



The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book

Version 1.0

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FORWARD

Dear Reader,

My name is Kris Porter and I am the author of *The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book, V1.0*. This book started out to be a toy making pamphlet to sell as a fundraiser for a local parrot rescue organization. But once I started writing, I changed direction entirely. I wanted to focus on ways to engage parrots in productive activity. Providing them with toys is a very important part of that process, but there is so much more to enriching our bird's lives; including them in our daily activities, providing them with foraging opportunities and alternate play areas away from their cages, etc.

I asked Dr. Susan Friedman if I could quote from her article, *Straight Talk About Parrot Behavior*. She said yes and she was interested in seeing the final product. I sent a copy to her. Susan read it, liked it and asked if she could use it as required reading for her students. She asked me how I intended to market the book.

I was flattered and excited to receive such enthusiastic support from the Doctor herself for my book, and then sad. How to market it? All those color photos; it would cost a fortune to publish. I was trying to estimate what the book would have to sell for, when my husband, Jerry, came up with a brilliant idea. "Why don't you just print it to a PDF file and e-mail it to her?" he asked.

I e-mailed Susan and told her what Jerry had suggested. Susan wrote back and said she wasn't quite ready to take me up on my generosity – she was still thinking. Susan wanted to put me in touch with a contact at TFH Publishing. TFH produces books for pet owners and are known for their extensive use of color photos. I balked at that idea. I thought it would take too long to find someone at TFH interested in publishing this particular book and I was attaching myself to the idea of giving the book away for free.

Susan then suggested I consider an e-book where people would pay to download it. We could still accomplish wide dissemination and I would be able to turn a small profit. By that time I had wrapped my heart and soul around the opportunity to distribute the book for free and I wasn't letting go of it. The fact that something I wrote could help enrich parrots' lives and I had the chance to give it away to a number of parrot owners, was so much more reinforcing for me than selling the book. Finally, she accepted the fact that I was very clear on my decision.

I am especially grateful to Susan G. Friedman, Ph.D., for providing me this opportunity to share *The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book, V1.0* with you all. I hope you enjoy reading it and you find yourselves wanting to share copies with others who you feel may benefit from reading this book.

Sincerely,
Kris Porter

INTRODUCTION

We as parrot owners are always looking for ideas to keep our parrots busy and engaged in playful activities. In the following pages you will find several examples of parrot toys you can make at home. Also included are examples of some great ready-made toys you can purchase and where to find them.

I got started making toys for my parrots after purchasing the book: Parrot-Toys & Play Areas by Carol S. D'Arezzo and Lauren Shannon-Nunn. Then I attended a parrot toy making class. At that class I was introduced to so many ideas for making my own toys that I couldn't retain them all in my head. I remember thinking I would have liked a take home instruction book to keep for reference. This is that book.

I get most of my ideas for toys or play gyms by watching my parrots play and from searching for toys on the internet. I am always thrilled to make a toy that my parrots actually play with.

I'm sure you've heard this before, but once more for the record, *no parrot toy is 100% safe*. Please observe your parrot playing with every new type of toy you introduce to his environment before you leave him alone with it. Check old toys often for frayed cotton rope or long strands of any material. Birds have been known to get pieces of string or threads wrapped around their toes, necks and wings. There is no need to be paranoid or overly suspicious of every toy, just be knowledgeable and careful, and use good sense.

Most of the internet sites that sell parrot toys have sections on safety tips and information on picking the right size toys. It is worth your time to click on those pages and read the information provided.

D'Arezzo and Nunn in their book Parrot-Toys & Play Areas have pages of wonderful information on toy safety as well as parrot-safe methods to hang toys and safe materials to make toys from. This is a book you can read over and over to get ideas from.

Sometimes I think we consider toys an optional item. So often I've heard parents of small children say, "You don't need any more toys, you don't play with the ones you already have."

Well our parrots are not children, and a toy for them is not to be considered a bonus item. It is a necessary item. Parrot toys provide opportunities for our birds to have something to do during the day. Toys afford them the possibility to make choices, solve problems and keep active. If our birds don't play with the toys they have, then perhaps they need another type of toy.

In this book, I plan to give you all sorts of ideas for helping to keep your parrot active. I hope you have fun reading this publication and find it useful—I know I am going to have fun writing it.

Kris Porter

1

THE MAKING OF A TOY

If you make it—they will play with it. . . .

Well not always, but I like to keep trying. Nothing gives me greater pleasure than to see one of my parrots dive into a toy I just made. I've long ago gotten over any hurt feelings from spending hours making a toy, only to have them not go near it.

Almost every on-line site selling toys has an article or two on how to introduce a new toy to a toy shy parrot.

There are various opinions on when you should rotate toys, weekly, every other week; I've read some articles that say monthly, etc. Personally, I rotate mine as often as I need to, in most cases every 2 to 3 days. This is something you need to determine for yourself.

There are some toys I never rotate, for example, Buddy has a very favorite toy that has shreddables on a chain with a bell attached. It is a store bought toy and I buy these toys, usually 6 at a time. It has to be under his food dish on the left side of his cage. It is his absolute favorite toy. When he has torn it up or soiled it beyond washing, I put in a new one—in exactly the same spot.

Most articles that advise you to rotate toys will also caution you not to remove your parrot's favorite toy.

For every store bought toy or toy part, I have listed the supplier in the Resources section on pages 53 and 54.

1 THE MAKING OF A TOY

DITTO NEEDS SOMETHING TO DO

When to rotate? Ditto just presented me with an example. As I sit here at the computer I can hear him vocalizing in the background, actually he is loud enough to be in the foreground of my thoughts right now.



When I went over to his cage, I observed him perched in one spot not engaged in any activity other than loud vocalizing.

As you can see he has toys, but it looks like all but the braided rope toy are used up and his treat maze is empty. So I would say I need to get him something productive to do right now.



I got some items out of the left over toy container and put them in a crock, then fastened the crock at the bottom of the cage.



I made a quick kabob with a piece of wood, drilled corn, and sunburst wheels.



And I got out a new Scooter World Squid Bungee. This is everyone's absolute favorite store bought toy at my house.

DITTO NEEDS SOMETHING TO DO

In just a few minutes, I changed the cage environment from this.



To this.



1 THE MAKING OF A TOY

DITTO NEEDS SOMETHING TO DO

As you can see in the photos below, Ditto now has something to do in his cage.



First he gets all the treats.



Then he plays with the kabob.



He hunts for buried treasure.

And he plays with the Squid Bungee.



Ditto now has variety, activity, choices to make and problems to solve.

He never does play with the braided rope toy. But later, I can take it out of the cage and hang it on the window boing, or another play stand and it will become a brand new toy, just by moving it to a different area.

A TOY FOR BUDDY



Starting with these items, I'm going to assemble another toy. Here we have a length of vegetable tanned 1/4 inch leather, sunburst wheels, a used up Squid Bungee toy, plastic animals, foam letters (child baby toys), plastic forks & spoons (more baby toys) with holes drilled in handles, beads, empty plastic applesauce cups that have been washed, grass mats, grass rope, a whiffle ball toy with leather and beads, more shreddables, some small pieces of PVC pipe (rings) and wood.

I folded the piece of leather in half and made a knot to have two hanging strands and a loop for hanging. I strung items on both strands of leather. I cut the string off the Squid Bungee and stuffed a foam letter and some shreddable straws in it.

Then I started stringing all items on the lengths of leather.



With the applesauce cups-I punched a hole in the bottom of each and put a PVC ring, sunburst wheel and bead inside and put the two cups together for a sort of puzzler.



A TOY FOR BUDDY

Now lets test it out:

Yes Sir!
It's a good one alright!



OK, so I cheated a little bit here. I knew the minute I put this toy in Buddy's cage that I would be able to get a picture of him playing with it. Had I put this toy in Elvis's or Byrd's or Carrot's cage, they wouldn't have touched it. Not that they would have been afraid of it, it just wouldn't be a toy that held any interest for them. Not toy worthy, so to speak.

My point? This is where making your own toys has its advantage. I knew that all those items I picked out to string on that piece of leather were items of special interest to Buddy. These are some of his favorite things and I can customize a toy to suit his particular interests.

For Byrd it would need to have lots of wood on it. And the wood would have to be easy for her to chew up. Carrot would want pieces of fabric, cotton string or just give him a phone book. Elvis wants easy shreddables like sea grass mats and things he can rub his beak on like polar fleece, or cotton rope and of course phone books.

When I hear people say, "My bird doesn't play with toys." I often wonder, did they try everything they could possibly think of? Or did they buy a toy from the store, stick it in the cage, and when their bird showed little interest; conclude that their bird wouldn't play with toys.

WOOD

A lot of the wood sold for parrot toys we find is a little hard for small beaks to break up. My husband, Jerry, started taking pine 2 x 4's and cutting them across the grain to make pieces that break up easy. I like to have him cut it into pieces about 1/4 to 6/8 inch thick. If it's cut too thick Byrd will give up trying to chew it. We use pine because it's soft and non-toxic to parrots.



I can drill a hole in it and make toys. Or sometimes I just get out a piece of wood, hold it in my hand when Byrd is on the arm of my chair and she chomps away on it.

Now if you want to color your wood pieces, my friend Debbie found the best color at vitacritter.com. They suggest you mix the concentrates with alcohol for more vibrant colors and that is exactly what we did. And we let the wood air dry to dissipate the alcohol. It was right before Easter when Debbie got her sample order of colors and we colored wood instead of eggs.



A TOY FOR BYRD

This is a toy I purchased from Grey Feather Toys and then have refilled it over and over again. It is a stainless steel wire that is shaped like a boing. It came with beads and wooden bone shapes on it.

When Byrd has chewed most of the wood off, I take the toy apart and rebuild it.



You can purchase the toy and when your bird chews off all the wood that comes with it—take it apart and refill it like I did. Or they also sell the stainless steel wire in several sizes. If you get the wire and make one yourself, they caution you the edge of the wire is very sharp and you

need to file it down to a blunt end. They sell stainless steel wire in small, medium and large diameters. I made a boing for Ditto with a larger diameter wire. He's pictured on the cover playing with that toy.



Here is Byrd chewing on the refilled toy.

What to do with that one little left over piece of wood that Byrd had left on the toy? Put a piece of leather thru it, string some beads and you have a new foot toy.



TOYS, TOYS & MORE TOYS

Below is a refillable stainless steel ring with bits of polar fleece tied on it and some sea grass rope and small pieces of wood added in between the polar fleece. You can find the rings at local pet stores or on-line. If you cut a notch in the center of the polar fleece strip it ties on better.



I have one of those portable craft/sewing baskets at the ready. In it I have a container of assorted beads (I like those compartmentalized containers you can get at Wal-Mart, or any craft store), scissors, needle nose pliers, whiffle balls (or the practice golf balls found in sporting goods areas of Wal-Mart), some small pieces of wood and 1/8 inch leather strips. When I have to go places that I anticipate a long wait, I take my craft basket with me and I make foot toys.

I like to thread leather thru the holes in the whiffle ball and string lots of beads on the leather, tying knots in between each bead. It makes a great foot toy.



Or you can add a loop at the top and make it a hanging toy.



Buddy has gotten all there is to get out of this one.

TOYS, TOYS & MORE TOYS



This is a grape wreath purchased at Michaels made more interesting by adding leather, beads, polar fleece & cotton rope.



A stainless steel toy base filled with interesting items.



A stainless steel bell base with wood, and beads added for more interest.



Sunburst wheels; a favorite toy part. You can string them on kabobs, leather, make a foot toy out of them as pictured far left. And when they are all used up, put an almond in the middle and hide it in a toy crock or Zoo Pal cup. Parrots love these. I buy them in bulk from Grey Feather Toys.

Right you see Carrot with an easy toy to make. A length of plastic chain with short pieces of cotton rope tied all over it.



Ditto is on a basket I found at the thrift store. I put buttons, beads and squish balls inside the basket weavings and hung it in the cage with a quick link.

TOYS, TOYS & MORE TOYS

I like to combine Dazzle Rings, Itty Bitty Rings and Animal Links that I get from Grey Feather Toys with other beads I get from craft stores and Wal-Mart and put them on foot toys. The Dazzle Rings, Itty Bitty Rings and Animal Links add texture and rattling fun to the foot toys. When you buy beads from a craft store, make sure they are safe plastic beads.



See those beads top left? They were in a bag of plastic beads I got at Wal-Mart and I just threaded them on a strip of polar fleece and what a hit that is. I had to use a toothpick to poke the polar fleece strip thru the small hole of the bead, but Buddy and Ditto sure do like this toy.



We have two new arrivals in our home. Their owner passed away and our veterinarian thought we might be able to give them homes. Tiny is the Budgie and Boo is the Cockatiel. I didn't have much in the way of small bird toys so I had to come up with something quick. I made Tiny this swing from seeing an example on a small bird toy website. I took a store bought perch, cut the end off, drilled a couple small holes in it and strung beads on small stainless steel wire that I had in my toy bin and fastened the wire to the perch.

I found a mirror in the pet section of Wal-Mart and spiced it up with beads strung on paulie rope and leather. Boo loves looking in the mirror and the beads give him something else to do while he looks at his pretty self. I've referenced the sites that gave me these quick ideas in the Resources section on page 53.



TOYS, TOYS & MORE TOYS



Infant and child toys can be wonderful parrot toys as well. Here you see Buddy with an infant teething toy I found in the baby department at a local store.



A swing can be made from a plastic embroidery hoop covered with cotton rope. When you use cotton rope, make sure it is the bird safe cotton rope.



You can make your own perches. On the internet there are all sorts of sites with lists of non-toxic plants and trees that can be used around parrots.

Take a non-toxic tree branch, wash it in a 1 part bleach to 10 parts water solution and dry it. I put mine on a disposable aluminum oven liner and dry them in the oven on 200 degrees for about an hour.

Drill a hole slightly smaller than the diameter of your hanger bolt. To make it easier to screw in the hanger bolt, put two wing nuts on the very end of the hanger bolt facing each other like I have pictured to the right. Then you can screw in the hanger bolt, attach washers and you have a perch

When you store these be sure it is not in a closed plastic container. I did that and grew mold. Now I store mine in an open cardboard box. Sometimes if the wood is green and even if you dry it, it isn't cured and can grow mold.



2

SHREDDERS

These are toys that give new meaning to the phrase I often heard my grandmother say to me when I was a little girl. “Well you’ve just made a *glorious mess* for me to clean up!”

Your birds are going to have fun chewing, shredding and scattering bits and pieces of these toys all over the place.

I don’t think there are very many of us out there that enjoy cleaning up, but here’s a thought; the bigger the mess, the more active and happily occupied your feathered friend will have been. And that after all, is our goal, is it not?

Put in perspective, the mess our parrots make when playing with toys is indeed a *glorious mess*.

PHONE BOOKS: Another way to recycle them

This is a very easy and inexpensive shreddable toy to make. You will need access to a band saw and drill press. You can cut the phone book in half or thirds, depending on the size you want, with the band saw.



Drill a hole in the top and thread a zip tie through the hole and fasten it to the cage or play gym.



If you don't have a drill press, you can weave the phone book between the bars of the cage.



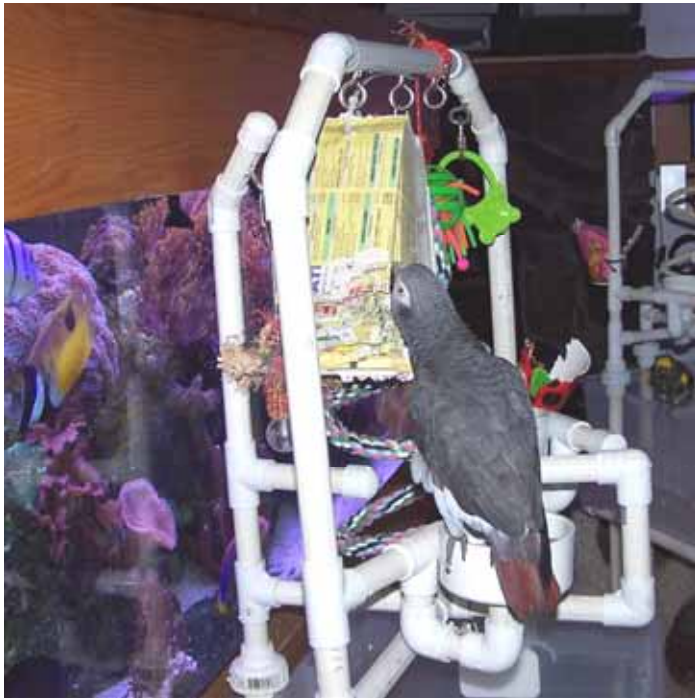
Elvis isn't particular about the method of delivery for his phone books, hang it in the cage or weave it between the bars, it doesn't matter, just give him a phone book and he will shred it.

PHONE BOOKS

I'm sure most of you reading this book already know about phone books. But this was a novel idea for me and it was how I got my very own power tool. I asked Jerry if we had a band saw and he said, "no, why"? I told him I needed a band saw specifically to cut phone books in half. And I could use a drill press as well. I found out, if you ask your husband for power tools, you get them the next day, and good ones too.

If you don't have access to a band saw or drill press and/or aren't sure how to safely use a band saw—you can put the whole book in the bottom of the cage. There are also phone books made for the car that are smaller and you could weave them in the bars of the cage.

See you at the recycle dumpster next year when the new phone books come out.



Phone books aren't just for the cage. Elvis is enjoying shredding a phone book on his play gym in the living room.

Carrot has just made a *glorious mess* shredding his phone book. Coming home to a mess like this always makes me smile. Would you look at how busy Carrot was today?

Looks like Kris gets to have fun with the broom toy now.



OTHER BOOKS & PAPER SHREDDING IDEAS

You can purchase a cage shelf and put a paperback book on the shelf for your bird to chew up. The Salvation Army sells used paperbacks for \$0.10 each.

There is nothing Byrd loves better than a good book.

Byrd on a stainless steel flat shelf.



The shelf that Carrot is on is called a sundeck. The sun-decks come in small and large sizes.

You can also stick the book between the cage bars next to a perch.

Take advantage of your junk mail. One of Byrd's favorite things is to help me open and sort the mail. I put her on a TV tray near my desk and her job is to open all the junk mail.



Byrd claimed dibs on the Cabela's Christmas catalog.



And she opens junk mail and shreds those credit card offers.

ZOO PAL CUPS

I found these Zoo Pal cups at Wal-Mart. Punch 2 small holes in the back of the cup and thread a zip tie through the holes. Then fill cups with edible treats, foot toys and shredded paper. The cups have a lid you can close once you fill them. When filled, tie these cups to the cage bars or on play gym stands. These Zoo Pal cups would also be considered *foraging opportunities* as your parrots are after food and non-food items that are hidden inside something, and it requires work on their part to obtain the items.



Ditto, seeing what's in his Zoo Pal cup.

Byrd just wants to shred her cup.



Ideas to fill cups:

- Nutri-Berries
- Puffed cereal, cheerios
- Bird appropriate size beads
- Small bits of wood or leather
- Small foot toys
- Almonds or other nuts in shell
- Squish balls

I like to stuff these items between colorful shredded paper.

SEA GRASS MATS

My parrots like to shred these sea grass mats and I find all sorts of uses for them. I thread them on skewers to make a piñata like shreddable toy. Hang them on play stands or in the cage.

One of my bird's favorites is strips of polar fleece or leather, threaded through the mat with beads, straws or small pieces of wood tied onto the strips. Then I thread a zip tie through the center of the mat and fasten it to the cage bars. Here is Elvis playing with one.

This toy is uncomplicated and makes up quick .

I either use leather strips or polar fleece strips to tie the beads, straws and bits of wood onto the mat. When you use leather, make sure it is vegetable tanned leather.

I choose to use polar fleece instead of other fabric, because the polar fleece doesn't fray and the possibility of a toe getting caught in a fraying string is less likely with polar fleece.



When your bird has tired of this toy there is usually a small piece or two of the sea grass mat left. These leftover pieces are now foot toys. You can stuff them inside Zoo Pal cups or put them in a toy basket or treasure chest toy.



Jerry is handing Buddy the maize mat he dropped. Maize mats have equal shredding appeal as the sea grass mats. I cut maize mats in quarters and thread them on skewers to add to shreddable kabob toys.

I like to have pieces of these shreddable mats available to hand to a parrot that is on my lap or the arm of my chair to give them something productive to do.

REFILLABLES



Here we have examples of two different types of refillable toy ideas. The toy that Elvis is focused on is a stainless steel toy base. On this base I have strung a Crunch Ball (usually found at local pet stores) filled with plastic Squish Balls. Then added plastic Bunnies & Bears Keys with a Bouncing Atom Ball.

The toy on the left is a refillable stainless steel skewer. I threaded a piñata toy I bought at a local pet store on the skewer, then a maize mat and a garden peat pot (available at any local garden center, Wal-Mart, Lowes, Home Depot). After I threaded the peat pot on the skewer, I filled it with shredded colored paper with a nutri-berry and almond in the shell hidden inside for extra incentive.

REFILLABLES

The Tiki Hut is a refillable stainless steel toy made with shreddable and durable toy parts.



This toy is built on a sturdy stainless steel skewer. When your bird is finished with the toy you can re-invent it by purchasing the Seagrass Shreddable Refill Kit from Grey Feather Toys or use your imagination and find other things to refill it with.



As you can see, the Tiki Hut is a hit at my house. I refilled this one with pieces of maize mats, sea grass rope and a peat pot. I will often thread a piece of drilled corn (available at local pet stores) onto the skewer and then cover the corn with a peat pot. My birds love to chew thru the peat pot to get at the corn, and then we have another *glorious mess* and more vacuuming fun for me. I am always impressed at how far they can scatter those dried kernels of corn.



DON'T THROW OUT THAT BOX

It's a Toy, don't you know?



Carrot loves to crawl into any box and shred the box and whatever is inside of it. Carrot is a male so I feel comfortable putting a box in his cage without the worry of triggering egg laying. Also Carrot does not get aggressive around his box.

On the other hand, I've never put a box in Byrd's cage. I think she would see that as a nesting opportunity. And, knowing her personality, I hesitate to give her access to any box she can crawl into (like the oatmeal box) as I'm confident that would set me up to receive a bite. My point? Know your bird; some of the ideas presented in this publication aren't suitable for every parrot.

Byrd does enjoy standing on a box on her play gym and tearing it to shreds. Apparently this is neutral territory and she feels no need to defend it. She's happy; I'm happy watching her and I can approach her without her lunging and trying to bite.



3

TREASURE HUNTING

In the wild, parrots spend a lot of hours in each day foraging for food. In captivity food is, more often than not, readily available and the activity of obtaining food doesn't require very much of our bird's time. So what can we as caretakers do to provide foraging opportunities for our pet birds?

Many, many things. Almost every web site that sells parrot toys has a section dedicated to foraging toys. There are also books, articles and DVD's available that are devoted to the subject of foraging.

Foraging toys can be as simple as hanging a kabob filled with fresh fruits and vegetables inside the cage, or providing a more complicated puzzle toy filled with favorite treats.

When you provide your bird with foraging opportunities you help alleviate boredom and encourage more active behaviors.

FOOD KABOBS



I prefer this type of kabob or skewer as opposed to the thicker stainless steel skewer with the ball on the end. This skewer has a smaller base and it is easier to thread the food on.

You can usually find this skewer at local pet stores. Sometimes it is in the small critter section.

With the larger skewer (bottom right) I find the base is thicker and pieces of food break apart when I thread them on.



Ditto loves a good kabob.

This is the larger skewer with the ball on the end. The washer in the picture is an optional item.

As you can see in this picture it can be used as a food kabob. But I find it easier to use it for a refillable toy as in the example on page 23 and 24 of this book. I fill mine with shreddable/chewable toys.



MORE KABOB IDEAS

These kabobs are filled with shreddables, but I also consider them to be foraging opportunities. I hide treats and foot toys in the peat cups or paper cups. There is no end to what you can thread on these skewers to make an attractive kabob. Plastic animals, sunburst wheels, paper plates, paper bowls (thread on two bowls, facing each other and hide a treat between the bowls), etc.



Here is a picture of Chloe on her artichoke kabob. It is posted in the Enrichment section on the Parrot Behavior Analysis Solutions (PBAS) list.

You can open the leaves of the artichoke and place food between the leaves, including almond butter smeared between a few of them to encourage more exploring.



REFILLABLE FORAGING TOYS

There are a variety of foraging toys that can be purchased at local pet stores and on-line. Here are a few of my flock's favorites:



Buddy is very busy here. He knows there is a grape somewhere inside his Carousel Treat Holder.



I like to put a grape, nutri-berry, almond or other favorite treat item inside this treat holder and then stuff mustard, turnip, collard greens or Swiss chard all around the favorite treat. In the process of tearing thru the greens to get to the prized treat, it is my hope that my parrot may ingest some of the greens.

This is a Jungle Talk Carousel Treat Holder. It is available in 2 sizes, small and large.



This is another treat holder that I found at a local pet store. I think it is either a Jungle Talk or Bullet Proof product. I like this one because it comes in 2 sizes and it comes apart for easy cleaning.

In the picture, right, I have filled this toy with food and non-food items; nuts, a piece of left over sea grass mat, beads and a squish ball.



REFILLABLE FORAGING TOYS

An all time favorite is this treat maze. I got mine at Grey Feather Toys, but you can find these at several on-line parrot toy sites.

It can be filled with a favorite treat, cereal, nuts or pellets. I will also put in non-food items; bird appropriate size beads, small pieces of wood or other shreddables, etc. It is fun to watch your parrot spin the wheel to get the goodies out of this toy. This is also a toy that comes apart for easy cleaning.



I've noticed with this toy and other foraging toys, that my parrots will be more interested in consuming the food item they retrieve from the toy or they will spend more time playing with an item they have to work to get at.



Elvis is after goldfish.



Carrot got a prize almond.

REFILLABLE FORAGING TOYS

Below are more examples of refillable foraging toys that can be purchased on-line or at local pet stores. Most of these treat holders can be found at several on-line sites selling parrot toys.



Byrd works at getting an almond out of this block of wood.



Ditto works for treats hidden in this Kong toy.

Below are pictures of various foraging toys available at on-line sites and local pet stores.



Treasure chests come in two sizes.

SOME SIMPLE IDEAS

I find my parrots are more interested in greens when I weave them through the cage bars.



When you prepare vegetables, let them help. Put them on the counter, let them be involved in the fresh food preparations. It might take you longer to chop the veggies and make the birdie bread, but you will all have fun.



Or you can put your parrot on a nearby perch and as you chop hand him a piece of carrot, a sugar snap pea, a jalapeno pepper.

Pamela Clark told me how she separates a walnut into perfect halves. Hold the walnut in a kitchen towel or potholder and insert a table knife into the wide end of the walnut shell then twist it open.



Walnuts on the half shell for Buddy.

MORE FORAGING IDEAS

I keep a crock on the bar above the kitchen counter filled with dog treats. I put Carrot on a perch on the counter, gave him a treat to keep busy with and hopefully out of my way while I was preparing dinner. He finished his treat, climbed off his perch and into the crock. He had great fun throwing all the dog treats out of the crock onto the counter. His head kept popping up out of the jar just like a little Jack-in-the-Box.



It seems like at our house, we keep everything on the kitchen counter. Here you see Byrd ready to forage in the container of recycled toy parts that have been washed. Would you look at all her choices? She can go to the dog treat crock, or the toy part container, or there is a whole banana, you can't see in the photo, on the counter to the right that she could tear into. My bet is it won't be long before most or all of those parts will be all over the counter and on the floor.

I learned this one from reading one of Pamela Clark's articles. I like to put a big crock at the bottom of the cage and fill it with foot toys, pieces of wood, beads, shreddable items, etc. I hide a treat or two in the crock to make it more interesting.



4

PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

In her article, The Optimal Environment Part Three—The Creative Cage, Pamela Clark says it best:

“Alternate Perching Sites

Companion parrots also need perching areas in other rooms of the house. Parrots need to go places. They are very “visual” creatures...their overall experience and satisfaction with life often is increased and augmented in captivity just by moving them from room to room with a family member or from perch to perch in the same room. Just seeing the same room from a different perspective can provide stimulation to a parrot that has been in his cage for most of the day.

The same swings and coiled rope perches that can be used on a hook over a cage will also serve as alternate perching sites around the house, if hung from the ceiling. If chewing on the ceiling is a concern, there are acrylic devices that can be used between the perch and the ceiling. Bell Plastics of the Sierras carries a great “ceiling saver,” which can be ordered by calling (210) 928-5676.

Playstands come in all sizes and shapes, and having both freestanding and tabletop versions adds more variety to a parrot’s life experience. The perches that attach with suction cups, usually sold for use in the shower, can also be placed on the bathroom mirror. There is nothing an African Grey usually loves more than looking at himself in the mirror while his owner is getting dressed in the morning, and other species appreciate this experience as well.”

Pamela Clark is an IAABC Certified Parrot Behavior Consultant. More of her articles can be found at the Parrot House’s web site. The web address is:

<http://www.parrothouse.com/pamelaclark/>.

PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS

I built my first gym following instructions in [Parrot-Toys & Play Areas](#). I built the standard gym with 3/4 inch PVC for the base and 1/2-inch for the top and perches for Byrd. Jerry and I observed her moving around on the new play gym and we started modifying accordingly.



This was a very good start. However, Byrd got into the habit of tossing food to the dogs and watching them scramble for it. At this time Byrd was an only parrot. I thought we could come up with a smaller gym with a food and dropping catcher.

I wanted to have a bucket under the food cups and Jerry came up with the idea to add unions so you could disassemble the play gym. At first we had unions on 4 sides, but it was awkward to have to unscrew the unions and take the top part of the gym off to get the bucket out to clean it.

This is what we ended up with. Notice in the front of the bucket there is no PVC pipe or union which lets you lift the bucket straight out to clean, it's much handier. I don't have the food cups on the gym in this picture, but you can see the food cup holders. I like having food cups lower on the gym instead of on the top bar, because it promotes more activity. They have to climb down from the top to get to the food cups. And the bucket should catch all the food and droppings, right?



PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS

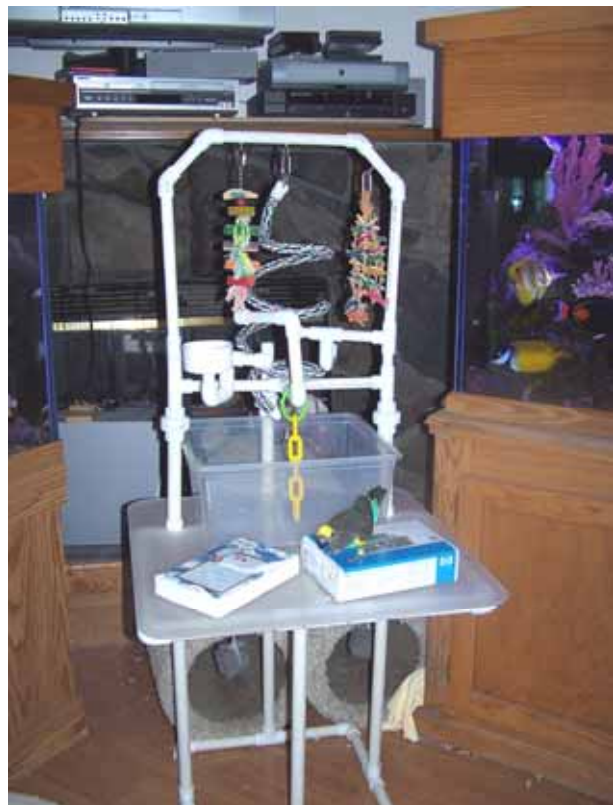


Wrong. But I think in theory, it was still a good idea. And of course, after Buddy is finished with his food he will throw what's left down to the dogs.

I still like this set up, it gives them another place to climb and explore and retrieve the grape they threw out when the food cup was first filled. I can put a bowl of toys in the bucket to add variety. And it is easy to clean and wash up.

I like using PVC because it is easy to wash, but for those of you that have access to a lot of wood rather than PVC each of these stands could be replicated in bird safe wood.

When she has the opportunity, Byrd spends more time shredding books and boxes. I thought it would be great if her gym could have a flat surface. We got a 24 inch square sheet of plexi-glass from Speedy Auto Glass. Jerry drilled holes in it to fit over the smaller end of the unions and rounded the corners. Then we sanded it to give it an opaque finish. I designed the frame to accommodate the plexi-glass, and Byrd has her gym with flat surface. I used to put a little ladder on the bucket that went down to the shelf, but both Carrot and Byrd can climb down off that small bucket to the shelf without the ladder. Of course, the ladder gives them another something to chew.



PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS



I don't wrap the perches in vet wrap. I use a Dremel tool to carve grooves in the perches, PVC pipe on the side and bars across the top. I don't glue the perches in place, I make these so all the pieces come apart and I can put them in the sink and scrub them and put them in the dishwasher. Of note, the food cups are made out of PVC caps and they will warp on the bottom rack of the dishwasher. So I put everything on the top rack only.

Parrot-Toys & Play Areas goes into great detail on ideas for wrapping perches to include accommodating birds with missing feet or toes. If you are considering making one of these gyms, I would suggest you get this book.



For food cups I use PVC caps in a variety of sizes. I cut a small piece of pipe the diameter of the connector I plan to use and glue it to the bottom of the cap. I sand the bottom of the cap to make a better seal for the glue.



As you can see everything comes apart. All the perches are off and in the sink.



Next I just have to unscrew the unions, remove the top of the gym, and I can take the shelf off to clean it.

The other play gyms come apart in much the same way, they just don't have a shelf.

4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS

You can make these gyms in a size to suit small to large parrots. I don't have large parrots, so I don't have a lot of examples of toys and play gyms for the larger birds.



However, here is one I made for a larger bird last summer. The base is 1 1/4 inch PVC, and I used 1 1/4 inch to 1 inch reducers and then I put in three 1 inch unions and built with 1 inch PVC up from there. The food cups are 4" caps with a 1 inch piece of PVC glued on the bottom which gives you something to fit into the 1 inch 90 that holds the cup and allows you to remove the cup for cleaning. You can use a 90 at the end of the perch to hold the food cup, but I like to put a T in the middle then attach 2 90's like in this picture. It gives the parrot a choice of standing on the perch to eat, but most times they stand on the cap.

I don't glue many parts together except for the food cup holder.



I glue the 90 that is connected to the T as well as the two 90 degree connectors together. This prevents the cup from falling off, if your parrot prefers standing on the cup to eat.

I score every area I think they are going to climb on with the Dremel tool, including the connectors.

I use stainless steel screw eyes for hangers. You can find them at hardware stores or on-line at some parrot toy stores. Just make sure they are not made of zinc if you find them at a hardware store.



You don't need power tools to make these gyms. Pictured bottom left is a ratcheted PVC pipe cutter. The ratcheting action makes it easier to cut the pipe, you can get these at any Home Depot. Perches can be wrapped with vet wrap.

I use the mallet to pound the frame together so I don't have to use PVC cement. From experience I will tell you not to go crazy pounding in the perches or you will never get them out for cleaning.

4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS



Here is an example of a hanging play area. I found a child's saucer sled at Toys-R-Us. I drilled 4 holes in the saucer. Built a simple PVC top and attached it altogether with plastic chain. You can find plastic chain at Home Depot or Lowe's and I've seen it at Wal-Mart. I think the yellow chain is larger diameter and could be used for large birds

I like using a frame such as this because it gives them more room at the top for play, rather than having all the chains converging in the center to a single point.



This is made with 1 inch PVC & stainless steel screw eyes. In this picture you see the PVC isn't scored with a Dremel tool. Silly me, I wanted my parrots to stay on the boing or chain and play with the toys. But a parrot needs to be on top, don't you know? So I scored this one and all the other ones I've made since this one. They're going to get up there so we might as well give them a secure perch.

The only way I could figure out how to attach the plastic chain to the saucer sled was with stainless steel quick links. On the right is an example using a very large quick link and on the left, if you can't find a quick link large enough to fit thru the hole and the plastic, you can use 2 smaller ones.



The nice thing about this set-up is that it is very easy to take the saucer off and wash it.



PLAY STANDS & PLAY GYMS



I made this smaller hanging play area for the bathroom. The base is a plant saucer I found at Wal-Mart and it was the right color. It seems grey and green are neutral non-threatening colors to my flock. I have some parrots that are terrified of orange and blue saucers.

The PVC is 1/2 inch.

I hang toys and weave shreddables in the chain for interest.

Even though this is a smaller hanging play stand, it accommodates Ditto quite well.

As Pam Clark says, "Parrots need to go places". With this hanging play stand, I can bring a parrot into the bathroom and they can watch me brush my teeth, blow dry my hair, take a bath, and on rare occasions, put on make-up.

It is just one more place to go with things to do and see outside of their cage.



PLAY STANDS, PLAY GYMS & ALTERNATE PLAY AREAS



Hang a boing from the ceiling and attach some toys to it. Here Buddy is playing on the braided rope toy that is hanging down the center of the boing.

To the right Ditto illustrates the need for ceiling protectors. If not for the ceiling protector, he would be up there chewing on the track lights. Land Of Vos has good instructions on making a ceiling protector in the “Do It Yourself” section of their website.



Here we have a set of book shelves next to Jerry’s recliner. We’ve let the birds have the lower shelf and put what is important to us on the top two shelves. Fortunately for us, not one of our parrots has been inclined to figure out how to get to the shelves above their shelf.

I took Carrot to work with me and my boss tied a bagel to the handle of this basket and put Carrot on it. This is a great idea for an alternate play area, but not a good example of a basket to use for that purpose.



A good basket is similar to this one, left, that Monica Gonzalez has pictured on her Bird Toy Projects page at grey-feathertoys.com. It is made of untreated wicker or willow and has a wide base with a sturdy handle. You don’t want the handle too high off the basket like the one pictured above. A shorter handle will provide more balance when your bird plays on it. You can carry the basket from room to room. Tie on toys and/or fill with toys to make it more interesting.

PLAY STANDS, PLAY GYMS & ALTERNATE PLAY AREAS



This is simply a basket with a piece of Wacky Wood thru the handles. I added toys inside and out. You could use a dowel or tree branch instead of the Wacky Wood.

This idea could be adapted for a very large parrot by using a larger wicker laundry basket.

At first when my birds perched on the basket edge, the basket would tilt forward and wobble so they wanted no part of it.

Byrd likes to shred the basket.

To stabilize the basket I got two stainless steel toy extenders and attached them to the basket with quick links in this manner to steady the basket and then put a length of 1 1/4 inch PVC pipe over the extenders.

This basket play area hangs off the ceiling at the end of and above my kitchen counter.



Buddy is our little acrobat. He swings from the toys hanging on the side.

To the right you see Ditto likes to investigate what's inside the basket. Here he found a walnut half.



4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

PLAY STANDS, PLAY GYMS & ALTERNATE PLAY AREAS

My friend Debbie Ross has shared photos of her play gyms and stands with us:



This is a large multiple bird play gym that her husband, Steve, built. It usually sits on a large platform stand in the living room. It is in the bird room now to make room for the Christmas tree. He used the examples and instructions in [Parrot-Toys & Play Areas](#) as a guide to make this stand.



Here is a picture of two of Debbie's birds on the play gym when it was in the living room.



This is another play stand that Debbie has in the living room. This is Deano's favorite place to be.

THE AVIARY

Here is an excerpt from Pamela Clark's article, The Optimal Environment Part Three—The Creative Cage:

“The Outdoor Aviary... An Opportunity for Exuberance

It is also my conviction that parrots need fresh air and sunshine and that the provision of an outdoor aviary is one of the best investments that can be made. Whenever I suggest this, I often receive a voiced objection from those living in areas that experience a harsh winter. However, I also know those who live in similar areas, who have gone ahead and put in such an aviary and just use it whenever the weather permits. I have several outdoor aviaries for my parrots, and I think that allowing them time in these does more to guarantee their overall satisfaction with life than any other single thing I do.

An outdoor aviary affords a bird some time alone...away from us. This is something my parrots seem to appreciate. They have a life in their outdoor aviary that I do not share, for the most part. This creates for them, if only for a few hours, a feeling of autonomy because they can play vigorously, making different choices about what to do next, without being totally dependent upon me.

Have a Bath?

Further, such an aviary can provide the opportunity for much more exercise than a cage does, simply due to the larger size. My Blue and Gold plays regularly in one aviary right outside my kitchen window. As I wash bird dishes in the morning, I enjoy watching him and never fail to be struck by his level of activity while out there and the exuberance with which he plays. There is no comparison to his level of activity in his indoor cage, even though he has a very large cage. He is a very busy bird while out there.

He trounces through the large terra cotta plant saucer that serves as a bathtub. He throws his foot toys around, spreads his wings in delight and runs through the ice cold water, yelling the statement, “Have a bath...have a bath...” He takes his favorite Kong toy and throws it into the water to give it a bath, asking it, “Have a bath? Have a bath?”

When thirsty, he drinks from his Kong. He sticks it on the end of his bottom beak, dips it into the clear water and then tips his head backward in sheer joy as the water trickles down his throat. When exhausted from his bath, he climbs up on to his highest natural branch, carrying his Kong with him. He then fills it with pellets or fresh food from his dish, and sits contentedly enjoying his snack that he keeps in his Kong. Once he's rested again, he hangs and swings from the many ladders and swings that hang from the top of the flight. He has 5, and can decide which one or which combination he will play on. Then, back down to the bottom of the flight he goes again to push around the see-through Fisher Price play ball that has the beads inside.

The emotion he expresses when out there is one of *exuberance*. He plays hard when out there, being able to do so much more than when he's in his main cage, and comes in tired and relaxed at the end of the day. Why does he feel so relaxed when he comes indoors at the end of the day? It is now widely accepted that emotions have the ability to impact how we feel physically. Going around angry or stressed during a day will result in tense muscles, lack of appetite and a sense of fatigue in many of us. However, a walk outdoors or an hour in the garden will once again set us to rights. Why should it be any different for our parrots, who evolved to live their entire lives outdoors? Thus, the provision of a secure outdoor aviary is a great gift.

THE AVIARY

Wire Issues

These aviaries come in many sizes and shapes. It is possible to get a galvanized, welded wire aviary from one of the companies that sells such aviaries to bird breeders. Advertisements for these can be found in *Bird Talk* magazine. This is the kind I use. There is now widely recognized concern over using wire aviaries because of the danger of a parrot ingesting zinc from the galvanized wire. However, several things can be done to minimize this danger. The wire can be scrubbed with a wire brush to remove any loose zinc flakes. It can also be painted with the type of non-toxic cage paint now sold in many bird stores. Aviculturist Eb Cravens also once reported that, by wiring perches or appropriately-sized tree branches onto the inner sides of the wire enclosures, the birds will be encouraged to climb from place to place by gripping these with their beaks, so that they do not even touch the wire when climbing.

Further, in my experience, companion parrots who live most of their lives indoors are so happy at the chance to play outdoors in a familiar aviary that they do not cling to the wire, nor are they interested in chewing on it. There are far too many other, more interesting, things to do.

Outdoor Diversions

Thus, the provision of enough opportunities for exploration and activity does more to keep the birds off the wire than anything else. My favorite outdoor aviary, the one in which my Blue and Gold Macaw has so much fun, has a large terra cotta dish on the bottom for bathing. It also frequently has a flat of wheat grass that I have grown and placed in there for digging and chewing, or simply rolling around on. I notice that there is nothing Golding loves more than to walk on the soft grass and roll his stomach around on it. He rarely eats or digs in the grass, although my African Greys do.

There are food and water dishes, and enough perches to afford time in both sun and shade. Half of the aviary is covered with plywood, so that any bird out there can take shelter both from the sun and the view of any predators that might fly by overhead. There are also numerous opportunities for active play, in the form of swings and ladders. *Perma Play Products* manufactures a wonderful ladder that, when hung vertically from the ceiling of the aviary, encourages both climbing and flapping skills. *Bell Plastics* has a great selection of acrylic swings, perches and toys that withstand outdoor weather. The Tweeter Totter rocking swing, made by Sweet Feet and Beaks (770-983-0184) entertains two birds at once. This can also be ordered from *The Birdbrain* catalogue (www.thebirdbrain.com or 888-923-2140).

All of these diversions are so intriguing that the birds do not spend time on the wire. However, for those who still remain nervous about having their birds in welded wire enclosures, there are now a number of companies who sell powder-coated enclosures that are quite safe, as well as visually more attractive than the “breeder” style aviaries. The investment in one of these can be well worth the peace of mind. Some of the nicest are manufactured and sold by *Heavenly Habitats*, *Exotic Enclosures*, *Corners Limited* and *Expandable Habitats*.”

4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

THE AVIARY

This past spring Jerry came up with the idea to enclose our back porch. We were concerned about using galvanized wire but he built it in such a way that we felt it was not a problem. To the existing porch railing he nailed pressure treated wood, then added the wire and nailed untreated pine molding to the inside to cover the exposed edges of wire. Since this is right off the kitchen area on the back porch we can watch our parrots when they are out there to be sure they don't chew on wire and the way Jerry built it, they don't get to the pressure treated wood. At the end of the porch going down the stairs to the lower deck, he installed a screen door.

I have to say Pam is right, this is the single best thing we've done for our parrots. Granted we live in Alaska and our season is short, but we still have plenty of opportunities to get our parrots outdoors. The fact that this aviary is a back porch makes it even more accessible and convenient. I just open the back door and out we go.



A view from the back of the house.



The aviary screen door.

A view from the inside of the house going out to the aviary.



THE AVIARY



On the inside, Jerry made these holders for PVC pipe out of PVC bulkheads in a block of untreated pine.

Then I was able to screw in a connector and start building play stands.

The play stands were built of PVC. These baskets were made much the same way as the one you see on page 41. And I hung some toys, a boing or two and a pot of nasturtiums.



Above you see Elvis on a short stand. He had a severe wing trim and when startled he fell hard. We built him this shorter playstand until he was able to climb on a taller one without falling so much. But he still got out and enjoyed the sun.

THE AVIARY

If you don't have the means or the area to build an outdoor aviary, there are other ways to get your parrots outdoors in nice weather, even in Alaska.

Debbie Ross has a large deck over her garage. She has several portable cages that she sets up on the deck in the early spring and leaves them there all summer. Her parrots are able to enjoy the sunshine in their cages on the deck. She uses tree branches for perches and puts in toys for them to play with outside. Her parrots also enjoy being sprayed outside with a garden hose with a shower wand attachment.

I've heard from several people that their parrots seem to enjoy bathing more when given the opportunity to experience a bath outdoors.

I find that to be true with my parrots. Here you see Ditto enjoying a spraying outside in the aviary. I rarely see him spread his wings in this way when I bathe him indoors in the shower.

If you do decide to put a cage outdoors for your parrot to get fresh air, here are some points to be mindful of:

- ◆ The advisability of getting a parrot outdoors in a cage depends upon the bird and the size of the cage.
 - Parrots may not do well being placed outdoors in a small cage because this can really increase anxiety levels. They know that they have no room to move, so if they see a raptor overhead it's very scary.
 - Raccoons or other predators may be a problem with a bird in a cage, since they can reach right through the bars of the cage.
- ◆ Wire issues are a concern with an outdoor cage, since it is smaller in size than an aviary, chewing on the wire may be a concern and the cage should be constructed of bird safe wire.
- ◆ Protection from the elements may also be required.
 - Consider temperature extremes and make sure shade is available when it is extremely hot. If too cold, bring them in of course.



Even with our aviary, I am either with them on the porch when they are out, or in the kitchen where I have a direct view of the aviary. Also, not every parrot in our house took to the aviary experience right away. Ditto loved it from the start. Buddy was afraid to go out at first. The outdoor experience was one he needed to be gradually exposed to. A lawn mower starting up in the neighborhood would startle him.

Once when Ditto was out alone, I heard an alarm call from him and saw him fly by and attach to the screen door. I went out to see a cat on the aviary roof. I was able to get Ditto in and shoo the cat away with a squirt bottle. Luckily I had been in the habit of being, either in the aviary or in direct sight of the aviary, so I was able to rescue Ditto immediately and in short time he was comfortable with going back outside to the aviary.

4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

In her article, [Straight Talk About Parrot Behavior](#), Susan G. Friedman, PHD, writes:

“Parrots are like 3-5 year old children.

To investigate animals’ cognitive ability, Irene Pepperberg studied the learning behavior of Alex, an African grey parrot. Of course one of the uniquely intriguing characteristics of parrots for this type of research is that many parrots talk. Over 20 years of intensive training, representing tens of thousands of instructional hours, Alex learned to discriminate 50 object labels; 5 shapes; 7 colors; 4 materials; quantities up to 6, and the concepts same/different and bigger/smaller. For people who thought these skills could only be mastered by humans, or at best great apes, it is a stunning demonstration of animal learning. As described by Pepperberg, “It is incredibly fascinating to have creatures so evolutionarily separate from humans performing simple forms of the same types of complex cognitive tasks as do young children.” (see <http://www.edge.org/documents/archive/edge126.html>).

Even for those of us who hail ourselves as having suspected as much all along, the scientific control of this demonstration allowed us to replace our own fallible common sense with facts. However, these data also bring to light another important issue for companion parrot caregivers that strikes at the heart of our greatest dilemma: Can we meet parrots’ behavioral needs in our living rooms? On the one hand, the comparison to children makes a striking point: Parrots are not like potted plants that thrive on only water, sunshine and rich soil. They are not décor to accent the subtle hues of our throw pillows. They are intelligent thinking, emoting, and doing creatures that are built to behave not to be still.

On the other hand, it is reasonable to suspect that other species of animals can learn similarly stunning discriminations given the same intensive learning opportunity. In fact, I can’t even imagine what a human would learn over 20 years of individualized daily instruction. Thus, the real message transcends the comparison of parrots to children. It is not an issue of so-called intellectual capacity, lest we replace one kind of speciesism for another. By this I mean, don’t *all* animals in our care deserve to live stimulating lives, rich with variation, activity, and problems to solve? Or is this standard of living for only those species that learn simple forms of the same types of complex cognitive tasks performed by young children?

There is another consideration, as well. In what way does the frequently exaggerated interpretation that parrots are like 3-5 year old children actually hurt parrots? How many parrots are relinquished because they didn’t meet people’s expectations as feather kids, (e.g., did not follow directions or displayed aggression to strangers)? For your information, below is a partial list of behaviors characteristic of most 3-5 year old children. The list includes just cognitive oriented tasks. There are scores of other behaviors not on this list from the social and physical skill domains.

- can place objects in a line from largest to smallest
- can recognize some letters if taught
- may be able to print own name
- recognizes familiar words in simple books or signs
- understands the concepts of "tallest, biggest, same, more, on, in, under, and above

4 PARROTS NEED TO GO PLACES

- counts 1-7 objects out loud - but not always in the right order
- understands the order of daily routines
- speaks in fairly complex sentences, e.g. "The baby ate the cookie before I could put it on the table."
- asks a lot of questions, including ones on birth and death
- enjoys singing simple songs, rhymes, and nonsense words
- adapts language to listener's level of understanding
- learns name, address and phone number
- if taught asks and answers who, what, when, why, and where questions
- continues one activity for 10-15 minutes
- names 6-8 colors and 3 shapes
- follows 2 unrelated directions
- has basic understanding of concepts related to number, size, weight, colors, textures, distance, position, and time;
- understands immediate passage of time as in what happened yesterday, but does not understand calendar time;
- has long attention span and finishes activities;
- understands and remembers own accomplishments;
- adds "ed" to words ("I goed to the door and put-ed the cat outdoors and "He hurt-ed me.").

The take-home message is that parrots are not kids and kids are not parrots. As eloquently stated by Marion Breland Bailey, "Every animal is the smartest for the ecological niche in which it lives - if it were not, it would not be there." Few of us take the time to learn about parrots' unique characteristics which are often very different than humans and vital to understanding, predicting and influencing their behavior. Parrots hear, see, digest and even breathe differently than we do. And of course, kids can't fly. In what ways do we fail to meet parrots' needs because we tend to admire them most when they reflect to us our own image?"

Susan G. Friedman, Ph.D., is currently a faculty member in the Department of Psychology at Utah State University. A Behaviorist for more than 25 years, her area of expertise is learning and behavior with a special emphasis on children's behavior disorders. In the last several years, Susan has helped pioneer efforts to apply to animals the humane philosophy and scientifically sound teaching technology from the field of Applied Behavior Analysis, which has been so effective with human learners. *The guiding principle of this approach is a hierarchy of teaching interventions starting with the most positive, least intrusive, effective behavior solutions.*

Susan is a steadfast proponent of changing behavior through facilitation rather than force. These tools of facilitation focus on animals' extraordinary biologic capacity to learn by interacting with their environment. By changing the environment for success, animals learn to behave successfully. These principles and methods comprise her course, Living and Learning with Parrots: The Fundamental Principles of Behavior, which she teaches several times a year in workshops and on the internet.

You can find more information about the Living and Learning with Parrots (LLP) course and how to register to take the course at behaviorworks.org.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

I wholeheartedly agree with Pam that our “parrots need to go places”. And with Susan that “they are built to behave not to be still”. I also believe, with a little imagination and dedication on our part, “we can meet parrots’ behavioral needs in our living rooms”.

There are many places in our homes where we can put a play stand, either free standing or hanging. We can put one in the living room, bedroom, kitchen or even the bathroom. And we can put all sorts of things to do on those play stands and play gyms to empower our parrots’ with the ability to make choices, solve problems and keep active.

For example, I never fold laundry alone. I always bring at least one parrot into the bedroom and place them on the bed to help me fold laundry. Byrd usually goes to the headboard and investigates that area (I usually put a foot toy or two there for her to find, or a box to chew). Ditto makes it more interesting for me though, he runs around on the bed attacking all the folded piles of clothes, which results in my having to fold them all over again, but I get the biggest kick out of watching him. Cheap entertainment for us both, I’m thinking. For these activities, I don’t even need a play stand, just a bed and a pile of laundry.

There are times in our living room, when our birds start playing what I call musical playstands. Buddy will fly over to Ditto’s playstand and eat the food in Ditto’s dish that he didn’t eat in his own dish. Ditto will fly over to Elvis’s playstand to shred his phone book even though Ditto has one he hasn’t touched on his own playstand—and on it goes. This is a perfect example of what Pam wrote, “Just seeing the same room from a different perspective can provide stimulation to a parrot that has been in his cage for most of the day.” These playstands are all in the one living room, constructed in much the same way with similar toys on them and the same food in each dish. But just moving to an adjacent playstand stimulates a parrot in our house to play with a toy that they weren’t playing with on their playstand; or eat the same food they wouldn’t eat in their dish because it is from some other parrot’s dish.

I’d also like to leave you with more thoughts on individuality in the types of toys each parrot might interact with. This is such an important point to remember and I feel I can’t stress it enough. By now you see I’m big on examples and here is another one.

On page 42 you see Byrd on the basket above the kitchen counter and she is busy shredding that basket. I also like to give my parrots a small basket of toys in their cage or on their playstand. They can forage for what’s in the basket or they can chew up the basket after they throw everything out of it. But I cannot give Byrd a basket in her cage or on her playstand—she is afraid of it. Even the smallest wicker basket will have her growling and backing away if placed in her cage or on her playstand. But she has no fear of the larger basket she is on in the picture on page 42 and she will climb onto the basket that is hanging from the aviary playstand pictured on page 47. So, do you see how we need to be mindful of our parrots individuality? Byrd is not afraid of baskets in general, but I must be careful in how I present the basket to her and what size and shape the basket is that I present to her.

THE END

?

I sincerely hope not! I hope this is just the beginning, and that after reading through this booklet, you are motivated to think of more and more ways to enrich your parrot's environment.

Go on-line, join the PBAS list, sign up for LLP, exchange ideas with other parrot owners. If you don't know of any local parrot groups or clubs in your area, ask your avian veterinarian. In Anchorage we have the Alaska Bird Club and Parrot Education and Adoption Center. I found out about those organizations from my veterinarian.

Keep learning, networking and sharing your ideas.

Thank you for taking the time to read The Parrot Enrichment Activity Book, V1.0. If you've found some worthwhile ideas to use at your house, then I'm delighted.

Sincerely,

Kris Porter

RESOURCES

The following lists resources where you can find some of the toy parts and toys referenced in this book as well as more information on toy safety, foraging and enrichment.

- <http://parrotislandinc.com>—They have a good deal of foraging toys as well as Scooter World toys. At the end of each toy page you can click on articles on toy safety as well as tips on introducing new toys to your bird. This is the supplier for:
 - Squid Bungee Toy, pg. 6
 - Bunnies & Bears Keys, pg. 23
 - Squish Balls, pg. 23
 - Bouncing Atom Ball, pg. 23
- <http://www.rosespet.com>—sells the newly released DVD Captive Foraging, by Dr. Scott Echols. This is the supplier for:
 - Stainless Steel Rings, pg. 13
 - Stainless Steel Skewer, pg. 23 & 27
- <http://www.greyfeathertoys.com>—You can purchase toys or toy making kits and parts and they are the only site I know of that is exclusively stainless steel. At the bottom left of their home page is a section For Our Customers; in there are toy safety info, FAQ's, and articles on New Bird Toy Introduction 101. Grey Feather Toys has a newsletter you can sign up to get via e-mail. In it Monica Gonzalez gives toy making tips. This is the supplier for:
 - Boing O Bones Toy, pg. 12
 - Sunburst Wheels, pg. 14
 - Seagrass & Maize Mats, pg. 22
 - Stainless Steel Skewer, pg. 23
 - Treat Maze, pg. 30
 - Stainless Steel Toy Base, pg. 14 & 23
 - Stainless Bell Base, pg. 14
 - Stainless Steel Flat Shelf, pg. 20
 - Tiki Hut, pg. 24
 - Stainless Steel Toy Extenders, pg. 42
- <http://www.beakapoo.com/>—this on-line store has a large selection of wonderfully made and reasonably priced small bird toys as well as larger bird toys. This is the supplier for:
 - Tinker Bell Swing, pg. 15 (Note: The tinker bell swing they sell is much nicer than the one I made for Tiny pictured on page 15, but this is where I got the idea)
- <http://www.drsfostersmith.com>—This is the supplier for:
 - Sundeck, pg. 20
 - Wacky Wood, pg. 42
- <http://www.smartbirdtoys.com>—This is the supplier for:
 - Treasure Chests, pg. 31
- <http://www.squawkstore.com/store>—This is the supplier for:
 - Carousel Treat Holder, pg. 29
- <http://nalanitoys.com/>—this on-line store has lots of toys and a good selection of toys for the smaller birds including parakeets.

RESOURCES

- <http://www.birdsjustwannahavefun.com>—this on-line store sells some good foraging toys. On their home page they have a section on Toy Making you can click on with more good ideas.
- <http://www.windycityparrot.com>—lots of foraging toys and ideas here.
- <http://www.itsagreysworld.com/articles>—this is a Grey Feather Toys site. They have articles on The Art of Toy Making and Foraging.
- If you go to www.google.com and do a search for Foraging Toys for Birds by Holly Nash you can get to her article at peteducation.com.
- An excellent article, Independent Enrichment Activities for Your Bird, by Adrienne Mock is posted in the files section under Enrichment at PBAS. Parrot Behavior Analysis Solutions (PBAS) is an email list. For information on how to join this list or information on Susan Friedman’s Living and Learning With Parrots (LLP) course go to behaviorworks.org. Adrienne Mock suggests in her article that if you go to www.google.com and do a search for “animal enrichment birds” or “animal enrichment parrots” there are literally thousands of sites.
- <http://www.landofvos.com/> is an Eclectus site hosted by Carolyn Swicegood. If you go to the home page and look bottom left you will see a section “Do It Yourself”. There are projects for window perches, a tree stand, another way to make the saucer boing, table top stands, and one that really appeals to me called Parrotland, which is made of wood. There is a link for you to download the instructions for making Parrotland, it’s worth your time to go see this.