

## Enrichment for reptiles

### “How would you feel if you spent your whole life in a single room?”

Enrichment is often an overlooked area of reptile care. Enrichment allows for normal species-typical behaviour and provides stimulation conducive to overall health and welfare.

Behaviour patterns in wild reptiles often revolve around locomotion, habitat selection, foraging, ingesting and digesting food, protection from predators, dominance behaviours, courtship, and nesting.

When developing an enrichment program for your reptile, it's important to consider the species' natural history, the individual's temperament and life stage, and the safety (to avoid injury, disease, or stress) and effectiveness of enrichment items.

### So, what does enrichment look like for our captive reptiles?

Paper, cardboard boxes, tubes, tubs, baskets, rocks, branches, wine racks, scents, and dirt... Are these items considered enrichment? They can be! Providing novelty to afford mental stimulation, and environmental complexity to promote physical and mental exercise and positive challenges, can be as simple as using items already found around the house, or repurposing items that would normally be thrown out. Enrichment can always be more complicated and naturalistic or even include bioactive enclosures to mimic a natural ecosystem.

### Below is a list of some enrichment ideas for reptiles:

- Increased enclosure size to add complexity, facilitate temperature and humidity gradients, and increase the activity and behavioural repertoire of the reptile.
- Providing natural substrates such as soil, moss, wood chips, etc, can give reptiles the choice to manipulate their environment and engage in natural behaviour such as burrowing.
- Varying the feeding schedule can increase activity and predatory behaviour.
- Water features: shallow pools, misting, deeper pools, water cascades, etc.
- Multi-substrate peg boards for snakes eg. sand/pebbles/carpet/fake grass.
- Puzzle feeders /hollow ball toys eg. bug balls.
- Target-training and choice-based handling.
- Natural sounds and relaxing white noise eg. playing tracks of cricket noise, thunderstorms, running water, wind, etc.
- Chemosensory behaviour in snakes can be stimulated by adding a shed of another (healthy, disease-free) snake.
- Outdoor time – sunshine, sensory enrichment.
- Enrichment for climbing reptiles: Utilising vertical spaces for climbing; PVC piping, hammocks, peg boards, logs and branches, cat towers, bird perches, bar stools, rocks, books, and wine racks – use your imagination!

Providing your reptile with enrichment is a rewarding experience. Enrichment activities should be something of value that reptiles find meaningful. When introducing enrichment items, observe your reptile's behaviour to ensure that interactions with those items are positive.

*An excellent resource for reptile enrichment is available online via YouTube on the channel “Lori Torrini” - A channel focusing on reptile behaviour, enrichment, training, and welfare.*

*Playlists for naturalistic sounds for reptiles are available on YouTube on the “The Lizard Doctor” channel.*