

COMPLETE NUTRITION : DRY SEED OR PELLETS

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There have been many recent articles written about proper nutritional requirements for the racing pigeon. Many of these articles are very informative re the requirements of the birds and the deficiencies of the dry seed diet. The scribe will inform the reader of the lack of a particular Vitamin group and continue in the direction of rectifying the deficiency with a particular supplement which of course is needed to rectify the deficiency concerned. This is not always the correct manner in which to address the deficiency. Supplementing a dry seed diet (say deficient in B group Vitamins) with say a yeast based product will no doubt rectify the low Vitamin group but, will the diet now become balanced ? I think not. Being balanced MEANS that all Protein, Amino-Acid, Vitamin, Mineral and trace elements are in the correct proportions to the requirements of the particular species concerned. Blind supplementation usually increases the deficient group to beyond the required amount which is both unnecessary and increases the expense of keeping the birds and unbalances the diet. In some cases over-supplementation can result in toxic levels of both Vitamins and Minerals i.e.;

Ca (calcium) there are so many products on the market which are calcium based with the intent on providing sufficient levels both during and non breeding periods. Grits, calcium powders, pick stone/pots, liquid calcium etc, most of these products overlap each other and can result in toxic levels of calcium being ingested and many supplements use Vitamin D3 which will enhance the already high levels of calcium that some fanciers use. High levels of calcium if consumed daily over long periods of time can be terminal.

Does the average fancier know what level of calcium is required for the breeding bird? I doubt it. Breeding pigeons would require between 1 to 1.1% calcium per kilo of feed. Dry seed would certainly not provide this level and supplementation is required to achieve these levels. But how does the fancier work out how much is required? Some will tell you that a bird will only consume the amounts needed, others will try to calculate the amount in their current mix and add the required amount, most won't bother and throw in 2 or 3 different products and leave it at that. With the wide range of both commercial and home mixes, the varied areas where the individual grains are grown would make this task very difficult even for animal nutritionists and veterinarians.

Vitamin E is also very important and the correct levels are required daily. Have you ever noticed how the first round of eggs seem to have a lower than average fertility rate? Some of this can be attributed to the poor quality of feed rations which the stock birds have been fed over the off season. This is usually rectified by the second round as most fanciers either supplement with a Vitamin complex and or move their birds onto a quality breeding mix. Some fanciers ask me for the lowest priced (and quality) feed during the off season and tell me its for their stock birds!! When I ask them why they want that sort of feed, they tell me all they want is something to keep their stock birds alive over this period no wonder some have poor breeding seasons. Insufficient levels of Vitamin E will affect sperm membrane integrity that is susceptible to lipid peroxidation; also this will affect the immune system and antioxidant system etc. Fortunately Vitamin E is safe even in quantities 2 X or more than recommended levels; the only drawback is the cost involved.

That's enough of that and I'm sure all of you are aware that dry seed mixes are not and will never be totally complete.

PELLETISED feeds on the other hand in most cases are nutritionally complete and rarely do they need supplementation. All quality manufacturers have their formulations completed by a Animal Nutritionist, (not by a Avian Veterinarian in the case of birds as most fanciers would believe) nutritionist tend to continue to update their knowledge with seminars additional educational components etc, (where as most Veterinarians tend to concentrate on the diagnosis and remedy of injury / illness), however, there are some veterinarians which continue their studies into this area and are the ones to discuss nutritional needs if a nutritionist is not on hand. There seems to be a misconception about pellets with many making comments such as "pellets can never replace a grain diet completely" !! I am sure that many of you have heard or read similar comments but I doubt those who make them have the necessary educational standard and technical expertise to make such a claim and people without the necessary training would be best to advise on matters more befitting their experience. And just one more example, I was visiting a friend and a particular gentleman that was also visiting joined into our discussion of pellet only diets. When I commented on our pellets being used by breeders of Macaw parrots and the sensational results obtained with larger egg clutches and higher hatch rates as compared to his previous grain diet, this visitor made a comment "parrots evolved with a hooked beak so they can eat seed and that's what they should eat" intelligence on the highest level, what a forward thinker and inspiration to all those whom continue to discount/ discredit modern scientific advances and these sorts of comments from unqualified persons should be ignored

Pellets if formulated correctly and used within the manufacturers recommendations (up to 100%) will provide the best nutritional diet obtainable, there is no need to supplement with this or that product. Most pellets are manufactured from cereal grains (ours are based on rice) with some legumes to increase protein levels, but levels of 16% or higher require the addition of a protein meal. I would recommend a vegetable source as this will supply the required levels without possible serious digestive conditions which can manifest themselves with animal proteins.

Everything that your birds need are contained within , the appropriate Proteins, Vitamins, Amino-Acids and micro nutrients have been included for the quantity of feed consumed by your bird daily. Initially quality pellets may seem to cost more than grain diets but over the length of a year will cost no more than grain diets supplemented with Vitamin/Mineral concentrates etc. Modern pellets are a far cry from the old chook pellets we had when I was a boy. They are produced in many formulations from breeder with a relative high protein level aprox 20% (20% has shown to provide the best overall results), this is not obtainable in a grain mix even a grain diet of 100 % peas will not give you 20% digestible protein. Fats and good levels of Vitamins, Amino-acids and Minerals etc will all be included. Maintenance formulations usually have lower nutrient levels to the factor of 25% as compared to the breeder and would be ideal for returning race birds and stock birds. And finally there are the high carbohydrate formulations used in racing to boost energy levels. Changing the train of thought of long term flyers who have been successful with grain diets is quite difficult, but we have had some hard core customers now purchasing pellets and feeding them to their birds with more than pleasing results. It may take a week to convert you birds onto pellets as they may initially not recognise the pellets as a feed source, once accustomed to eating them you will have no problems what so ever.

I know of four pellet manufactures (apart from ourselves) that manufacture appropriate pellets one is in Victoria , the other two are overseas, Belgium and UK. Whichever pellet you try, your birds will thank you for it