Play: Vital to Bird Health & Wellness

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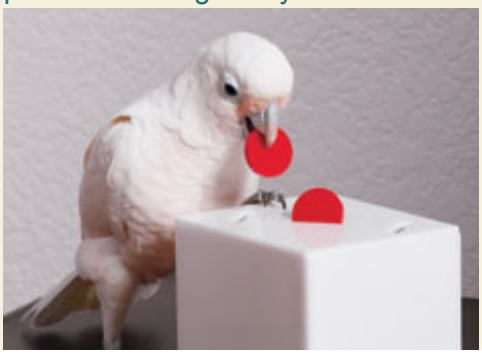
the importance of PLAY & creative ways to encourage it

he emotional reward derived from play is such that birds do some things just for the fun of it, such as drop small toys or treats into their water bowl simply to watch the ripple. Without play, our birds are vulnerable to many undesirable behaviors, such as screaming, biting, feather picking, and even withdrawal or depression. Your bird's ability to play, however, depends largely upon you. Are you providing an environment that encourages play? Use the following checklist to see if there are areas you could improve your pet's opportunities and ability to play.

Birds are intelligent creatures and love to solve problems. Parrots can learn to distinguish colors, people and shapes. Some can associate words and their meanings to construct simple sentences. Some species hide seeds over many miles and then later retrieve 90% of them. In the home environment, play is the all-important avenue for expressing their intelligence and problem-solving ability.



- Give your bird an appropriately sized home. You're going to see behavioral and health problems in birds with cages too small for toys and accessories. Give your bird a generous living space, and then turn it into a playground.
- Select toys that mimic natural behaviors. Assemble ladders or rope perches side-to-side in the cage for a branch walking experience. Give him shreddable toys so he can emulate nest-building behaviors. Introduce puzzles and mazes, where the reward comes only after the work (like his meals in the wild). Give him some swings and ropes for climbing; he might even learn to climb the rope with his beak - just for fun. Use toys that condition his beak or make interesting sounds.
- Add playtime challenge to his feeding. In the wild, a bird spends a lot of physical and mental energy collecting food. Simulate this at home by creating a shell game of sorts. Use three food cups, but place a treat inside only one. Then, wrap each cup in paper, so your bird has to shred paper and find the cup in which his treat resides.
- Schedule visits to his play gym outside the cage, to expose him to different surroundings and allow him to hang upside down and flap his feathers. Give him a birdbath to bathe in, or let him join you in the shower. You'll see his spirit soar.

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- Play with your bird. Play music and dance in front of your bird. He'll quickly learn how to do the same. Teach your bird tricks. Get a good book on bird training, and take him through a series of tricks to demonstrate play can be educational.

Our birds depend on us in so many ways to help them play. They thrive through play, and when they thrive, we get the satisfaction of a job well done.

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