



International Association of  
Avian Trainers and Educators

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

### **ENRICHMENT**

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## **BACKGROUND**

Enrichment can be defined as the alteration 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, nesting, etc.. Enrichment programs should be based on desired behaviors rather than types of items offered.

## **POSITION**

IAATE strongly recommends developing enrichment programs that incorporate species-appropriate opportunities for all birds and are updated regularly to fit best practices. Species' natural history and the individual's disposition, history, and ability should be considered when developing enrichment.

IAATE recommends a behavior-based enrichment program, in which provided enrichment is designed to elicit specific target behaviors and evaluated for efficacy.

IAATE recommends establishing protocols addressing frequency of presentation, duration of use, variety of opportunities, record keeping including an efficacy evaluation system, and overall safety prior to implementation of any enrichment program. These enrichment programs should align with any federal regulations required based on location.

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.
- Behaviors, including but not limited to feather destruction, self-mutilation, destruction of their environment, abnormal or repetitive behavior, and undesirable interactions between conspecifics or towards staff, 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 with 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 various reasons, enrichment opportunities should be provided to all birds. The frequency of presentation should vary to maximize the birds' interest based on individual needs. If items are left in habitats for long periods, the effectiveness of the enrichment may begin to decline. Assess daily for interaction with enrichment items, removing and replacing any items that are no longer being used.

#### *Duration of use*

The appropriate length of time an enrichment offering remains in a habitat 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 daily for signs of deterioration can prevent potential safety risks to the birds. Edible enrichment items should be removed before a buildup of foodborne pathogens and pests occurs.

#### *Novelty*

The use of novel enrichment items on a regular schedule can increase the likelihood of interaction with them. Effective enrichment should promote a diversity of behaviors rather than rely solely on variation in materials or appearance. Providing multiple items that elicit similar patterns of interaction may limit opportunities for broader behavioral expression.

#### *Variety of opportunities*

A comprehensive enrichment program addresses the birds' needs from an integrated sensory perspective and incorporates various categories of stimuli, such as sensory, social, food-based, environmental/habitat, and cognitive. Offering variety helps keep bird and animal care staff interested and involved. The development of a comprehensive list of facility-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. Because individual engagement may fluctuate due to life stage, season, health, or other factors, continuous evaluation is necessary to ensure sustained wellbeing benefits.

#### *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 species' natural history and the individual history of each bird. Interactions with new enrichment items should always be monitored. Utilization of a process to approve, introduce,



and monitor new enrichment items can maximize safety and reduce the occurrence of accidents/injuries.

Enrichment opportunities can be developed at little or no cost using 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, several potential detrimental side effects should be understood and avoided.

#### *Breeding behavior*

If there are restrictions on breeding specific birds or if breeding-related behaviors contribute to adverse behavioral or health outcomes, 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.

#### *Disease transmission*

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

#### *Impeded mobility*

Staff should ensure enrichment does not impede movement, perching, or flight. Steps should be taken for any birds with physical disabilities to allow them to engage with enrichment and navigate their environment.

#### *Undesirable behavior*

When offering enrichment, staff should consider the number of birds in the habitat and their social dynamics. When providing or removing enrichment, care should be taken to observe interactions between conspecifics and towards staff.

For animals housed individually, observe the animal's behavior before entering the habitat. A clear protocol should be in place to remove items which may include stationing or shifting birds to ensure safety of staff and animals.

#### *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.

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