

## Toys Are Employment Opportunities

Category: Companion Parrot Toys, Cages and Foraging

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An unemployed parrot is an unhealthy, unhappy and frustrated parrot. I have a hard time bandying the word "toy" around when discussing employment opportunities. The word toy implies a childish activity that is used for distraction. That couldn't be further from the reality. Parrot toys are irreplaceable, mandatory, and are going to be destroyed. Eventually. Beak and foot manipulation offers mindful thought, exercise to small and large muscle groups, strengthens their respiratory and immune systems, activates creative parrot thought and occupies a very intelligent always running mind. Their need for mental and physical exercise is no different than ours, except they need more of it more often.

Our parrots are driven by three main instinctual drives; location, materials and food. Each of those items leads to other instincts as feeding, mating, play and sheltering. The pointless joy of play has been observed in the wild. They randomize items for the sheer silly of it. Location preference is driven by material and food availability. Centralized food and water sources drive sheltering, which brings the girls which creates the flocks and so forth and so on. The complexity of how these things affect a parrot's choice and movement is clear. In the wild, and in the core instinct of our parrots is the need to constantly be analyzing, searching, upgrading, communicating, sharing, building, discarding, compiling, acquiring and procreating in their world. Out there, it's a big world. There's a lot to consider and even more to investigate. In our companion world, it's much smaller, less is required of them to survive. And yet, they wake up every morning with these instincts that scream, "LET'S GO!"

You can see how a parrot may seem poorly behaved in a human environment. How do they know that rattan chair isn't for nesting and sheltering material? Of course they go into the dog water bowl, it's water! So for quicker typing on my end we'll call toys, Employment Opportunities, or EO's for short.

The parrot toy industry has categorized toys for the buyer; foraging, educational, natural, chewing, preening, refillable, foot, and even organic native derived materials toys. The labels tell us what the toy is meant to provide, the parrots tell us what it's really providing. The parrot industry as a whole has one important goal, profit. I don't begrudge that at all, they need to make profit so they can continue and we need them to continue. But what I would like to discuss is the toy peer pressure and guilt. These items are expensive, even with free shipping, or at a discount location. And there is reality behind the packaging I'd like to visit just a little bit. I am an Agent of Balance. EOs and the amount required is directly impacted by the amount of time your parrot is alone, or in a cage. EO needs are also affected by the parrot's age, and personality. I have met parrots who could care less about EOs, and would rather change locations regularly and ponder the world. I've met parrots who at the age of 4 can not sit still to save themselves. They must always be working on something.

Know your bird before you drop that dollar. Modification through observation! Everytime you bring home a foot toy, if your baby throws it on the floor and ignores it, your bird isn't much of a foot toy player. Try taking that rejected foot toy and attach it to an already hanging toy in their cage. Consider their travels. Do they need to fly with a toy in their foot or beak? My Snickers can not fly without a toy. He is flightless if he has no toy in his beak or foot. I keep soft cloth toddler toys for him to grab and fly with, so if he should drop it midflight no harm no foul.

What of naturally derived native materials toys? Are they better? Well that depends on where and how they came to be, and most importantly how they were handled. What glue was used to get that mass of fun put together? What coloring? Here's the thing, most bird toys were imported before the labeling started about naturally derived materials. Most grass, bamboo, and cork were imported in parts and assembled here, or those buyers purchased in mass bulk imported from the Asian markets. So if you are in an aisle that has a grass toy with no packaging bragging and a grass toy WITH packaging bragging, check the country of origin. Made in the USA isn't a guarantee that the individual elements are from the US. We are a global community and parrot toys have always been a parts import driven industry. Some materials are not native to the States, and can never be grown here. Better to spend your money by material quality, value of play, metals safety, and design for life expectancy.

Cork, balsa and soft woods are awesome for the little guys, but medium to large parrots will destroy these toys in a matter of minutes. There is soft and hard pine wood for these guys. Look closely at the wood chunks. Where is the grain of the wood going? Think woodworker thoughts. The closer the lines of the wood, the closer that wood came from the heart of the tree. Heart wood is tough stuff! Know your wood grains. Colored wood isn't necessarily necessary. I used to think I needed the bright stuff to keep them all engaged. I soon learned after my husband got into wood working, and toy building for us, that natural is just peachy keen to all of our flock. It's not mandatory, unless your bird says it is.

Check the metal hooks, rings, and locking mechanisms. Unless it claims stainless steel, it is not. Watch those elements and when they show deterioration, throw them out. Life expectancy of EO's is directly related to the sum of it's parts and the sum of the items above. In the end, a toy with a long life could be a toy that wasn't loved in life. (Outside of stainless steel of course.) Expect destruction! Embrace this as a seal of approval, and a job well done by you.

And finally all parrots truly appreciate one toy that is their arch nemesis. THE toy that needs fighting, and conquering every day. You can't shop for this toy specifically, but one day, you will bring one in that is chosen as the coveted "beat it up, smash it up, scream at it" toy. When that EO is chosen, go back and get a couple more. Once an arch nemesis is named, they rarely fall out of favor.

***Together we can give every parrot everywhere, a happy home!***

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