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## Behavioral Enrichment 101

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This is an article for all the new caregivers, who have just now started working with animals and are getting acquainted with the concept of exactly what "giving care" means. I have found that it registers in all kinds of levels in the zoo keeper's mind. For one thing, "old school zoo keeping" does not require more than the basic husbandry in the everyday routine. Even now in the 21st century, some caregivers believe maintaining exhibits and servicing animals is all that is required in their eight-hour routine. Behavioral enrichment is not required and is considered something that can be done after regular duty, if time allows.

In my opinion, there is much more to Behavioral Enrichment, and it should be discussed at a high level and with new keepers, so they can fully understand its value.

In this article I will begin by asking what Behavioral Enrichment is and why the animals need it. I will then talk about the specifics of planning and implementation.

### 1. What is Behavioral Enrichment?

Behavioral enrichment serves to promote the psychological well-being of captive animals by enriching their environment. Behavioral enrichment provides an appropriate environment that promotes natural activities, the stimulation breaks down to several different levels like Exhibit, Dietary, or Social Enhancements and can be used in many forms.

### 2. Why do the animals need it?

Regardless of an institution's financial circumstances or its commitments to animal welfare, there is no way to recreate ALL the natural behaviors of the animals in the collection. No matter how well an exhibit is designed, and with the inclusion of the most modern behavioral architecture, what may be pleasing or attractive to the human eye will not necessarily meet the behavioral needs of the exhibit animal.

The fact that they have to interact with humans at all causes the animal to assume behaviors that may be deviant in comparison to their wild counterparts. For example, we put them on feeding schedules, altering such things as foraging time, their choice of foods, and their eating patterns. We clean their exhibits. We move them around, introduce and separate them from other animals, medicate or euthanize them, in short, making most of their life decisions for them. To some degree their housing and social setting will always be inappropriate and this can cause aggression, boredom, and physical and psychological illness. It is the keeper's responsibility, as the animal's primary caretaker, to attempt to decrease these problems.

### 3. How do we begin?

Behavioral enrichment is a two-way street. It notably benefits the animals, but it also increases the keeper's knowledge of their animals.

Keepers need to:

- Research the natural behaviors of their animals
- Observe the behavior in captivity
- Talk to each other about behavioral problems they are experiencing with their animals
- Organize their research to arrive at the best solutions for the behavioral enrichment of their animals
- Read the professional newsletters such as:

*The Shape of Enrichment* (published quarterly),  
Shape of Enrichment, Inc., 1650 Minden Dr., San Diego, CA 02111-7124 USA

*Animal Keepers' Forum* (published monthly) American Association of Zoo Keepers, Inc.,  
3601 SW 29th Street, Suite 133, Topeka, KS 66614-2054 USA <http://www.aazk.org>

*AAZK Enrichment Notebook* <http://www.aazk.org>

*JAAWS (Journal of Applied Animal's Welfare Science)*, published quarterly by the  
Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals <http://www.psyceta.org/jaaws>

Reports regarding Behavior Enrichment of captive animals published by the Universities  
Federation for Animal Welfare <http://www.ufaw.org.uk>

- Refer to related Internet websites like:  
The Animal Welfare Institute at <http://www.animalwelfare.com>

The Exotic Animals: Care and Conservation Resource Website located at  
<http://www.pacificnet.net/~jmcnary>

The Cambridge Center for Behavioral Studies and the Animal Trainers SIG of the Association  
for Behavior Analysis have put together an excellent overview of the many ways that positive  
reinforcement techniques are being used by professional animal trainers and in zoos --  
<http://www.behavior.org/animals/frameset.cfm>

*The Shape of Enrichment*, <http://www.enrichment.org>

Links of Interest to Keepers, <http://www.veederandld.20m.com/keeper.html>

- Attend regional and national AZA and AAZK Conferences

### 4. How do we apply it?

A keeper may have to work within the confines of their zoo's policy when it comes to using only natural appearing objects versus unnatural ones. If only allowed to use natural materials, a keeper can still be creative with enrichment. They can present a diet in different form, change exhibit furniture to give it a different appearance, and when possible, they can juggle animals around in their night quarters, increasing the available space or exposing them to another's den.

Introducing urine and fecal droppings of other species into the exhibit space is a simple, no cost idea that can have a remarkable effect on many animals.

Tree logs or branches can be given to an animal from outside of their own exhibit, creating visual novelty and presenting different smells that may be interesting to an animal (*Editor's note: Be sure and check out possible toxicity of any plant material introduced into an animal's exhibit. See <http://www.AZ11.org/Toxic%20Plant%20Links.htm>*).

Natural materials lying around on zoo grounds are a possible source of enrichment, diet addition or

provide playing and hiding materials. For example: pine cones, fruits, beanpods and browse or feathers, shed snake skins, or different soils.

Donated goods such as discarded Christmas trees, Halloween pumpkins and cacti can also be utilized.

In the night house there is more freedom to be creative, using items that may not be acceptable on exhibit but will serve the dual purpose of behavioral enrichment and that of recycling materials - i.e. cardboard boxes, paper bags, newspapers, shredded paper, old clothing and telephone books.

The keeper has to keep in mind that one does not want to alter the animal's exhibit or night house to the point where it confuses or scares the animal. They need some consistency as well as change.

#### *What works, what doesn't work?*

In order to determine your successes or failures with behavioral enrichment, you need to keep ongoing records of what additions or materials are being used by the animals. A good method of doing this is to keep a book or journal that summarizes and evaluates the behavioral enrichment techniques you are utilizing.

Behavioral enrichment is not a new concept in zoos, but its importance is being recognized more and more worldwide. Enrichment committees are being established to test and evaluate various forms of enrichment. Some institutions are appointing behavioral managers, or behavioral curators, whose job is to identify and document behavioral problems, generate training and enrichment solutions, train new employees and make behavioral policy decisions.

As my very last thought, keepers have to remember that cleaning and feeding may seem like satisfactory caregiving, but giving care just has to stretch a little bit further. One can scrub and clean all day and keep animals in hospital-clean circumstances and they will exhibit abnormal behaviors. Captivity is the reduction of natural stimulations. It is the keeper's goal to change what the animal experiences in its captive environment on a regular basis and make captivity bearable for them.

Behavioral enrichment works best when it is incorporated as part of the daily routine.

If you would like to submit a question for this column or have comments on previously published materials, please send them to AAZK, Inc., 3601 S. W. 29th St., Suite 133, Topeka, KS 66614-2054 Attn: Reactions/AKF

*Ideas appearing in this column have not necessarily been tested by the editors for safety considerations. Always think ahead and use good judgement when trying new ideas. You are invited to submit materials for the Enrichment Options Column. This might include recipes, toys, puzzle feeders, olfactory enrichment ideas, etc. Drawings and photos of enrichment are encouraged. Send to: AKF/Enrichment, 3601 SW 29th St., Suite 133, Topeka, KS 66614-2054. Eds.)*

Visit the AAZK Enrichment Website - [www.enrich.org/aazk](http://www.enrich.org/aazk) or to join the Enrichment Listserve, email [jackbeil@humboldt1.com](mailto:jackbeil@humboldt1.com)  
An archive of past postings may be viewed at [www.caza.org/enrich](http://www.caza.org/enrich)

THE SCANDALOUSLY FUNNY VIDEO THAT SOLD OUT AT THE AAZK'S 2001 CONFERENCE!

# KEEPER PROFILES

**"Brilliant!"**

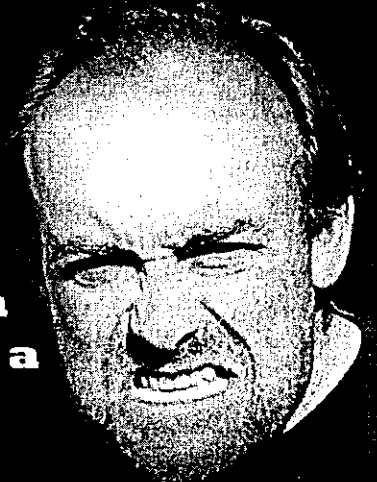
-Jacquie Randall, Assiniboine Park Zoo, Winnipeg

**"Outstanding!"**

-Mark DeDenus, Reid Park Zoo, Tucson

**"Makes 'Gone With the Wind' look like a piece of crap!"**

--Rodger Ebert



See profiles of the keepers we all know and work with: the Rebel, the Victim of the System, the Anal Retentive, the Bunny-Hugger ~ and others too scary to mention. Watch them pontificate on their careers and pray you don't see yourself in one of them.

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Price includes airmail shipping. Please include your name, shipping address, and, if you like, an e-mail address; we can e-mail you as soon as shipment takes place, which will be within 24 hours of receiving your check. Any questions or comments concerning the video may be addressed to [zoovideo2001@aol.com](mailto:zoovideo2001@aol.com)

\*no relation to Roger Ebert