

Enrichment

Making Time for Fun

Story by Megan McConnell, Trainer, Natural Encounters, Inc.

You have just finished your assigned morning husbandry section. Now you have ten minutes before you have to start setting up for the first show of the day. Your task is to enrich all forty birds in your mixed-species section. GO!

Sounds like a tall order! Especially for a large variety of birds such as the ones in our mixed-species area which includes three species of Chicken, Black and King Vultures, East African Crowned Cranes, African Pied Crows, African Collared Ravens, Red-legged and Black-legged Seriemas, Southern Ground and Abyssinian Ground Hornbills, and Hadada Ibis.

The previous enrichment program was set up with a large variety of items including rubber and plastic toys, boxes, browse, wood blocks, metal plates and spoons, and many more. Each day, each bird in mixed-species was assigned to receive one of these items. This worked well, but often the bins that held all of the toys would get very disorganized and we would waste more time looking for the different toys than it took to pass out all of the toys to the birds.

Using a collaboration of ideas we set out to overhaul the mixed species section of our enrichment plan with a few objectives in mind. The first objective was to make it more streamlined in an effort to make it more effective and save time. We have a very limited time in our schedule for morning husbandry and enrichment so this was a high priority. Another important aspect of the program was that it needed to be user-friendly and easy for team members and new staff members to learn as well as easy for me to manage as the leader of the project.

So, we came up with a plan that includes a rotation in which each day is assigned a specific type of item that every bird gets. For example, we have a rubber toy day, a ball day, a box day, etc. This allows the entire process to be streamlined and much faster for the person assigned to that husbandry section for the day. We ended up with fourteen different bins for

a two-week rotation that has worked out really well so far. On any given day, the person assigned to the section goes into the shed, finds the bin for the day, and finds all of the needed materials along with information about any exceptions for the day. For example, we found through trial and error that some of our birds enjoy playing a little too roughly with some of the toys. If the enrichment item for the day is considered unsafe for a specific bird it is given an alternative, such as a different style or size water pan for bathing or simply a toy from another day. These details are all on a sheet attached to the front of every bin so that the communication is clear and the birds stay safe. In addition, we have special husbandry practices that are performed on a weekly schedule such as sand baths for the chickens and seriemas and special bath salts for the corvids and pigeons to promote feather health. One of the great things about most of the items that we use is that they are recycled and therefore very cost effective. Our staff regularly brings in recycled plastic bottles, newspaper, cardboard boxes, and much more.

Another section of our enrichment program involves all of our parrots. Our collection of parrots includes almost 40 individuals including several pairs of Greenwing and Blue-and-Gold Macaws, a Military Macaw, Red-fronted Macaws, a Hyacinth Macaw, a Severe Macaw, Blue-fronted Amazons, Rose-breasted Cockatoos, and an Umbrella Cockatoo. Each of the parrots is assigned a trainer that is responsible for changing out their enrichment twice a week. They must then check off their initials on a chart we have in our trainer office. This can be a variety of things from paper boxes and cardboard to wood blocks or bamboo browse. A list of approved items is provided for our trainers to give them some ideas and they are encouraged to come up with new items for approval. This not only gives all of the trainers a sense of responsibility,

| 2009 | April 26-May 2 | | | | May 3-9 | | | | May 10-16 | | | | |
|---------------|----------------|--------|--------------|--------------|----------|--------|--------------|--------------|-----------|--------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| | Ball Day | Browse | Metal Plates | Enrichment 1 | Ball Day | Browse | Metal Plates | Enrichment 1 | Ball Day | Browse | Metal Plates | Enrichment 1 | Enrichment 2 |
| Abbie | CS | MM | A | A | | | | | A | A | | | |
| Baby/Corbin | JTM | | AB | AB | | | | | AP | AP | AS | AS | |
| Ben | VA | VA | A | A | A | A | A | A | | | | | |
| Bob | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Bobby/Farrell | JTM | SEA | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM | JTM |
| Charles | AB | JTM | MM | MM | CS | JTM | MM | CS | JTM | MM | CS | JTM | MM |
| Crantico | JTM | KO | KO | KO | JTM | KO | KO | CF | | | | | |
| Debbie | CF | KO | MM | CF | JTM | MM | CF | JTM | MM | CF | JTM | MM | CF |
| Dora | AB | MM | A | A | | | | | | | | | |
| Ernie | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Gabby | | | CS | CS | | | | | | | | | |
| Isabelle | A | A | A | A | | | | | | | | | |
| Jane | CF | KO | KO | CF | JTM | KO | KO | CF | JTM | KO | KO | CF | JTM |
| Gracie | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF |
| Greer | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF | JTM | CF | CF |

| 14 different days of enrichment |
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| Balls – boomer balls, jolly balls, wiffle balls, etc. |
| Bamboo – stalk of the bamboo plant |
| Boxes – cardboard boxes of varying sizes |
| Browse – bamboo plants of varying sizes |
| Metal items – plates, bowls, spoons, cups |
| Paper – newspaper, paper bags, phonebooks, etc. |
| Pine cones – giant pine cones |
| Plastic bottles – water bottles, milk jugs, etc. |
| Plastic toys |
| PVC pipe – 3" PVC pipe cut into different lengths |
| Rubber toys |
| Washcloths |
| Wood blocks – pieces of 2x4 cut into pieces |
| Zip-tie toys – zip-ties attached to dog clips |

ity, but also benefits the birds greatly by frequently changing their environment. Another aspect of our enrichment plan is our bath cage, which is just a normal enclosure with a mister head on it. Each of our parrots is given the opportunity once a week to go in the bath cage and take a bath or just get some extra sunshine. The bath cage is also located near the center of the backstage area, which gives the birds additional stimulation in the form of lots of people moving around and other birds going by. The check-off for the bath cage is also located on the chart pictured.

Our enrichment program also includes our birds of prey. We have fifteen birds of prey including a Bald Eagle, Bateleur Eagle, Harris' Hawks, Eurasian Eagle Owls, Great Horned Owls, a Mississippi Kite, Augur Buzzards, and a Ferruginous Hawk. Each day they are also given various enrichment items. Some of the more popular items have been large pinecones, cornhusks, and just plain old newspaper wrapped around perches or made into different shapes so that the birds can shred it. Included are some photos of the birds enjoying their enrichment.

So with a few ideas being bounced around and a bunch of plastic bins, we were able to transform the old system into something new, different, and hassle-free! It has made enrichment more fun for my teammates and me (and the birds) and we have already begun to come up with more ideas for the future.

Submit your enrichment ideas or articles to Robin Shewokis at birdelves@aol.com

