

Foraging in birds

Foraging is simply the act of looking for food. Why is it so important?

Wild birds spend many hours a day looking for food, a process known as foraging. In some species, almost 90% of their day is spent foraging! Pet birds have their food provided from a bowl, which takes away that instinctive foraging behaviour. Birds that do not have an opportunity to forage may redirect most of that time to less productive activities, like feather chewing, feather picking, mutilation, screaming, aggression and other behavioural problems. This adversely affects their overall quality of life.

Foraging can be easily provided in the home environment; however, this may need to be taught to your bird if he/she has not foraged before. Foraging can be done both inside and outside the cage.

Below is a list of some simple foraging ideas:

- ✓ Cover the food bowl with paper or cardboard
- ✓ Mix torn up pieces of cardboard or similar material inside the food bowl
- ✓ Hide food in brown paper bags, scrunched up toilet paper rolls, paper cups and wedge between cage bars
- ✓ Put small amount of food at different locations around the cage and clip pieces of vegetables/native vegetation at various locations
- ✓ Hide food in paper/cardboard boxes and pierce holes

It is important to keep a few things in mind:

- ✓ Destructible and shredding toys made of natural materials, such as cardboard, paper, wood and safe plant leaf are best, and most closely resemble what birds encounter in the wild.
- ✓ **Do not use rope, fluffy huts or metal toys for foraging as these are not safe for birds.**
- ✓ Some birds may be fearful of new objects. Introduce foraging one item at a time starting with simple items and observe your bird's response. Placing a large colourful complex puzzle in the cage may scare your bird and be overall counterproductive to the process.
- ✓ Help your bird if needed. For example, if you cover your bird's food bowl with a piece of paper and he/she is confused and cannot find the food, punch a few holes in the paper so your bird can see the food underneath. It is important to take baby steps.

Commercially available foraging toys can also be purchased online. An excellent educational resource "Captive Foraging DVD" is available online via YouTube Lafeber channel and covers the above concepts in detail. All bird clients are encouraged to watch this 30-minute DVD.