



A Happy Macaw Diet

E-book on the Feathered Family: All about Macaws Diet

<http://www.MacawSecrets.com>

© March 2004.



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
A Healthy Macaw Diet	4
Introducing New Foods	5
Seeds	7
Fresh Food and Supplements	7
Vegetables	7
Fruits	8
Sprouted Seeds	8
Ensure Quality Proteins – Up to 20%	9
Increase Vitamin A by 30%	9
Get your pet veggies and fruits by about 15-20%	10
Smooth volt face to Pellets for Picky Macaws	11
Schedule for the Transition	13
Kitchen Counter	13
Recommended Foods	15
Food Preparation Tips	18
Wash your hands:	18
Sanitize cutting surfaces and utensils:	18
Wash Food Thoroughly:	18
Cook meat thoroughly:	19
Word of Caution!	19
Acknowledgements	21



Introduction

The health and vitality of your Macaw depends entirely on the right kind of diet. The perfect diet not only means the right amount but also the right combination of the essential nutrients required by your Macaw. We need to be even more careful about the Macaw diet since we have removed them from their natural habitat, from the lap of nature. Macaws in the wild are used to hunt for their own survival just like the other species of the animal and bird kingdoms. Their natural instincts make them choose the right nutrients in the wild. When we take up their responsibility, we need to provide them with the complete quota of nutrients required by them.

Despite all the information acquired from incredible scientific techniques, some natural systems continue to baffle us. Macaw diet is a case in point. Very little information is available regarding the right avian diet. However, if you think sunflower seeds is the be-all and end-all to a Macaw diet, it's time to sit up and learn much more than you ever thought existed. This is a comprehensive guide to all the recommended proteins, fruits, and medicinal properties of certain Macaw foods! Understanding which food is right for your Macaw is as interesting and difficult as it is for that of your own child. Veterans believe, it is easier to decide on a child's likes and dislikes than it is for Macaws!



A Healthy Macaw Diet

Meals complete with the right amounts of nutrients define a balanced diet. A healthy diet should contain food from all groups - proteins, carbohydrates, vitamins and minerals. Always remember, variety is the spice of life. The more varied food you give your Macaw, the less trouble it will give you at meal times.

Macaw enthusiasts agree that a low-fat diet with balanced nutrient supplements is a definitely nourishing diet for them. However, a balanced diet only twice a week is ideal. Overdoing it or not doing it at all can both be fatal. A vitamin A veggies meal one day alternating with high protein mashes the next is one of the best ways of maintaining a healthy diet for your Macaw. Besides providing the right nutrients, this process has another purpose. Your Macaw will not be able to reject the food blaming it on monotony.

Mother Nature has an abundance of greens at her disposal to feed her colorful creations. A Macaw in the wild feeds on nourishing green plants, leaves, buds, springs, shoots, blossoms, and stems. Other favorites include nuts, seeds, fruits and berries. Majority of the diet consists of fibrous green foods. Proteins from vegetable stuff and fats are not enough to enrich its diet. As a caring Macaw owner, you must look into the greens included in the diet. That is the key to keep your Macaw healthy. Owing to popular beliefs, we focus more on grains and seeds, overlooking the importance of greens in its diet. As an educated Macaw lover, be sure to provide one or two greens in your Macaw diet every day.

Would you give stale, colorless food to your child? Macaws are like children. Give them fresh food to have healthy Macaws at home. Fresh food, whether it is fruits, greens or seeds, nourish a Macaw much more, even if they are raw and uncooked. Nibble the food yourself to test the crispness before you give it to your



Macaw. Also give once-over items to them for cleanliness. Sealed and refrigerated food remain fresh longer. It's important to know and remember that humans and Macaws are quite similar when it comes to matters of the taste bud. Like humans, it is easier to train Macaws to try new food when they are young and more flexible. Change the color, size and texture of the food often to see your Macaw smack its lips...oops, I mean beak!

Introducing New Foods

Imagine this. Infused with total thrill and excitement, you decide to try new food with your Macaw. The first attempt fails. You think it's natural. The second one fails too. So do all the following attempts. You realize your Macaw is one choosy and stubborn bird. It has no heart for your endeavours. What do you do? Try feeding your Macaw with new food by offering it in the morning or at late evening (when they are usually so hungry that they will eat anything!). The following are some interesting ideas which you may employ to make your Macaw try new and unfamiliar food:

1. **Start Young:** It is always wiser to "catch them young". Young Macaws are more flexible to change, while older ones get stubborn. Introduce your Macaw to new food when they are young, adventurous about life and obedient.
2. **Familiar Settings:** Just like soldiers are trained to fight on familiar grounds first, similarly introduce new food to your Macaw with other familiar delicacies. This will help your pet to try it sooner than without anything known and tested.
3. **Tantalizing Treats:** Mix treats and new food in a container. The idea is to come across the new food naturally with the treat. Sunflower seeds are absolute delights. Mix new food with them and watch your bird nibble the new food with the seeds.



4. **Morning is the Best Time:** An old Indian saying has it: hunger will make a tiger chew grass. Try the early hours of the day. With an empty stomach, a Macaw should be ready to eat anything. Try new food in the mornings. It should be a success.
5. **Respect Their Preferences:** In order to give new food, don't force your bird. Like human beings, they too have their preferences. Some like to chew raw vegetables, some like hot food, while there are some who want their food cold. Respect these choices.
6. **Disguise the Foods:** Macaws, like human beings, are slaves of habit. Their bodies get used to specific timings. So, when it's food-time, new food can be rejected. However, if you introduce new food some other time, say, by fastening it to the cage, your bird's curiosity may be intrigued. It may start nibbling at it and, you never know, may begin to like it too!
7. **Maize on the Cob:** You will be surprised how many birds like to gnaw on it!
8. **Paint It Orange:** Macaws are bundles of nature's colors. They bring color to every owner's life. So, give them brightly colored fruits and vegetables. They may be cooked or raw. Chop them into biteable pieces and watch them devour these delights.
9. **Temptation Tricks:** Seeing is believing. After all attempts have failed, try and convince your Macaw that the new food is phenomenally delicious by biting into it yourself. In more cases than not, your Macaw will be interested to try it after it notices you enjoying the fruit or vegetable.
10. **Fresh Sprouts:** Freshly budded seeds are a rich source of nutrition and nourishment. Before you begin with greens, give them seeds to make the transition slow but steady.
11. **No Starving:** Starving a Macaw for not trying new food is akin to killing it. It can develop behavioral problems due to this form of atrocity. Don't



starve your Macaw. Think innovatively to introduce variety to your pet.

Seeds

A completely seed-based diet is best avoided. This is because of the following reasons. They do not provide complete nutrition. Secondly, seeds are full of fat. Such fatty foods are unhealthy and harmful for Macaws. Such a seed-only meal should be the last choice when no other option is available. In the Macaw world, seeds are to them what chips and coke are to us. It is junk food for Macaws. Birds love them as much as we love chips. The greater threat is the long-lasting one. Once hooked to seeds, it is darn difficult to make them try new food. For most Macaws, kernels should only cover 10 percent of their regular diet. Even Macaws are brand conscious. Some Macaws select their favorite seed from a given seed mix and reject the rest. This lowers the nutritional value of their diet even more. Cockatiels and some Macaws are known as seedeaters and can tolerate a higher percentage in their diet. This does not mean that it is safe for them to take only seeds. A 25% concentration of seeds in the regular diet is harmless. But not more than that.

Fresh Food and Supplements

Most pet Macaws love their meals, provided they are the right mix of a variety of nourishing and freshly prepared foods, pellets and a small proportion of seeds. Remove the containers from the cages a few hours after meals as the food is quickly eaten and used up.

Vegetables

Fresh vegetables are an important part of your Macaw's diet. Different vegetables provide different nutrients and a healthy mix of veggies ensures a good diet. Introduce dark yellow and leafy green vegetables like celery and lettuce that are high in yarn and water but are not very nourishing. You can cook



the vegetables or offer them raw, whole or chopped, to your Macaws. As the owner you should be knowing which form your pet is comfortable with. A better way of tempting the Macaws to try new vegetables is to swing them from side-to-side or clip them on to the cage. If your Macaw is one of the larger and majestic varieties, you can offer chunky pieces that it will be able to crush with its feet at its own convenience. Whatever be the form of food, your aim is to get your bird to eat as many varieties of vegetables as possible. Again, use tricks and not force to make your bird eat.

Fruits

Try introducing your bird to a wide variety of fruits. Thankfully, birds love fruits. So, try to limit them to a small proportion of the normal diet, lest they exceed it. There is one golden rule about fruits. The more deeply colored the fruits, the more nutritionally rich they are. Give various tropical fruits that are a part of the Macaw's natural diet. A word of caution: depths or apple seeds can be noxious.

Sprouted Seeds

Supplementing the vegetable diet with sprouted seeds is an excellent way of adding nutritional value to your bird's diet. Since most birds love fresh sprouts, they are a good way of initiating your Macaw into the green diet! Newly budded seeds are replete with vitamins and natural resources, as well as enzymes and antioxidants that make them perfect constituents of a healthy Macaw diet.



Ensure Quality Proteins – Up to 20%



The building blocks of proteins are amino acids. It is the perfect combination and balance of amino acids that make proteins so important in providing nutrition. Now you know why all proteins do not provide adequate nutrition despite the amino acids. Small doses of protein can be supplemented by rice, beans and tofu. You can also test with:

- 1 Commercially produced mealworms or insect larvae. This is an excellent source of proteins for birds.
- 2 Detonated or pelleted diets explicitly created for Macaws.

Increase Vitamin A by 30%

Vitamin A is an essential nutrient-constituent of Macaw diet. It is vital to keep your Macaw's skin and feathers healthy and glossy. It is also essential for good eyesight. Vitamin A helps the body fight infection by keeping the mucous membranes healthy.



To avoid vitamin A insufficiency (the most common reason of under-nourishment of birds), you must provide food rich in beta-carotene, the prototype of vitamin A. Examples of such food items are broccoli, sprout leaves, dandelion leaves, spinach, turnip greens, and collard greens. The best source of Vitamin A is vegetables, although some fruits contain higher levels of vitamin A. Some Macaws prefer uncooked vegetables but, obviously, they are more edible when cooked or baked. However, overcooking brings down vitamin content. So, it is helpful to remember that the darker the flesh of the vegetable or fruit, the higher the carotene content.

Get your pet veggies and fruits by about 15-20%



While veggies and fruits provide the necessary vitamin A, they also contain other nutritional values that are essential for any mental development . It is needless to add they make a good addition to a mixed diet. Veggies and fruits that add to the nutritional content are: maize, pea-pods, cauliflower, leeks, beans and zucchini.





beans, asparagus, okra, banana, beets, potato, apples, pomegranates, grapes, cranberries, guava, tangerines, tomato, berries, oranges, blueberries, plums, figs, pineapple, etc.

Smooth volt face to Pellets for Picky Macaws

Try a formulated diet instead of the ideal one for your choosy feathered family member. Formulated diets are scientifically approved diets, prepared specially for the perfect health of all Macaw species. All Macaw owners who want healthy Macaws at home should opt for such formulated diets. If you have a Macaw at home, be ready to make two more P's regular features of your life. Patience and persistence will become your life-long friends. When you want your bird to graduate from a seed diet to a pellet diet, these friends will come of utmost help. Macaws can be as stubborn as human babies. You may take weeks or even months to persuade your pet to adopt the new diet. And don't blame yourself. It entirely depends on your bird's mood and eagerness to try the new diet. The following are some tried-and-tested methods that you may try but never ever starve your Macaw friend. You may lose it forever then.

1. **Start Young:** Like us, Macaws too get stubborn with age. They are more flexible when they are young. So, try and introduce new tastes to them when they are still young.
2. **No Starving:** Put your child in your Macaw's place and think what you would do with him if he was not agreeing to try new food. Would you starve him till he agreed? Don't do anything with your Macaw which you wouldn't do with your child.
3. **Spare the Sick:** If your Macaw is sick, don't try new food till he recovers. As it is its state of health is a matter of serious concern to you, and on top of that, if you force your Macaw to try new food, it will do more harm than good.
4. **Restrict artificial ingredients:** Artificially colored food looks attractive



but it is never good for your Macaw. Give as little as possible of these brightly colored stuff to your Macaw. It will keep your pet healthy.

5. **Tempting With a Treat:** Intelligent temptations have made kings give up their crowns. So, why not tempt your Macaw with treats? It is a good way of trying new food with a generous spread of treats. Crush the pellets and spray them over the seeds or a preferred treat. Your Macaw just might love the new crumbs mixed with its treats!
6. **Mornings Are the Best:** Strike when the iron is hot. That is, offer new food when your Macaw is hungry. In the mornings, when your Macaw is willing to eat anything, give it the new items. Its regular food can come in later during the day.
7. **Hand Feeding:** Any ordinary action transcends into an extraordinary feat when it is touched by love. Hand feed you Macaw with new food. Your Macaw will believe it is a treat and may actually start eating it. Love does cause wonders!
8. **Get Him Used to New Foods:** A Macaw, like a human baby, should be exposed to different textures and colors of food. This will make it more flexible to new tastes. Introduce new colors and new shapes of food to your Macaw. However, this should be done slowly. Too many colors at a time will only confuse your Macaw. Crunchy vegetables, fruits in biteable sizes and all in different shapes will intrigue your bird to try them. Vegetables and fruits should be introduced before you give it the usual crumbs. Making a Macaw adapt to a new diet is a slow and painstaking process. However, do not confuse the bird with too many new things at one time. Wait for a few weeks before or after introducing another new food.
9. **Monitor Weight:** If your bird is resistant to his new diet, it is better to monitor the bird's body weight. If you find the number of feces thinning and the bird losing its body weight more than usual in a week, switch back to the old diet. Also, keep in mind that there might be a transition



in the droppings (color, texture) when you nourish him with pellets. So, don't start thinking your Macaw is sick. Any body system, be it a bird or human, will need time to adjust to a new diet.

Schedule for the Transition

If your bird readily accepts the formulated diet, here is a schedule for a quick change:

- 1 **Week 1:** Feed 75% of the calculated daily consumption in seeds, and alternate pellets for the other 25%.
- 2 **Week 2:** Feed 50% of the daily consumption as seeds and 50% as pellets.
- 3 **Week 3:** Supply 25% of the daily consumption as seeds and 75% as pellets.
- 4 **Week 4:** For larger Macaws, decrease the seed element even more.

Remember, for Macaws and cockatiels, a diet must have seeds (25 percent), pellets (50 percent), and fresh foods (25 percent) to make the best diet. However, larger Macaws must have a lesser percentage of seed content, with pellets and fresh foods and treats making up the major part of the diet.

Kitchen Counter

Here are great recipes for meals for your Macaw.

Recipe 1:

Ingredients:

1. 1 pot full of baby carrots, winter crush, or sweet potatoes along with baked yam, squeezed or cooked properly and later mashed with carrots.



2. 3pcs of boorish whole-grain crumbled toast.
3. 2-4tbs of non-fat plain yogurt.
4. Optional: 1/8-cup high quality hand nourishing formula or a spray of a spirulina or wheat grass type supplement.

Method:

Mix and mash in large bowl to mix well. Change the consistency according to your Macaw's preference. No cooking required. Add nutrient-rich edibles such as finely sliced collard greens, kale or broccoli flowers, griped carrots, wheat germ, oat bran, grated tofu-cheese, nonfat cottage cheese, sliced nuts or chopped currants , very hard boiled egg, pasta, brown rice, well-cooked and chopped chicken and powdered crumbs. Anything that is nourishing and nutritive!

Recipe 2:

Quinoa, a South American grain, is highly nutritious and a delightful meal for your Macaw. It is rich in protein, calcium and phosphorous. It is pronounced "keen-nwa". It has been suggested that it is probably the most nutritious grain in the world. Irrespective of the form, be it sprouted and served raw, or cooked, it is a highly nutritious meal for Macaws. Quinoa is easily available at all health stores as bulk grain. Following is a recipe that will surely intrigue your Macaw to try it out.

1. 1 cup of quinoa
2. 2-3 cups of water
3. Corn kernels
4. Chopped carrots
5. Raisins and/or dried apples
6. Cinnamon stick

Boil 2 cups of water and add the quinoa. Cook for 10 minutes and then add the veggies and dried fruits. Cook for another 5 minutes or until the quinoa grain is clear and has a tiny tail sprouting from it. You may have to add a little more water if it gets too dry too quickly. Let it cool. Now it is ready to be served. Carrots may be replaced with any other vegetable. More the number of vegetables, the more delicious is it for your Macaw.



Caution: Soft food is the perfect breeding ground for bacteria if left open in the cage. Do not use any scraps as components. Dole out a fresh batch each time you feed your Macaw.

Recommended Foods

Here is a list of suggested food items that can be used as natural medicine for our birds. The following are vital for the good health of your Macaw.



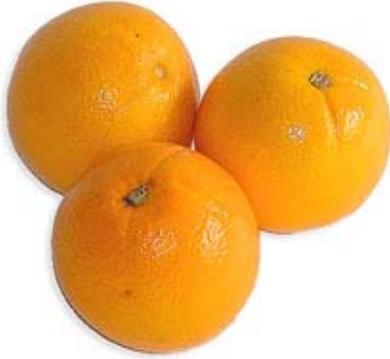
CHERRIES: Cherries are great favorites with Macaws. Make your Macaw cheerful with a couple of cherries and watch the fun! Cherries also help fight diseases. They can cure Gout. Unsullied, frozen or even airtight food products help ease the throbbing ache of gout.



PAPAYA: This juicy fruit is a great digestive aid. Known for its strong digestive enzyme, papain and the high beta-carotene content, this fruit is a rich source of



Vitamin-A. Macaws consider papaya as a regular feature in their diet. Papaya keeps their system healthy. Macaws love papaya seeds for their peppery taste.



ORANGES: Macaws develop a fancy towards the orange naturally. This fruit remains fresh and remains free of pathogens for many hours. In tropical regions, this makes a good ration for the birds to keep their body temperature normal. The bright color of these oranges adds to the attraction of the Macaw to the fruit.



APPLES: High in yarn and pectin, apples include anti-bacterial, anti-viral, and anti-inflammatory agents. The juicy crunch with every bite clicks well with the Macaw. Apples also fight high cholesterol. Most Macaws eat apples daily. Remember the old saying? An apple a day keeps the doctor away. The same applies to Macaws. The difference is, a Macaw may not be able to eat a whole apple at one go!

BEANS: Beans are one of the add-on food items for Macaws. Beans help in controlling high blood sugar levels and lower cholesterol levels. Beans are rich in fiber and are an important part of the daily amount of roughage required by all



Macaws. They are high in protein when served with brown rice.



BROWN RICE: Feed your Macaw with brown rice to solve all digestive problems. Rice is anti-diarrhea and contains anti-cancer protease inhibitors. Rice is a hot favorite with Macaws. They like it in any form. Give them rice to have a healthy and happy Macaw at home.

NUTS: Nuts are an organic source that makes excellent add-on food, especially during winters when Macaws require extra strength in order to take care of their body temperature. Nuts have fats which make the body warm during winter. As an anti-cancer and heart protective supplement, nuts are a valuable part of any Macaw's food intake. And Macaws, like many of us, like munching away all through the day!

SWEET POTATOES: Popularly called yams, sweet potatoes are yet again one of the most favorite food items for Macaws. Yams also have tremendous medicinal properties. They offer antioxidant beta-carotene that prevent heart diseases, cataracts and numerous cancers.

GRAPE SEEDS: As a potent antioxidant and fifty times as powerful as Vitamin



EWCP, grape seeds are a boon to your Macaw. You can effectively treat painful conditions of feather plucking with grape seeds.

Food Preparation Tips

Food safety is an important issue for Macaw owners, since a minor carelessness can lead to outbreaks of diseases such as hepatitis, Escherichia coli Infection and food poisoning. The most important yet the most easy-to-forget work is to put fresh food and water in the bird's coop many times a day (not more than 6 hours in winters, less than 6 hours during summers). Maintain high levels of purity and 100% hygiene while preparing the food for your Macaw. This tends to reduce physical hazards in your Macaw. Hygiene is a pre-requisite of good health.

Wash your hands:

Wash your hands well before you start preparing meals for your feathered family member. Use an antibacterial soap to reduce the spread of microorganisms. Dry your hands with a clean cloth before you start.

Sanitize cutting surfaces and utensils:

Cut the vegetables and fruits with a sterilized cook's knife on a fixed cutting board. Both the knife and the cutting board should be sponged before and after use. It is advisable to rinse your cutting surface everyday, after use. The washing agent must be a purifier or a mixture of 3 teaspoons of chlorine bleach mixed in 1 gallon of water. Cleansing is a proper sanitation custom that is essential if unprepared meat or eggs have been carved on the cutting surface before.

Wash Food Thoroughly:

Before the food is carved, it should be carefully strained. You can add Nolvasan liquid to water; or add 1-teaspoon chlorine bleach in a gallon-full of water. Before slicing or dicing fruits and vegetables, they must be soaked in this liquid for



approximately ten minutes and then washed under running water for a minimum of five minutes. Look at the fruits and veggies carefully before and while rinsing them to check for mould, over ripeness or brown scars. Needless to say, meat and poultry should be thoroughly cleaned and washed before you cook them for your bird.

Cook meat thoroughly:

Any meat product that you give to your Macaw, be it turkey, chicken, or beef, it must be well prepared. A friend of mine told me she gives her birds meat cooked on the barbeque grill. The proper cleaning of food becomes even more significant when you are cooking meat for your Macaw. Any meat product must not remain uncooked or half cooked. See to it that there is no mould, over ripeness or brown scars. Although all Macaw diseases are not the outcome of stale or rotten food, yet infected meat or overripe fruits may cause harm to your Macaw's health. Some Macaw owners will try to convince you that lack of hygiene is not the only cause behind fatal diseases. They will have hundreds of examples to prove their point. Some claim chilled hamburger patties triggered, for example, the Escherichia coli infection and the recent hepatitis. I know a few who blamed it on strawberries from Mexico. And there are still others who will tell you that the sudden incident of cyclospora (a sponge) occurred due to the Guatemalan raspberries. If looked into all these cases, one thing is clear. The bottomline remains unchanged. Only unhygienic, ill-maintained meat, overripe fruits and cooking in unhealthy conditions can lead to infections and even fatal diseases.

Word of Caution!

Chocolate, avocado, and rhubarb are absolute no-nos for your Macaw. Also, avoid beverages containing caffeine or alcohol. All set meat products from your kitchen top or food high in nitrates, or monosodium glutamate (MSG) are not right



for your Macaw. Keep your bird away from onions, germinated Lima, fava and navy beans, fruit pits and apple seeds.

Remember, birds are intolerant to lactose. That means no milk products, beyond a little quantity of hard cheese and yogurt, should be fed to your Macaw. Moreover, eating healthy food and keeping junk food at bay (as these are high in fat, salt, or sugar) is the secret to glowing and glossy health!. Peanuts tainted with Aspergillums yeast are a health risk, and can cause respiratory diseases. Also being a source of aflatoxin, it is a strong carcinogen toxin. If you plan to feed uncooked peanuts, do not ever compromise with quality. Reject them if you notice even a speck of mould on them.

Keep these in mind and enjoy a colorful life with nature's bundle of colors!



Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank the following contributors for their kind permission to use photographs of their beautiful birds in the creation of this guide:

Louise at <http://www.Macawlink.com/>

Arne at <http://www.avianbiotech.com>

Elisabeth DeSimone

<http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=ynamazon> and

<http://www.petbirdpage.com/breed.asp?breed=wbcaique>

Marc Morrone at <http://www.Macawsoftheworld.com/Macaws.html>