Benefits

Sprouted seed provides the feeding adult with all the benefits of a seed diet together with a palatable source of easily digested energy and protein for the growing nestling. For this reason the feeding process is less strenuous on the breeding pair and there is less likelihood of the "poor parent syndrome". Babies fed a mixed sprouted seed diet readily accept a varied balanced diet as fledglings. Sprouted seed is not necessary outside the breeding season.

The Equipment

Glass and stainless steel is preferred to plastic for the soaking and sprouting containers. The porous nature of plastic prevents the sterilisation of a container contaminated by bacteria or other disease forming germs. Glass and stainless steel are easily sterilised in boiling water or with appropriate disinfectants. Plastic can be used successfully until infected, however thereafter it will be impossible to control sprouting related diseases in the aviary.

The Seed

The seed, above all else, is the most important part of the sprouting process. The seed type, quality and cleanliness are equally important.

Seed Type

The seed type used depends primarily on the bird species involved. Small birds may eat the sprout but not the kernel of large seeds and thereby miss out on the full benefits of the sprouting process. The larger birds can be given both the larger and smaller seeds. A variety of seed types is recommended so that the nestlings will accept a varied diet as fledglings and adults. The main seeds used for sprouting are the "oil" seeds (high energy and high protein) although often the "starch" seeds (high energy low protein) are best given before hatching and when the young are fully feathered. The high energy and high protein seeds such as sunflower, rape, lettuce, and the legumes (i.e. tic beans etc.) are easy to sprout and highly palatable. The "starch" seeds such as the millets, canary, oats, wheat and milo should be given for variety and for the correct protein balance. Some seeds such as niger seed are almost impossible to sprout without special laboratory techniques.

Seed Quality

There is no nutritional value in a seed (except niger) which does not readily sprout. An 80% and above sprouting rate reflects a seed of good quality.

Seed Cleanliness

Most seed merchants realise the value of clean seed for the prevention of disease. Dusty and unclean seed is more likely to be contaminated with bacteria and fungus



than a seed that has been cleaned.

Seed grown by irrigation is sometimes contaminated by fungus. Fungus infections are a common cause of illness and breeding failure. Sunflower, safflower, the millets and corn are the grains most commonly affected. Any suspect grains should be cultured and titrated in order to detect the levels of contamination with fungus and bacteria or be left in direct sunlight for several hours before being used for sprouting.

The Process

The correct sprouting process must be used in order to minimise the potential problems associated with the technique. The water used for soaking seed should not come via a hose pipe or other plastic pipe. These can harbour bacteria. Distilled water (boiled and allowed to cool) is the ideal.

1. Soak seed for 12 hours in a sterilised container (preferably glass or stainless steel) using clean seed.
2. After 12 hours strain seed and wash repeatedly until the water is clean. Abort the process if the seed has an offensive odour at this time. The seed should have a sweet smell.
3. After the cleansing and straining, leave strained seed in a warm place repeating the above process at least twice daily.
4. On the third day (depending on the temperature) the seed should be sprouted enough to feed to the birds.
5. The sprouted seed is then rinsed clean and then soaked in Aviclen (made by Vetafarm) diluted 1:1000, for 10 minutes before the final rinse. Aviclen may be safely used in the water during the complete process whereas a bleach can only be used for the final rinse. Aviclen is recommended in all stages with the sprouting of suspect or untested seed. The unused sprouted seed should be discarded after 12 hours.

Summary

The breeding performance of an aviary is improved with the proper use of sprouts. Seed cleanliness and quality together with good hygiene and Aviclen, guarantees the successful use of sprouts.



How to convert your Bird to Pellets

Parrots are creatures of habit and do not take to new foods very easily. You must enter a battle of wits with you birds until they accept the pellets as food. Parrots will reject pellets, not because they do not like them but simply because they do not recognise them as food.

Some Simple Strategies

1. Mix a handful of pellets and a handful of seed together in a container. Add enough hot water to make the mix sticky. Mould the mix into a rissole shape and press firmly. Place the freshly made "rissole" in the bird's normal feeding container. The birds will initially pick through the rissole looking for seed. Repeat the process daily while slowly reducing the amount of seed and increasing the portion of pellets.
2. A similar process can be used with soaked seed, which is especially useful when the hen is rearing chicks, as she will tend to take food very easily.
3. A blend of dry seed and pellets can be used in the normal dish. This is a slower method and acceptance will vary between individual birds.
4. The least preferred method is by "cold turkey" where the seed is removed and replaced by pellets. In this instance the birds should have access to fruit and vegetables at all times so they have some form of nutrition while learning what pellets are.
5. Birds that are hand tame can be offered pellets smeared with fruit or peanut butter from your hand until they get used to the taste. Although the conversion process may be a little tedious, once it is done the advantages of pellet feeding are obvious. Chicks that have been reared by adults on pellets will automatically go to the pellets when they are weaned. Birds that have been reared on the pellets will convert back to seed easily, especially if they have had access to some soaked seeds and seeds in fruit and vegetables.

Pellet Eating Habits

Interestingly, parrots do not swallow the pellets in pieces! They tend to chew them first into a fine powder before they eat them. It is important that you do not throw out the powder in the bowls (provided it is not spoilt) because the birds will eat this in time. If the feed bowls are kept clean and dry you will find the birds will not waste any pellets.

Other things you should feed your Bird

Birds like variety just as people do. It is always worthwhile feeding your bird fruits, vegetables, cooked meats, nuts, and bread etc. Birds can actually eat anything that we as humans eat. You will not need to feed these extras excessively but you will find that birds appreciate the changing diet. Remember to be careful to remove these foods before they spoil and always feed the "extras" in a separate dish to the one used for pellets. Obviously fresh water should be available at all times for all birds. When feeding your birds pellets, they will consume more water than when eating seed. Be sure your water dishes and supply are adequate.

Vetafarm Breeder Pellets

Vetafarm Breeder Pellets incorporate the latest information and techniques for the feeding of your parrots. Veterinarians have long recognised that seed diets are deficient in many nutrients essential for the long life of the birds.

Supplementation goes some way toward addressing these deficiencies but a better approach is to continually feed the bird a balanced diet. Vetafarm Breeder Pellets offer your birds the best nutrition available in a convenient pellet form. You will find that the time saved by feeding Breeder Pellets (easier to feed, no messy hulls to remove) is enough to warrant their use before considering the improved nutrition for your birds.

When you are feeding your birds, you look for a food that will promote good health, feather lustre and improved nutrition, and that is precisely what happens when Vetafarm Breeder Pellets are fed as your bird's main source of nutrition.

**Further information
on diet, hygiene,
worming, vitamins,
bird stress, licensing,
Avian Vets and much
more is available from
the team at
Kellyville Pets.**



At Kellyville Pets, we encourage responsible pet ownership.

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