

FORAGING & ROOSTING getting started:

What is Foraging & Roosting?

We define Foraging as encouraging our pet parrots to seek and hunt to find food stuffs. This is in contrast to the classical 'bowl of food' presentation for our pets.

Our parrots are naturally wired to be curious to seek out food stuffs, yet their survival instinct is also to be suspicious of changes in their immediate environment (cage and cage furniture). Therefore parrots will often view new objects and foods with suspicion.

Pet parrots often need to be 'taught' to forage. This is best done initially with treats and with any change to be gradually introduced. All changes need to be progressive (from treats to food staples).

This is a good time to review Roosting. Wild parrots in the morning move from their overnight sleeping areas to various foraging grounds to search of food. These sleeping areas are called Roost sites. Smaller parrots tend to seek more dense foliage trees to roost, while large parrots seem to prefer more open yet taller trees to roost. Most parrots, being closer to the earth's equator, are well adapted to receiving approximately 12 hours of daylight per day. Yet in captivity our parrots can be easily exposed to over 16 to 20 hrs of light with our evening lighted home environment, & this is often not beneficial.

Realizing that the majority of our parrots have the mental capability of a 5 year old human child, yet only the emotional stability of a 2 year old human child is helpful. Rest is important, and changes are not always welcome. Please be patient.

A reasonable time frame needed to have our pet parrots learn and enjoy foraging is from several weeks to a few months ... and it may take up to one year for a parrot to learn full foraging.

The positive results of a busy, interactive pet parrot is reduced day time vocalization (still expect the usual morning and evening 'calling' rituals), and often a reduced level of feather destruction.

PRACTICAL USE OF ROOSTING HABITS with separate cages:

In order to maximize the mental stimulation of our parrots provide adequate rest each night. Adequate rest is of great benefit to our parrots, just like to young children. Consider having a separate Night cage (for roosting) that is smaller and only has basic perches and water bowls (food bowl is only necessary if any concern of delay transferring back to the daytime cage).

This Night cage should be away from busy evenings of noise and extended lighting. Plan for close to 12 hours of dark, quiet rest for your parrot. Light control alone by timers is possible yet not ideal. If not able to use a separate Night cage, then remove majority of toys at night, replace during day.

In the morning we move our parrot to their daytime cage to start foraging for the day. Moving our parrot from a Night cage to a larger daytime cage also allows for more social interaction between owner and parrot. This daytime cage is filled with toys and foraging bowls allowing for a busy day of activity.

PRACTICAL POINTS OF BEGINNING SUCCESSFUL FORAGING :

1. Getting Started, properly
2. Treat driven
3. Gradual steps
4. Progressive
5. Ultimate foraging goal is when all food staples are successfully foraged.
6. Be patient, this is all new for your pet parrot

1. GETTING STARTED :

It is important that your bird is in good health, has had a recent examination with your veterinarian, and ideally has had routine wellness health testing (blood, fecal tests, etc).

It is critical to have a current weight on your bird, and to monitor this weight at regular intervals (according to your veterinarian's advice and may start once every 2 weeks to once a month).

The DVD 'Captive Foraging' by Dr. Scott Echols is recommended, and should be watched several times, at least once a month during this conversion to foraging behavior for your bird.

The following suggested steps will help with this transition, yet be creative using these steps.

... and remember this is worth it for the emotional and mental stability of your bird!

2. TREATS:

While the eventual goal of foraging is to eventually have all food found by foraging, initially foraging should start by using treats only, with regular food available in the usual bowl at all times.

Foraging is like running a marathon, training is required. Both activities, marathons without training or foraging without teaching your bird are destined for failure.

Correct foraging needs to be daily, well-motivated and simple.

To start foraging we have to identify what is a treat for the bird... nuts and seeds are ideal because are usually well accepted, dry (won't mold quickly) and can be quite small (easily hidden for foraging).

Remember 'treats' in more than small amounts become 'staples' and quickly lose our birds' interest.

3. GRADUAL STEPS:

It is best to start foraging with a new 'treat' bowl (with a nervous bird place new bowl in same place as regular bowl). With a very nervous bird have the new bowl outside the cage and over few days gradually introduce into the cage.

To encourage acceptance, start by putting 2-4 treats (should be quite a small size) in treat bowl.

Throughout the training have the regular bowl available with regular foods, yet it is best to have this regular food containing no 'treats', instead reserve treats for foraging.

Over a few days add 2-4 dried beans (kidney beans or other) into treat bowl along with 2-4 treats.

By end of first week have one layer of dried beans with 2-4 treats on top and visible.

The next week add a second layer of dried beans with twice the amount (4-8) treats partially mixed between the dried beans.

After ensuring good acceptance with continued treats and dried beans in the separate treat bowl, consider adding a small amount of regular food (pellets are ideal if well accepted) to the treat bowl.

The next step is to add dried beans to the regular food bowl. This continues to support the practice of foraging with regular food (you have already started putting some regular food in the treat bowl).

By end of the second week have one layer of dried beans with on top covering the regular food bowl.

During this time there are two bowls. One with regular food covered with layer of dried beans as well as the treat bowl with treats as well as more and more regular (ie pellets) foods.

4. PROGRESSIVE:

Eventually it is ideal to explore other foraging habits using a small quantity of desirable treats. Another foraging suggestion is in the treat bowl to use a small paper lining or cut to size a paper sandwich bag.

Initially one starts with just a piece of paper just covering the bottom on a second treat bowl. Over a few days increase size of small paper lining so it gets bigger. Gradually the paper is bigger and curls up the sides of the bowl. Then the paper becoming a little larger than the bowl (a small paper sandwich bag could be cut to size).

4. PROGRESSIVE (Continued)

The next step with this foraging bowl is to have the paper liner closed over the treats so the paper has to be torn open by the bird to get to the treats. These small pieces of paper are used containing a single treat (looks like a Hersey Kiss), with many of these wrapped 'Hersey Kisses' treats available in the treat bowl.

The final transition is to have many of these 'Hersey Kisses' all contained in one paper bag. This is accomplished by initially having a shorter bag in the bowl containing the paper covered treats.

The paper bag is now moved out of the treat bowl and this bag is hung to side of cage beside the treat bowl.

5. FULL-OUT FORAGING!!:

The final step is transition to have all food found by foraging.

The transition to this stage should not be rushed. It would be wise to have your bird again checked out by your veterinarian. This is to make sure there are no concerns like muscle wasting or excessive weight loss.

Finally full-out foraging is accomplished by having these paper bags filled with these paper-covered treats as well as regular food hung in various places in the cage.

6. BE PATIENT, THIS IS NEW:

By re-watching the DVD 'Captive Foraging' by Dr. Scott Echolls you will learn new points and you will be reminded that this is the kindest thing to do for your pet's emotion and mental stability.

Again, the majority of our parrots have the mental capability of a 5 year old human child, yet remembering they have only the emotional stability of a 2 year old human child is helpful. This means your parrot's attention span and short to medium term memory is relatively short.

Rest is an important part of a healthy lifestyle, and by using a separate Night and Day cage we can maximized the mental health of our parrot pets.

Remember to please be patient; most of this is new to you and your parrot.

THIS IS WORTH IT!