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Foraging Ideas for Your Pet Bird

DISCLAIMER: Do not implement any of these changes without consulting your veterinarian first. Beginning this program with an unhealthy bird could lead to serious illness.

Imagine, your day begins with the sun rising (or the lights coming on) and the call of your flock of companions. You are excited and ready to face another day. After a few hours (or minutes), the lights go off, a door closes, all becomes silent and you are left alone with no one with whom to speak or interact. If you were a pet bird, you would probably spend your time eating, sleeping and preening or grooming. All of these behaviors are normal, but when a bird's time alone stretches to several hours, these behaviors can become obsessions and you as the pet owner can end up with an obese, lazy, and bald pet! The following summary is a way to entertain your bird while you are gone during the day and, also, a way to simulate the foraging behavior that your pet's wild cousins partake in everyday.

Prior to beginning this program, you need to determine the amount of food your bird eats in one day:

1. Mix together all of the dry food you will offer your pet for one 24 hour period. Use a tablespoon, teaspoon, or a kitchen scale to measure this amount of food prior to placing it in your birds bowl. Write down the amount in teaspoons, tablespoons, grams or ounces.
2. After 24 hours, measure the remaining food left in the food bowl.
3. Calculate the amount of food your bird has consumed with the following equation
$$\frac{\text{Amount of food initially placed in the bowl} - \text{Amount of food left after 24 hours}}{\text{Amount of food eaten in one day}}$$
4. The goal is to have a small amount of food left over everyday so, you should feed a little more than the amount calculated in 3 (above)

You should purchase a postal scale to weigh your bird on a daily basis so that your bird does not lose weight without you realizing it. This is a great way to catch illnesses before they become debilitating. The goal is for your bird to stay within 10 % of their body weight. The following formula will determine when you need to bring your bird to the veterinarian or increase the amount of food you are offering:

$$\frac{\text{Your bird's weight}}{\text{X } 0.9}$$

The lowest weight your bird should get

If your bird reaches this weight, **you should contact us immediately** to schedule an appointment and you should begin to offer more food until you come to our office.

Weigh your bird at the same time everyday because your bird's weight fluctuates naturally over the course of the day!

Now that you know the amount of food your bird eats in one day, we can start to encourage foraging behavior.

Foraging Scheme

Purchase at least 6 bowls for food and place them in different positions in your bird's cage. Be creative with the placement of the bowls place some high, some low, some near perches, some away from perches, etc.

Week One:

Divide the amount of dry food you will feed in one day evenly between the 6 bowls. This week your pet will learn that food is available in each bowl everyday.

Week Two:

Continue to divide the food evenly between all six bowls, but start to cover the bowls with one of the following:

- Shredded paper
- Sheets of paper
- Toys
- Untreated blocks of wood

This week, your pet will start to have to look for their food.

Week three and on:

Begin leaving random bowls empty and continue covering the bowls. For the rest of your bird's life, **SHAKE THINGS UP!** Start leaving different foods in different bowls. Put a toy in the bowl and cover the bowl up! Use your imagination!!! Move the bowls around every few weeks!

The goal of this program is to give your bird something constructive (or destructive!) to do while you are away from home or occupied.