

An Evaluation of Three Diet Conversion Methods in Psittacine Birds Converting from Seed-Based Diets to Pelleted Diets

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Abstract: The nutritional deficiencies of popular seed-based diets for captive psittacines have been linked to physical and psychological disease conditions in these species. However, bird owners often reject transitioning their pets to nutritionally complete pelleted diets due to concerns over the difficulty of diet conversion. To assess dietary conversion of psittacines from seed-based to pelleted diets, avian veterinarians presented 3 diet conversion methods to owners with birds of varying ages and species. The owners implemented their chosen conversion method at home and then received a survey when they successfully completed diet conversion or abandoned their attempt. “Birdies Choice” was a reward-based method in which birds were offered 3 different pelleted diets on a tabletop. If there was a positive interaction and the bird ate one or more of the diets, the bird was rewarded. The preferred pellet was then gradually transitioned into their food dishes. In the “Slow and Steady” method, pellets were alternated with familiar food at varying intervals to increase the birds' exposure to the pellets. The “Tough Love” method maximized exposure to new pellets by introducing a small portion of familiar food for a limited time, along with multiple dishes of new pellets. Survey results showed 97.5% of birds converted regardless of method, with 57.5% converting within the first 7 days. When conversion times were evaluated based on life stage (juvenile, adult, and geriatric), sex, or bird family (Psittacidae, Cacatuidae, and Psittaculidae), there were no significant differences noted between groups. The only variable significantly affecting time to conversion was method used, with “Tough Love” converting birds faster than the other methods. Ultimately, all 3 methods of dietary conversion were successful with the majority of birds during the first month of implementation. These results provide evidence-based information to owners and veterinarians to facilitate pellet conversion attempts for psittacines.