International Association of
Avian Trainers and Educators

POSITION STATEMENT

ENRICHMENT

Prepared and published by
The International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators
www.IAATE.org

First Published: August 2010
Revised: June 2019

BACKGROUND

Enrichment can be defined as the altering of an animal's environment to encourage and increase species specific behavior. Enrichment has evolved from basic husbandry needs to include devices and offerings that are designed to create choices and elicit naturalistic behaviors. The activity levels of birds in the wild suggest that, in human care, they can benefit from mental and physical stimulation that allows for more control over their environment. Enrichment provides opportunities for birds in human care to make choices and exhibit naturalistic behaviors such as foraging, bathing, flying, and nesting. Enrichment programs should be based around desired behaviors rather than types of items offered.

POSITION

IAATE strongly recommends the development of enrichment programs incorporating species-appropriate opportunities for all birds.

IAATE recommends establishing protocols addressing frequency of presentation, duration of use, variety of opportunities, record keeping, and overall safety prior to implementation of any enrichment program.

IAATE suggests that while facilities may have limited resources available for the development of enrichment programs, cost effective strategies exist and should be explored.

SUPPORT FOR POSITION

Species-appropriate behavior-based enrichment programs provide the following benefits:
- Birds in human care may have limited opportunities to make choices, take actions, and experience the effects of those actions. Carefully developed enrichment programs can increase those opportunities.
- Undesirable behaviors including, but not limited to, feather destruction, self-mutilation, and aggression can be decreased through the use of species-appropriate enrichment strategies.
- Offering enrichment on exhibit or during public programs may encourage natural behaviors that can provide staff the opportunity to deliver an educational message.

Animal care staff and management personnel should work together to develop enrichment protocols that address the following:

Frequency of presentation
Although the frequency of presentation may differ for a variety of reasons, enrichment opportunities should be provided to all birds. Frequency of presentation should vary to maximize the birds' interest based on individual needs.

Duration of use
The length of time an enrichment offering remains in an enclosure or exhibit is influenced by a variety of factors such as the durability of the device, the interest level of the birds, sanitary concerns, etc. Monitoring enrichment devices on a daily basis for signs of deterioration can prevent potential safety risk to the birds. Edible enrichment items should be removed before a build-up of food-borne pathogens and pests can occur.

Variety of opportunities
A comprehensive enrichment program addresses the birds' needs from an integrated sensory perspective. Offering variety helps keep birds, as well as animal care staff, interested and involved. Development of a comprehensive list of approved enrichment opportunities for each species can enhance future enrichment planning.

Record keeping
Recording observations and assessments maximizes the effectiveness of an enrichment program. Based on observations of the bird's initial reaction and subsequent responses, enrichment opportunities can be maintained or redesigned as appropriate.

Safety
When creating enrichment opportunities, it is important to address all potential safety hazards and make modifications as necessary. Consideration of safety issues requires knowledge of the natural history of the species and the individual history of each bird. Utilization of an approval process for new enrichment ideas can maximize safety and reduce the occurrence of accidents/injuries.

Enrichment opportunities can be developed at little or no cost through the use of creative resources. Examples include recycled items, donated items, naturally available materials, varied environmental conditions, training/socialization sessions, etc. Volunteer time, visitor participation, and fundraising efforts can also support enrichment programs.

POSSIBLE DETRIMENTAL SIDE EFFECTS OF ENRICHMENT
While an enrichment program can have a positive impact on the lives of birds in human care, there are several potential detrimental side effects that should be understood and avoided.

Disease transmission
To avoid disease transmission, enrichment items that will be rotated between birds in more than one enclosure or exhibit should be cleaned or disinfected according to established husbandry protocols. Enrichment offered to birds in quarantine should not be used in the general collection until quarantined birds have been cleared.

Undesirable breeding behavior
If there are restrictions on breeding specific birds or if breeding behaviors become problematic, care should be taken when offering enrichment items that may stimulate such behaviors. Items that may be used as nest cavities or nesting material may inadvertently encourage breeding behaviors.

Impeded mobility
Staff should ensure enrichment does not impede movement, perching, or flight.

Aggressive behavior
When offering enrichment, staff should consider the number of birds in the enclosure and their social dynamics.

When providing or removing enrichment, care should be taken to avoid aggressive behavior by birds towards staff or each other.

Excessive stress
Staff should be familiar with each bird's behavior and be able to recognize excessive or prolonged stress. Enrichment that elicits such responses should be removed and avoided.

Providing adequate space for birds to choose to interact with or avoid enrichment is important for managing stress levels.