

Bird Socialization and Enrichment

Birds are very social and are super smart creatures! They thrive with plenty of socialization with people or other birds of the same species. They also enjoy daily enrichment. Enrichment for birds is providing foraging and other stimulating activities that include chewing, shredding, and playing.

Socialization

Socializing your bird regularly is very important. Birds often build strong bonds with one or two people in their household. Some birds prefer lots of interaction while others like to stay in their cage and watch.

When handling a new bird, be sure to approach slowly while speaking gently. If the bird appears stressed, back off. Start by hand-feeding treats through the cage bars and once the bird is comfortable with that, you can start opening the cage door and handing them treats. Make sure you move your hand slowly. Once the bird is comfortable taking treats from you, encourage them to step up on your finger. Gently guiding with one hand behind it, using your other hand to push your index finger into your bird's chest. When the bird steps up onto your finger, say "step up." Every action and phrase should be slow and calm while your bird is learning. It can take several days with short sessions before a nervous bird is comfortable staying on your finger. Be patient and never overwork your bird to the point that it becomes stressed or exhausted.



Enrichment

It is important to meet all of your bird's enrichment needs for a happy and healthy bird. There are five enrichment categories that address all of a bird's sensory needs:

1. **Tactile Enrichment** is anything your bird touches with its beak, feet, or feathers. A variety of perches and toys are considered tactile enrichment. Play stands also make great tactile enrichment. Your bird can also receive tactile enrichment through different temperatures found in the wild, such as ice cubes and solar-heated river rocks.
2. **Visual Enrichment** is anything your bird sees around them, so be sure to provide plenty of colorful toys. Birds are very visually stimulated in the wild, so mirrors or pictures of other birds are great visual enrichment, as long as you allow escape routes in case certain images frighten them.
3. **Dietary Enrichment** can enhance your pet bird's life simply by varying food presentation or including treats. Birds naturally forage or search for food in the wild, so it's a good idea to offer foraging options by moving food bowls or covering them with a piece of paper. After some experience with these simple foraging exercises, you can hide food in boxes or foraging toys.
4. **Auditory Enrichment** is possibly the most underused form of enrichment. In the wild, birds especially parrots, use vocalizations for communications. While not all birds can learn to speak, pet birds can be trained to vocalize at appropriate times of the day by playing audio clips, whistling, and talking gently to your bird, encouraging them to chirp back and mimic. You can also play recorded natural, outdoor sounds.
5. **Social Enrichment** is important because birds (especially parrots) are flock animals that need interaction whenever you have a few moments to spare. Try to mimic your bird's natural habitat and include plenty of play during socialization. Some birds will need time and training to interact with people and enrichment tools, while others will take to it immediately.

