

A Jump Ahead in Enrichment: Rejuvenating an Idea

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Enrichment comes in many different forms and variations. There are always the classic go-tos: Boomer Balls, Rubber Kongs, baby rattles, newspaper, etc. Items like these undoubtedly have value to enriching the lives of your animals by helping to break up the monotony of life by engaging them and stimulating them with noise and movement. However, sometimes it is easy to over-think enrichment and overlook the power of the basics. Like how food is delivered, where water comes from and in what form, where to get away from the world around them, and where is the best place to observe the world passing by. Having a comfortable place to sit and watch others, to rest, and to sleep without anxiousness is appealing to anything, no matter what species it is. Perching options supply this form of enrichment by offering different vantage points and textures for our birds. However, when the term *perch* is used most people only see branches hung between the walls of an enclosure. However, I offer you a new alternative that might prove to be very popular with some of your collection: A trampoline.

One of the most common problems we had housing our waterfowl (mostly White-faced Whistling Ducks and Indian Runner Ducks) was the lack of variation in substrates and the constant dampness of the environment due to high humidity, which eventually caused Bumblefoot sores to occur. Our staff, looking for ways to remedy this, began looking for a way to offer new variations in not only texture but also consistency of footing. They came up with



stretching Enkamat ® over a wooden frame to create a platform that flexes with the weight of the bird. Not only did this add a necessary variation in the cover of the ground for the benefit of the bird's feet and allow it to dry more quickly due to increased air circulation, but it also turned into a very enjoyable perching area for the birds. Thus, it showed great potential for an enrichment item.

There were a couple aspects of this item that did deter us from using these Enkamat trampolines for an extended period of time, regardless of how our birds seemed to utilize their presence. First of all, the wooden frames, typically two by four boards screwed together, were too heavy to move - especially when they became waterlogged over time from being cleaned. Also, when left in one place for very long, they became a haven for mosquitoes, increasing the chances of spreading diseases like West Nile Virus, not to mention just being irritating. Lastly, due to not being portable, debris and fecal matter is washed through the matting and collect underneath which is never able to be cleaned out, making the likelihood of mold and other possibly toxic substances to grow, which could lead to increased health problems. All these issues lead to the trampolines eventually being discarded. So, I thought, how can I bring this amazing idea back to life?

After examining all the drawbacks surrounding these trampoline platforms, I realized there was one main problem that needed solving: the weight of the frame. If we could find a way to make the whole structure lighter then it would be more portable, easier to clean, and easier to remove for increased variability. It was decided that instead of wooden boards, PVC piping would be much less weight while still allowing for sturdiness. Water and chemicals would not be absorbed by it and the integrity of the frame would actually last longer. We would be able to completely pull the structure out of the enclosure for cleaning, and allow it to fully dry before placement back into the enclosure, decreasing the appeal for mosquitoes. Another benefit would be that we could more easily disinfect against bacteria and other problematic critters.



The construction of these trampoline platforms was actually fairly simple. We used 3 inch PVC piping to allow for enough height off the ground for the Enkamat and, at our local hardware store, there were pre-cut pieces available in three foot sections. Then we used 90 degree elbows to form the square. Using self-tapping screws and fender washers, we double-folded the Enkamat to secure the mat to the frame. At the corners and on the sides we folded it over as well to prevent the bird any access to the underside of the matting that was covered in loose strands and loops that could catch toes. We also decided that a double covering of matting would be best so that there is enough support for the birds, especially with the ones as large as the Crowned Cranes. The result was a lightweight, yet strong, frame that supports the matting in such a way as to create the yielding surface we were looking for.

This version 2.0 of a previous enrichment idea has become a successful addition to our enrichment collection. All different species regularly use this platform: Crowned Cranes, Hadada Ibis, Blue Andalusian and Rhode Island Red Chickens, Silver Gulls, and pigeons. Thanks to all the benefits of the light-weight design, the platforms are completely pulled out of the enclosure to be cleaned and disinfected during morning



husbandry. This allows them to have a couple of hours to dry before being put into a new enclosure. Having a dry perching area, especially in some of our wettest enclosures, has a positive effect on preventing foot problems such as Bumblefoot. Just one of the many benefits provided by our new trampolines!