

# Cuisine *de* Critters



## Pack & Flock Feeding Time

By Lisa Treen

**M**ost pets like to adhere to a routine and our parrots ensure that we stick to their twice-daily smorgasbord of birdie treats. Morning and night they're delivered a fresh bowl that consists of grains, fruit, soft mashed vegies, crunchie nuts and other treats that are diced, sliced, julienned and mixed up in our kitchen.

Assembling the evening meal is my responsibility and around 5:00pm I temporarily leave my desk, walk into the back of the office/kitchen and start the creative process. This degustation menu of tastes and textures is met with greedy excitement from both parrots. Curiously, their likes and dislikes can change daily.

Jackson is the most consistent in his preferences. He loves passionfruit and has a solid one-a-day kiwi fruit habit. Each evening, Jackson clamps his claws onto the side of his supper dish and stays crouched over it until he's finished. I timed his masticating meal-time recently and it was 45 minutes before he surfaced from his food bowl marathon-beak smeared with cracked passionfruit and kiwifruit seeds and a schmooly mess.

It makes me wonder what greatness has been achieved throughout history in 45 minutes. I believe Ethiopian runners have completed half marathons in just over 45 minutes. So an elite athlete can cover over 21kms all the while my parrot is consuming his evening meal. No wonder he has a string of nick-names that include Fatty Boomsticks, Boombalah, Boombee, BoomBoom—he just needs to put his training efforts into more energetic pursuits and his feet into a pair of specially designed Avian Nike's.

We regularly weigh the birds to keep an eye on their weight (a drop in weight can signify serious health problems) and Jackson recently clocked in at around 490 grams. "He's nearly 1 pound of parrot," exclaimed the husband. I grew up in the decimal world, whereas the husband is more of an imperialist, his olde-worlde measurements and weights still amuse me. Joking aside, Jacko hasn't got any weighty issues as Eclectus are routinely described as being a 'stocky and robust'.

Little Roger's tastes in food can only be described as fickle. As soon as a fresh bowl of food is placed in front of him, he can be seen tossing items to the floor with the skill of a Japanese Teppanyaki chef. He has a willing recipient in the form of a small Dalmatian who will scoop up anything that drops or is tossed from his cage. She spits out kiwi fruit that I give her, yet if it comes hurling through the air from Roger's cage, this food source is seen as mana from heaven. Like the mythical virgin, Atalanta, she runs at great speed, scooping up this bird bounty as if it were the golden apples.

I find it weird that Roger tosses his kiwi fruit, as Ringnecks are meant to be demons in destroying fruit crops. So legendary is their insatiable appetite for fruit, they're banned from being allowed into Hawaii for fear that if released they'll multiply and decimate large mango and papaya plantations.

The importation restrictions mean that we could never consider an early retirement to the friendly islands of Aloha. When mentioning this to one of our Maui based friends, he offered his advice that if we chartered a private jet from Australia to Hawaii, we could smuggle our small yellow parrot through as customs rarely search the jets of seemingly rich and famous. He has this inside knowledge as he routinely looks after the whims of visiting celebrities, ferrying them from airports to privately owned Maui mansions. He's seen all manner of illegal and banned flora and fauna brought into the 50th state by moguls, rock gods, celebrity chefs, and movie stars.

Perhaps Australian customs were hip to the open flaunting of quarantine laws by celebrities when they thoroughly searched Mr Stallone's luggage on his recent promo trip to Sydney. Was it really steroids and human growth hormone they were tipped to, or were they just looking for a small parrot?

### Sesame Balls to Share

This first recipe is a not too naughty sweet snack that can be made and stored in an airtight container in the fridge. Birds, dogs and many humans find these little balls of honey, nutty goodness and tasty delight. You can substitute peanut butter for another nut butter like cashew and we would recommend that you get the sort made from ground up nuts straight from a health food store.

#### Ingredients:

- 3/4 cup peanut butter or other nut butter
- 1/2 cup honey
- 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 3/4 cup skim powdered milk
- 1 cup oatmeal—choose the classic oats rather than the quick cooking kinds
- 1/2 cup mixed small nuts like pine nuts, sunflower seeds and
- 1/4 cup toasted sesame seeds plus extra sesame seeds to rolls balls in

Since the cooler months are creeping up on us, we thought we would add in some extra recipes that are easy to prepare and can be shared with your furred and feathered kids.



Most birds are dunkers and dippers—meaning they like to dunk or drop certain items of food in their water bowls. This can make a 'soup' that can quickly build up harmful bacteria. If your bird is prone to dunking and making soup, then place his water cup on the opposite side of the cage from his food and seed bowls. This distance will make it harder for him to slime dunk.

### Dunkin Parrots

## *A parrot at my table, a dog next to my chair and a cat at the kitchen door. Recipes to share with your human, bird, dog and cat guests*

### Method:

In a medium sized bowl, combine nut butter, honey and vanilla. Blend thoroughly. Mix in milk powder and oatmeal and mixed nuts together. Gradually add milk powder, oats and nuts into butter/honey mixture. Blend thoroughly and you may need to use gloved hands to mix this together as dough stiffens. Add small amounts of boiling water to mixture if it's too stiff.

Preheat oven to 120 degrees. Sprinkle sesame seeds on baking tray and toast in a preheated oven for a few minutes.

Roll mixture into small bite-sized balls and roll each in toasted sesame seeds. Refrigerate in airtight container.

### Sang Choy Bow Wow

This next recipe is an Asian favourite that is normally served in dainty iceberg lettuce cups as an entrée. These Thai tastes are sure to tantalize your guests' taste-buds. We recommend mincing your own chicken for a couple of reasons. The first is that you can choose free range or organic chicken and take off any excess fat before the mincing process. The other reason is that if you mince your chicken just before cooking, there's less likelihood of bacteria.

Your bird, dog, cat and human guest will enjoy this delicious and simple recipe, however you should omit the chilli for dog and cats as their sensitive tummies won't appreciate the hot spicy chillies, but your parrots will enjoy the chilli flavour. Add the chili into the mix, once you've set aside the portion you're serving to your dog or cat guest. Dogs and cats won't need the elegant lettuce cups and your birdie guests might like this rolled into a tortilla for foraging foodie fun!

- 2 small red chillies (fried and set aside)
- 500 grams of chicken mince
- 1 Tablespoon sesame oil
- 2 Tablespoons Asian fish sauce
- 2 Tablespoons fresh squeezed lemon juice
- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce (or wheat free tamari sauce)
- 1/2 cup chopped mixed coriander and mint leaves

### Method:

In a medium hot pan, fry the small chillies and set aside. Fry the chicken in pan until golden and add fish sauce, lemon juice and soy sauce and cook for 1 minute. Remove from heat and stir in the mint and coriander mixture. Serve hot in lettuce cups for humans with the chillies mixed in. Serve straight into bowls for your cat and dog friends.

### Lemon Szechwan Sardines

Fresh sardines from your fresh fish supplier are a world apart from the standard, cheap canned variety found on our supermarket shelves. This zesty recipe can be shared with your pooch or puss and we suggest you serve these over simple steamed baby spinach for your human guests. The tiny, soft bones are a wonderful source of calcium and can safely be consumed. Szechwan peppercorns aren't really peppercorns at all, these are small, red-brown dried berries that are native to the Chinese province or the same name.

They have a distinct fragrance and flavour. Found in Asian supermarkets, you roast or heat them before crushing.

### Ingredients

- 12 fresh sardines, butterflied

### Marinade

- 3 Tablespoons lemon juice
- 2 Tablespoons Szechwan peppercorns, toasted and crushed
- 2 Tablespoons olive oil
- 2 Tablespoons Thai basil, shredded

### Method:

Wash and pat dry the sardines. Make marinade by combining the lemon juice, peppercorns, olive oil and basil. Pour marinade over sardines and marinate for 20 minutes.

Cook marinated sardines on a grill, barbecue or frypan and cook each side for 1-2 minutes or until tender. Serve hot and over baby spinach to human guests and for dogs and cats, allow to cool completely.



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