

Feather conditioning

An eight part series on making your bird look like the “**BEST IN SHOW**”! Or how to reduce your wild bird’s stress. (They are wild animals!)

ADVANCED BIRDIE QUIZ

What can happen if all toys are removed from your pet bird?.

Should you get upset if your pet birds tear up toys ?

True or false? The size of the toy parts are more important than overall size of the toy.

Toys may not be the correct term for the amazing array of wood, beads, rope, chain, swings, and other material hanging on quiklinks on the “toy wall” at the local pet shop. We buy toys, give them to our birds, and they immediately try to destroy them or completely ignore them. My bratty little brother used to do that and the ungrateful little twit just shrugged his shoulders and sat in the naughty boy corner with no apparent remorse. Our pet birds seem to do the same thing (except for the corner).

What are they doing? We think they are “playing” (we call them toys) yet “engaging” themselves might be closer. In the wild, birds use their tongue to “feel” the textures say of a stick or nut shell. An empty nut shell will be investigated by your pet bird for quite some time. They may even “hide” it so they can return to it later. We hear of “my bird’s favorite toy” such as a bell or braided sisal that they carry around or sleep next to at night. Pet birds preen these favorite toys then eat, drink some water, straighten some feathers and return to the toy. What happens if the toy time is removed? There is finite time for eating and drinking. A full crop means no more eating. What’s left without a toy? The answer is feather preening sometimes to excess. Excessive feather preening can lead to feather destruction.

Birds are genetically disposed to flying wherever they wish. If we confine that ability to a cage or even a large room they are still hot wired to fly wherever they want.

Sometimes their frustration results with anger, and aggression. In the wild, if birds lose

their ability to fly they get eaten; we don't see feather destruction there. Toys can be a distraction from the frustration of the bird's inability to fly and perhaps distract from feather destruction, and aggression.

One of my own frustrations is when people complain how their bird destroys most of the toys they give them. Perhaps these people would rather have their bird start destroying its own feathers or become aggressive and start screaming and biting. The usual next comment is that their bird destroys the wood perches. The apparent reason would seem to be nest building but if we give birds wood toys they can destroy, then perhaps they won't destroy perches or feathers.

If I've convinced you that birds need toys then our next step is to select something the birds will "preen" or destroy. Some birds are not impressed with wood pieces while others aren't amused with plastic or acrylic. Some birds like louffa, leather, sisal, bells, wood blocks, plastic chain, paper, or woven grasses or branches while others do not. Diversify when picking out a toy. Select a toy with as many different materials on it as possible. If you find a toy with many of the materials mentioned on one toy then buy it and see what your bird tears up or preens. They will certainly ignore something on the toy but you'll get a good idea what they enjoy. Size is important but not the overall size. It's the size of the parts on the toy. It is generally true that African grays like little parts like pony beads, and small wood pieces that look like they might be suited better to lovebirds. Mini macaws and conures also enjoy these little parts. Even the little strands of sisal on a perch seem to fascinate them. Amazons tend to like leather, paper, louffa and woven grasses. Macaws like things that make noise such as bells banging against plastic beads, and heavy chain. Cockatoos like woven grasses and sisal. The smaller birds like finches enjoy the woven grasses, and small pieces of nesting material such as coconut fiber. Parakeets, lovebirds and cockatiels like paper, small playing cards, and woven grasses. Wood works for most but not all birds but the soft woods are preferred over hardwoods.

So have fun, diversify, and have in mind that toy destruction is a good thing. The price is worth avoiding the feather destruction, biting and screaming. Your pet bird may destroy them but will be grateful and so will you. Care for your birds how they're programmed and not like my goofy little brother. **Next month:** LIGHTING AND SUNSHINE
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