

Set goals

When deciding exactly what types of enrichment to use, determine the goal/s you want the animal to achieve. Consider how the animal's natural history may play a role in those goals.

And remember, always strive to stimulate natural behaviors. For example, what works for American Robins, which forage for soft bodied worms and grubs on the ground, may not work for other thrushes such as Western Bluebirds, which snatch flying insects out of the air. Likewise, adding leaves, pine needles, and dirt to an enclosure to stimulate foraging and finding food will work for an opossum or even a box turtle, but not for an owl—owls hunt by sound and sight, so hiding food under leaves would not lead them to the successful goal of finding food.

Of course, sometimes your goal may be simply for the animal to have fun—not everything has to be work, like finding food or actively protecting its territory.

Appropriate enrichment is vital to improving the quality of life of captive animals. It stimulates both mind and body, helping to reduce stress and prevent boredom while keeping them physically active and in good condition.

When a wild animal is held in captivity, the goal should always be to engage the animal's natural behaviors that it would instinctively use in the wild. There are a great many ways to create simple, effective enrichment opportunities in both education and rehabilitation settings. Get started and have fun!

Common Forms of Animal Enrichment

Environmental

Changing or adapting a captive environment to stimulate natural behaviors

Adding leaves or pine needles and then hiding food among them to encourage foraging

Cognitive

Mental stimulation and problem solving

Puzzle feeders

Working/training for food/treats

Behavioral

Training

Behavior modification

Sensory

An object that stimulates one of the five senses

Food items and puzzle toys

Items with different scents on them

Noise machine that plays bird songs or natural sounds

Physical

A form of exercise or physical expression

New branches to climb and/or perch on

Dirt to dig in

Natural items to climb over, perch on and/or hide in

Food

Presentation or preparation of foods/treats

High-value food items

Foods that encourage foraging

Foods the animal would find in the wild

Social

Interacting with another living creature, whether their own species or humans

Training

Individual stimulation with mirrors or stuffed animal toys

Feather dusters for nestlings (also provides comfort and security).

The official definition:

Enrichment is an animal husbandry principle that seeks to enhance the quality of captive animal care by identifying and providing the natural stimuli necessary for optimal psychological and physiological health.



The unofficial definition:

Fun, fun, fun for the animals (and YOU)!