

Arranging The Cage

Category: Companion Parrot Toys, Cages and Foraging

Author: Kathy LaFollett | Companion Parrot Advocate™

A companion parrot's cage is their roost. Emphasis "their" and "roost". Much like your own human home, a parrot has their opinion on layout and usage. They find comfort, safety, rest, nourishment, and entertainment in their space as well. A healthy balanced bird loves their cage. The conundrum is that your baby can't point and say, "Let's hang that toy there, and put that perch here facing the window. I really like shredding while watching the neighbors mow the lawn."

Start with Version 1.0 of a cage setup, and then modify by observation. Modification by observation is the successful way of setting up your parrot's roost. There are no books, instructions or bird forums that can tell you how your parrot will use and interpret their space. Each companion parrot is different, and will surprise you with things he should not be doing as a species defined. Butters, our Macaw, naps in the cockatiel cage when they are out and about. I never saw that coming. So I changed the hardware holding the perches to be able to handle a 2 pound macaw.

So, let's start with Version 1.0 of any fabulous roost layout. Your parrot needs:

- 1) The biggest cage you can afford.
- 2) A private spot or area in that cage.
- 3) Multiple feeding stations.
- 4) A water station.
- 5) Multiple play stations.
- 6) Multiple perch location made of various size appropriate materials.
- 7) A foraging spot on the floor.

The biggest cage you can afford, is literally that. Get the largest you can afford in cost and location in your home. A privacy spot is essential for your bird. This doesn't need to be a cozy, or a tent or even a boxed in area. What your baby needs is a break in line of sight from others in the room. A perch with hanging toys positioned in such a way that he can not see you directly and you cannot directly see him. (But give them a few openings between those toys to "keep an eye on you"). You'll find your baby there during the 2-3 o'clock hour dozing after a light mid day eating. The cozier and more private you make their privacy spot, the happier and calmer your parrot will be.

Generally, a companion parrot prefers to be with his flock to eat and drink. It's a group event. In nature the more the merrier, and the more the safer. More eyes and ears are available to keep an eye out for predators. This will prove true at home, where there are no predators, but where instinct doesn't care about that detail. Companion birds are instinctively driven to jump and fly from hither and yon to find food. Food doesn't show up conveniently in bowls in the wild. They have to hunt it down, dig it up, or out and then manipulate it to the size they need to eat. Here we have our parrots literally driven by DNA to work at eating, and we are trying to feed them like a fast food store. The water bowl/or bottle should be a stationary station that never changes, but the food bowls are another matter. Foraging, hunting and multiple locations of bowls, and food toys mimics a little better what they are driven to seek. Create a few different food bowl locations. Randomly change up what is in those bowls. Keep them guessing, and hunting. Hang food toys in the line of travel for your birds.

Line of travel are the routes your parrot has created to move the quickest and most efficiently throughout their cage. The bigger the cage, the more complex those routes become. Again, choice is provided through space. Line of travel is their favorite routes to confirm their own safety, environment stability and assuring themselves that all is well in the world. But even lines of travel should change once in a while. Trees do fall in the forest. Watch your companion parrot use his cage during his peak hours of activity, watch how he travels about, and you'll get a good understanding of just how and where he prefers to pause, rest, eat, daydream, watch and doze. Changing his line of travel once a month also gives him the chance to rethink his world. Like a nice remodel or new furniture, you've given a fresh feel to the place.

I'll assume your bird is a toy lover, and welcomes variety with some ease for the sake of covering stationing play areas, we'll all assume your bird likes most anything. Perches are the first step to toy placement, and there's a synergy with these toy items that are quite powerful in not only stimulating your parrot, but also to drive his natural instincts. So you've got an empty cage, a number of different perches and toys; where do you start?

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(Cont.)

Have your toy layout divide the cage into four layers much like a cake. I say four because it's a pretty fair number to a smaller cage or a very large cage. The fourth layer closest to the bottom should be left clear, providing easy cleaning for you and for a foraging box or plate for them.

Each layer should present a perch/toy combination that is not set up over the lower layer perch/toy combinations. Consider if a perch will offer views outside, keep the toy from blocking that view, but place the toy so that it could be a blind to hide behind while viewing outside. (Privacy) Consider the perching as a way to "ladder" around and up to the top of the cage, while monkeying around with the toys like jungle vines. I like to offer dual side toys with one perch. If my parrot should face one way, he has a toy option, and if he should face the other, a new toy is available.

Consider the thought that your bird may prefer having toys lay over his back. He may prefer having his toys literally laying on the perch. Others like a good struggle and hate their toy touching anything at all! Again, this leads us back to modifying by observation. You may perch and hang all day only to find, half of it just doesn't impress your pumpkin seed at all. Time to modify the location or the perch it's paired with, because birds have their own way of interpreting a good idea. The ultimate goal for your layout is presenting areas of opportunity and comfort. Each area can offer it's own opportunity for play, viewing, privacy, nibbling and war. Yes, I did say war.

No cage is complete without the arch nemesis of toys. There will be a type of toy, or a toy that you put into his cage that will produce an effect that you may consider almost violent. Be careful to watch the full reaction play out. This is not an angry bird, this is a bird who has found his favorite toy of all toys, the arch nemesis! This toy elicits screams and howls, and hanging upside down and head butts and wing flaps and the oddball stare down. It's impossible to buy such a toy on purpose. But it's inevitable you will buy one. And when you realize you've got it, don't loose it. Give it it's own honorable corner with a perch for those lazy days of toy wars. It's really no different than a child play wrestling with a stuffed bear.

What of the bottom of the cage? Oh, there we have a whole new level of fun. I find these the most enjoyable to create, because there isn't anything you can necessarily purchase and install. This is where creativity meets demand. Starting with what your companion bird is sets the tone for content size and challenge. Butters, our macaw, starts her foraging inside a large box or large basket. The cockatiels have a glass pie plate and Felix our CAG refuses to forage. I think he thinks it's beneath his character. There's always one of those in the room.

Foraging isn't always about eating. It's about hunting and investigation. My cockatiels love to play with opened pistachio nuts under Butter's cage. It looks like a game of pistachio football. There's no reason for them to purposely go under there hunting for half shells, but they do it every afternoon. Snickers our scarlet macaw, has his own cardboard box and stuffed toys to drop in and pull out.

Consider the container and what you want to provide with it. A basket provides perching, foraging and shredding. A cardboard box provides privacy, shredding and if you are Butters, something to knock over and then hide in much like an igloo. Pressed empty egg cartons are spectacular foraging containers for the little ones, like parakeets, budgies, and canaries. Oh yes, let's not forget our softbills! They too love the hunt! Cage floor foraging should be about the hunt, not the easy payoff. This is where my tiels find their treat of chopped broccoli. This is where Butters find's her whole nuts of walnut and pecan. This is where string beans and snap pea pods are strewn. This is where a whole date, or chopped dates wait for their tomb raiders. The shrapnel hiding this goodness is where creativity really shines! I save every plastic top off of every bottle that comes in the house. Butters loves the tops that flip (like those from creamer bottles and ketchup bottles.) Our IRN, Kirby, loves the containers for Ice Breakers Ice Cube gum.

Save paper towel innards, cardboard packaging and small boxes (such as tea). I save benign materials that I can create events of exploration. Roll up newspaper pages haphazardly, then stuff them into an empty paper towel roll. For smaller birds, cut that paper towel roll into 1 inch lengths, shred the newspaper to give them a head start and drop one in a foraging container. Straws folded in half then joined with a zip tie. Straw clusters created the same way. Ball up color fast tissue paper, some empty, some with plastic toys or pellets. Pellets are brand new when they have to unwrap them. We recycle toys in our home. Hand me down toys or better yet, hand me down to the next bird in size. They start in one bird's cage and when that bird is bored I remove the toy, dismantle it, discard unusable or dirty parts and move the remaining parts to the next toy build or to a foraging container.

Toss a cucumber in a Macaw's foraging container. There are endless possibilities in your fridge and pantry and backyard. Foraging boils down to creating an amazing pile of stuff all offering highly textural, visual and puzzling pieces of items in a new venue. Apply your observation for modification knowledge here too. Bring the things they love that hang, down onto the floor. Let them figure it out.

Creating the perfect parrot space is a voyage in creativity and awareness of your parrot's preferences. You'll know when you've got it right, when they look forward to time alone in their cage.

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

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