



## Medical Center for Birds

www.medicalcenterforbirds.com

3805 Main St  
Oakley, CA 94561  
Brian Speer, DVM, ABVP/ECZM (Avian)  
Brenna Fitzgerald, DVM

Ph: 925-625-1878  
Fax: 925-625-8511  
Geoff Olsen, DVM, ABVP (Avian)

## Foraging Behaviors and Their Applications in the Home

If “normal” social interaction with their adoptive family/flock is limited, as is often the case when their human companions are away earning a living, the other maintenance behavioral groups (foraging and feather care) must be increased to fill the deficit. If the total foraging activity of a pet parrot consists only of eating out of a dish, feeding activities may not occupy much more than 20 - 30 minutes a day. Depending on the species of parrot, their wild counterparts often will devote 6 -18 hours a day foraging. Merely by increasing the daily foraging activities of a pet parrot, the daily lifestyle can be enhanced in an ornithologically sound manner. This in turn may be very beneficial as a part of behavioral modification treatments for abnormal behaviors in the other maintenance categories of feather care and social interaction. Abnormal feather care often includes “feather picking” or other feather damaging behaviors, and abnormal social interaction problems may include screaming and other abnormal vocalization, and pair bonding behaviors that result in reproductive drive associated issues.

**Enhancing Foraging Behaviors:** Try some of these creative enhancement techniques, if they are applicable for your bird:

- Foraging perch: A piece of non-treated wood (e.g., pine lumber) drilled with holes into which nuts, seeds, or other treats fit tightly. The reward should be visible but not accessible without chewing down through the wood. This perch material can be used with your training perch, when the bird is outside of the cage with you. The wood can also be used as a perch in the cage, or even hung in the cage to increase the challenge.
- Wrapping food bowls: Wrap the food bowls with newspaper or cardboard so that your bird has to spend time chewing in to get at the food. You may have to teach your bird the first time by punching a starter hole, or simulating the foraging activity yourself, acquiring your bird’s favorite food item, and *not* sharing it with the bird after you find it.
- Wrapping food items: You can individually wrap nuts, seeds, or other rewards in small pieces of paper, corn husks or other materials. Wrapped with a twisted end, the treat becomes an ice cream cone that requires some chewing to get at the tasty surprise inside. Not *all* wrappings need to contain a reward, either.
- Mixing food with inedible items: Pellets or seeds can be mixed in with wood buttons or other items so that the bird has to dig through to find its food. Some parrot species can be particularly stimulated into new foraging behaviors by having a “sandbox” provided, in which some desired food items or treats can be found.
- Puzzle toys: There are a variety of toys available that require birds to unscrew parts or manipulate components to get at their reward.
- Trick training: By asking your bird to perform a desired behavior for a treat or reward, you are, in essence, providing a modified foraging activity for your bird. In addition, you are also having a lot of fun, and are adding in social interaction with and for your bird.