

## **Animal Behavior Management Alliance (ABMA) Training and Enrichment Talks**

### **Topic: Novel Enrichment Ideas**

**Begley, N. (Fall, 2004). Enrichment Talks. *Animal Behavior Management Alliance: Wellspring*. 5(3) p 4-7.**

**Question:** Since it can be challenging to keep coming up with new and exciting enrichment for our animals I thought that it would be helpful to highlight everyone's favorite enrichment for one of the columns. That way everyone can add a few novel things to those ever expanding enrichment lists! So, if you have a unique enrichment idea, or just a good old standby that always gets a great response from your animals, please let us know.

**Answer 1:** One of my favorite types of enrichment promotes natural behaviors not associated with foods or feeding methods. As keepers we often fall to the tried and true puzzle feeder, novelty food or foraging option. It has become my personal goal to 'think outside of the box' to target mental as well as physical activity. I hope to simulate experiences of the wild, stimulating ALL their senses and encourage a wider range of natural behaviors. This can be done through sensory stimuli, manipulatable toys, environmental changes, and behavioral or social options.

My favorite? Opportunities for contraspecific species interaction, not accomplished through mixed species exhibits. This can be achieved by bringing tractable education animals by for a visit (visual only for safety, of course!). We have used snakes, lizards, tortoises, ferrets, rabbits, rats, hedgehogs, raptors & psittacines. This is enriching for both education animals and exhibit animals!

To get even more creative we've used realistic animal piñatas (a cheetah was especially dramatic), stuffed animals, yard flamingos, rubber snakes, flying toy bats & birds, remote control mice, battery operated toy animals, puppets, and the best yet- realistic archery animal decoys which come in numerous North American species and even a selection of African species. I feel this can help the animals learn social skills, resourcefulness, flexibility, inventiveness and behavioral versatility through exploration and play. It also can help with the development of instincts, investigation, and a number of other behaviors to hone coping skills not often explored through enrichment.

#### **Dawn Neptune – Utah's Hogle Zoo**

**Answer 2:** Some of the enrichment items we use here in Baltimore are inexpensive and highly effective. The summer months offer new and exciting food choices; my favorite is entire ears of corn, including the husk. This is offered to rats, rabbits, parrots, and the one who enjoys it the most is the prehensile tail porcupine. The corn is donated from a local stand, as soon as I told them what it was for; they offered the smaller ears for the animals. They also offer seasonal fruits and veggies either free or at a discount. I always carry my business cards and zoo coupons to trade for free stuff. You'd be amazed what you can get for \$1 off coupons and stickers!

Our serval constantly challenges us. She does not travel as much in the summer because she is in our animal show on grounds, so we need to give her a good deal of enrichment.

During morning cleaning she has exercise time in our pygmy goat enclosure. Unfortunately for her handlers she takes great pride in rubbing herself in every pile of goat poop and puddle of urine she can find. In the summer we have a large number of snake sheds from our own collection and we put those in with the serval who shreds them and rubs on them. We also allow the rabbits, ducks, chicken, armadillo, and a large snake exercise to in the serval enclosure, before she goes in for the day. She really gets into the new smells and is quickly scent marking everything. We also offer her a large tub full of shredded paper and crickets. She really pounces on them, until she curls up in the tub and goes to sleep.

Our blue and gold macaw enjoys chewing holes in large boxes and makes his home in there until he completely shreds it. We have offered him everything from tissue boxes to super big TV boxes. His eyes get wide when he sees us coming with a really large box. So when the top portion of a dog house became available I put it in his enclosure, he laughs from under that thing all day and even spends the night in there too. We frequently offer phone books and we let the junior keepers bring in their old textbooks for him to shred at end of the school year. The first thing he does is take it into his “cave” where he laughs and screams for hours.

We offer the toucan a wide number of things to manipulate. The cheapest has been the plastic shower curtain rings, which you can find at the dollar store and make a chain out of them. Sam spends a great deal of time shaking and tugging on it, which is much better than shaking and tugging on skin! We also offer him large macaw and hawk feathers to preen and cotton and hemp ropes to shred.

For the snakes we use fake ficus trees and parrot perches that are forded with lots of climbing options. Snakes can be placed on the perches in the sun and volunteers and staff oversee them so that they do not escape from their trees.

### **Amy Eveleth-Baltimore Zoo**

**Answer 3:** At Gatorland we have our “World Famous Gator Jumparoo Show”. This show is performed several times daily with the main behavior of the show being jumping, of course. One of the ways to get the alligators to jump is by stringing four half chickens across the exhibit. The height of the chickens is often changed daily, by having cables that are different lengths hanging from a main cable. Sometimes it is easy for the alligators to get the chicken, because they only have to compete for the chicken with up to fifty other alligators and crocodiles. Aggression is rarely observed toward one another in this area. We control the height and the frequency of the offered chicken throughout the year. We do this show about 1200 times per year. The benefits are establishing an exercise program with crocodilians, encouraging natural behaviors, controlling socialization with in a population and not to mention sharing this with hundreds of thousands of people.

We have two ways for the guests at Gatorland to feed the alligators. This is a great mutual relationship for the alligators and guests, and certain alligators have even developed strategies for getting the food. We sell a turkey dog pack that consists of four 2-oz links of meat. When a guest feeds the alligators this food item, they usually break it up into smaller pieces. This gives the guest an opportunity to increase the frequency of feeding the alligators and to [enjoy] seeing the animals move. The alligators will get very small pieces, however there are certain individual alligators that have learned to pose

with their mouths agape and heads elevated out of the water to be noticed by the guest. Some alligators have not caught on to this yet, but have developed other strategies with their own pay off.

In addition to the turkey dogs, Gatorland has traditional feed machines to feed the fish in the main four-acre lake with the alligators. When the guest puts a quarter in the machine certain alligators will go to the machine. Often guests think that this food is for the alligators but the pellets are really catfish chow. The dominant fish in the lake at Gatorland is Tilapia. When the guests throw the catfish chow in the lake the fish swarm after the food at the surface. Some individual alligators have learned that if they sit underneath these feed machines while the crank is being turned that a swarm of fish gathers next to their heads. As the fish churn the alligator lifts and angles his head into a downward pitch slamming his head in to the fish churn. Nine out of ten times he will get a fish or two either by catching them or stunning them from the massive club of a head hits them.

The alligator is provided with many variable schedules through out the day, similar to their natural way of living in the wild. We explain these activities to the guests that walk in to encourage enrichment among themselves and at home. So as you can see even alligators can be enriched in fun ways!

#### **Flavio Morrissey - Gatorland**

**Answer 4:** My all time favorite, easiest, and cheapest way in which to enrich an animal's life is through multiple feedings. This does not mean adding extras to the diet, but taking the diet and dividing it into several smaller meals throughout the day. I think feeding primates this way is similar to foraging in the wild where the animals are looking for food for a large portion of their day (on average, our oranges get seven feedings a day). Multiple feedings are also done with our Sumatran tigers. They get a portion of their meat in the exhibit in the morning, bones thrown in for them during the afternoon and their remaining diet is offered in the holding when they come in at the end of the day. When they are together, our pair of tigers do not fight when 'hunting', but have learned to avoid each other when food is present. Our female is currently with 3 one year old cubs and they sometimes fight over the boxes so we do monitor the situation and adjust the feedings when necessary. All the animals that receive multiple feedings are more alert and active throughout the day.

#### **Karyn Tunwell – Toronto Zoo**

**Answer 5:** Got Milk Crates? In order to better replicate the natural feeding behavior of giraffe, the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore uses a variety of plastic crates, attaching them to the chain link in their pens and exhibit, with some of the openings enlarged. The giraffes spend a lot of time obtaining edible items; and manipulating objects such as kong toys, scrub brushes, or small boomer balls that they cannot remove, but seem to have fun moving around. To make this enrichment more difficult and time consuming, food can be put inside of boomer balls or whole melons and then put into the crates. Another variation involves attaching bread crates to the outside of the chain link fencing, so the giraffe have to manipulate the food or object through the links. One of the best features of the crates is that the keepers always have access to one side, allowing them to be filled at anytime of the day, no matter where the animals are located. We also use water cooler

bottles with holes drilled into the sides that require the giraffe to fish around inside for food. Freezing an ice treat inside of the water bottle can keep the giraffe occupied for even longer periods of time. We find the above items successful because they require the giraffe to spend time obtaining their food and gives them a challenge.

**Andrea Kouneski – Maryland Zoo in Baltimore**