

INTAKE AND GROWTH RATES OF THREE PASSERINE SPECIES AT DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM

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Whenever possible, avian parents are tasked with raising their young. Occasionally circumstances dictate that young are pulled for hand rearing. Protocols are in place for different species that indicate food items and amounts to feed as well as developmental indicators and husbandry parameters. Avian species have different diets as adults but many utilize similar food items to feed their young. Here we compare the nutrient intake and growth rates of hand reared Taveta Golden Weavers (*Ploceus castaneiceps*), White Headed Buffalo Weavers (*Dinemella dinemelli*) and Magpie Shrikes (*Corvinella melanoleuca*) at Disney's Animal Kingdom.

All three species are native to Africa, although there is minimal overlap of their natural distribution. The white headed buffalo weaver is native to savannah and dry brush in East Africa and has an adult diet of seeds, fruits, and insects. The taveta golden weaver lives in woodland and swampy areas of part of Kenya and Tanzania and has an adult diet consisting mainly of seeds. The magpie shrike lives in parts of Eastern and Southern Africa and has an adult diet consisting mainly of arthropods and other insects, lizards, rodents, carrion and fruit.

At Disney's Animal Kingdom, the birds are housed in mixed species aviaries. Specific food items are designated for the different species, although the birds have access to, and are often seen feeding from, a variety of food options. The main diet offered to birds in the aviaries consists of soaked parrot breeder pellets (Mazuri, St. Louis MO), DAK fruit mix (papaya, cooked sweet potato, apple, grapes and honeydew melon), Insectivore pellets (Mazuri, St. Louis MO), VitaFinch seed mix (Higgins Premium Pet, Miami FL) and insects (crickets and super worms). Some species, including the magpie shrikes, are also offered pinkie mice and Small Carnivore Diet (Milliken Meats, Markham ON), although these items would also be accessible by non-target species in the aviary.

When hand rearing these species, all start with similar items. Magpie shrikes start with chopped pinkie mice. Both taveta golden and white headed buffalo weavers start with chopped pinkie mice and soaked parrot breeder pellets. As they age, all species have items from the adult diet added in. By fledging, the birds have been converted to their adult diets. Fledging can occur as early as 16 days with the Taveta Golden Weaver and averages around 24 days for the magpie shrike. Regardless of time to fledging, the birds display a similar growth curve (figure 1).

As in all cases of hand rearing, it is important to record parameters such as food intake, body weight and specific developmental milestones. Information from all hand rearing attempts can provide valuable guidance for future endeavors.

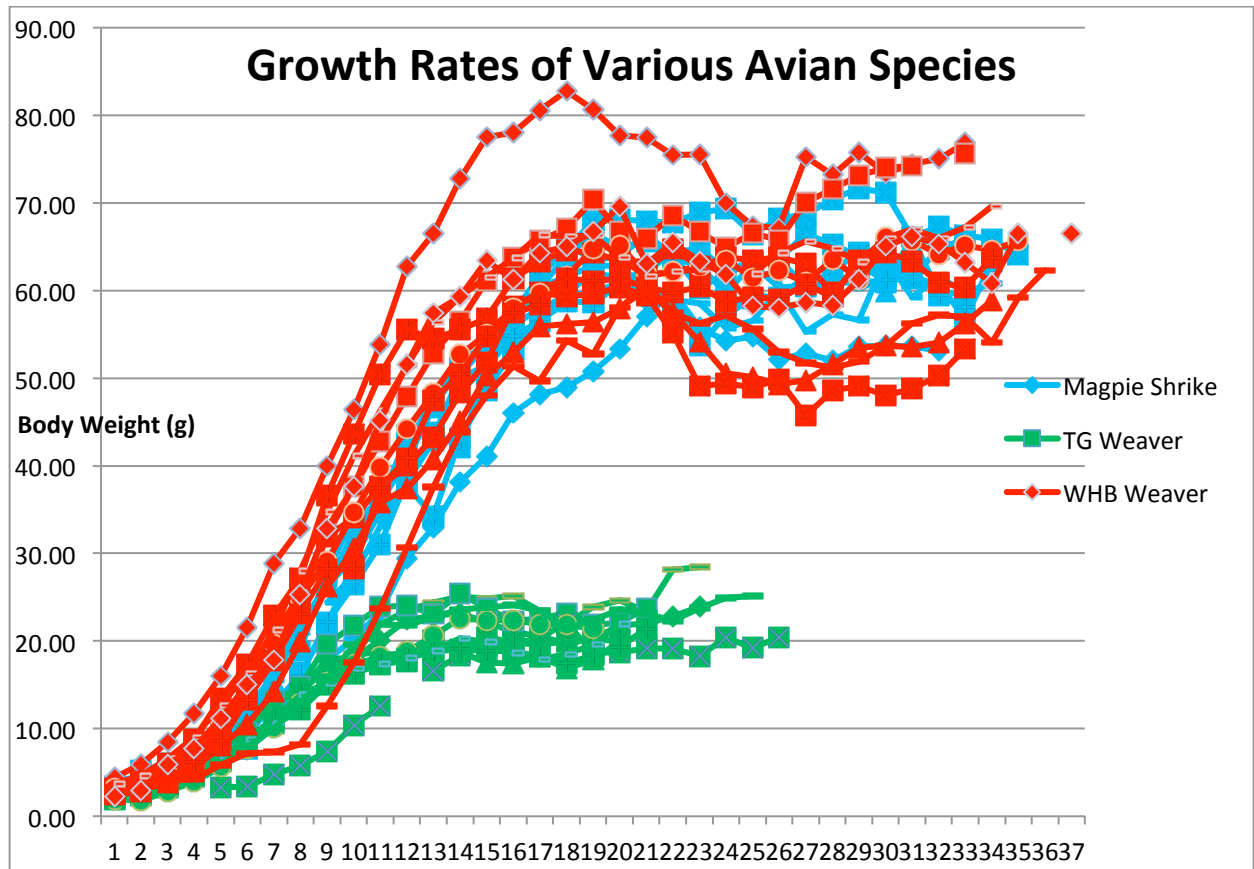


Figure 1. Growth rates of taveta golden weavers, white headed buffalo weavers and magpie shrikes at Disney’s Animal Kingdom.