

## PART 2

# Foraging



*In our last article we introduced the concept and benefits of foraging in a companion parrot setting and promised to deliver a range of suggestions for foraging set ups that you can provide.*

*In this article we explore how to set up a positive foraging environment for a companion parrot. The focus will be on the creative things that you can do at home using inexpensive materials.*

## RECAP

A parrot's physiology differs from other commonly kept domestic pets; their make-up enables them to rip, tare, crush, strip and dig through their day on the quest for a varied diet (it is estimated that parrots spend over 50% of their time looking for, obtaining and eating their food in the wild) and nesting/roosting sites. Ultimately this is a behaviour that is to be encouraged in captive parrots with the implementation of foraging toys/creations. Remember that the basic premise

is to hide food items and make the food a little more difficult to get at for your parrot. A good set up is one that engages your pet physically and mentally and most importantly – is time consuming!

## DESTRUCTIVE “AGGRESSIVE” BEHAVIOURS FOR SURVIVAL

If you have ever watched Lorikeets playing in the wild you will have noticed that it is far from a gentle affair and yet, if this kind of interaction was to occur between a pet and its handler the bird would be labelled as having a behavioural problem. Birds need to beat up/destroy their toys! Providing items for destruction will give your pet an outlet for innate aggressive behaviours used for survival and protecting territory in an undomesticated situation.

## EXERCISE MADE EASY

Simple actions such as placing the fresh components/treats of your bird's diet on the floor of the cage or aviary can help build the muscle tone of your parrot's pectorals as it returns to perch

after feeding. The same methodology can be used to strengthen the legs by placing chunks of food on the top of the cage. Ensure that the surfaces you use are clean and food is not placed directly under perches. This will prevent faecal contamination.



*A Rainbow Lorikeet eating through the bars of the top of the cage. Hang a cholla perch or plastic chain vertically to add extra angles for the parrot to gain exercise from.*





**NIKKI ARKINSTALL** (co-author)  
Avian Vet Nurse, Coburg, Vic  
Proprietor of Bird Boarding  
www.birdboarding.com.au



**CAROLINE GREVILLE**  
Co-founder of My Parrot Shop



*Branches with their bark and foliage still intact, provide excellent environmental enrichment for your parrot.*

## FOLIAGE FORAGE

### *The triple whammy foraging set up with a magic bonus!*

**1)** Go out and collect some foliage from your garden, the local park or your next door neighbour. Trees from the eucalyptus family are safe (so long as they haven't been sprayed with pesticides) and usually pretty easy to recognise. Bottle brush is an Australian native that is frequently found in gardens and adored by parrots everywhere. The size of your bird/s, the desired size of your set up and the resources available to you will determine whether you get one huge branch with everything still attached, lots of little clippings, or a mixture.

**2)** Find a way to secure the foliage in an area that allows your bird to climb both through it and over it:

- a) Weave bits in and out of the bars of your bird's cage.
- b) Tie a bundle of it to the side of the cage (or the top of the cage!).
- c) Secure smaller bunches to the playstand.
- d) Set a big bunch into a bucket of stones. Or even better set a larger bare branch into a bucket of concrete. Not only will it form a good supporting framework for the foliage it makes for a really exciting play stand all by itself!
- e) Oxidised chicken wire or bird wire secured over the top of a bucket can be a great base for a foliage arrangement. It has the advantage of allowing you to keep water in the

bucket (keeping the foliage fresher for longer) without endangering your bird to drowning.

- f) Secure a perch parallel and close to one side of the cage (inside or out), and use that perch as a way to hold the foliage together.
  - g) The Starbird Get-a-Grip provides an excellent base to weave foliage in and out of.
- 3)** Prepare some fruit and veg to place amongst the foliage. How you prepare the food can vary just as much as your foliage display. Cutting an apple into small pieces and spreading it far and thin amongst the branches will encourage a great deal of roaming before your bird is sated. Placing a whole piece of corn in its husk means your bird will have to find it, peel and shred the husk and then gradually work its way around the cob, sometimes having to get at funny angles in order to reach each piece of corn one at a time.

Putting fruit and veg into foliage is sometimes as simple as stuffing it into a thicket of close set shoots or skewering the item onto a sturdy twig. You may find that initially 'sturdy twig' real estate might be in thin supply (thanks to the abundance of leafy foliage) so just take your garden clippers to a few spots and create your own twigs.

Another helpful tip for skewering your fruit and veg onto twigs is to prepare holes in your fruit and veg first. You may look a little strange doing it, but using your cordless drill to put decent holes through corn, melon, pumpkin, carrot or orange quarters REALLY speeds things up (and it's fun).

**4)** Let your parrot loose on it.

Be warned; If you've never done anything like this before, there is a chance your parrot will be flummoxed by the whole thing. Be sure to observe carefully and learn what your parrot is keen on, afraid of, and most importantly what is being eaten. Some birds might need their first foray into foraging initiated using their favourite treats. You will likely, at least initially, need to continue to provide pellets, fruit and veg using conventional methods as well. The drive to forage might be innate, but doing it effectively is a learnt behaviour and you don't want your bird to starve whilst it is learning the necessary skills to forage successfully!

### **So what's the triple whammy and magic bonus?!**

**Foliage** – environmental enrichment all by itself! Even without the food in them, branches with their bark and foliage still intact, provide excellent environmental enrichment for your parrot.

The busy activity of stripping bark, snipping off leaves, chewing the ends off twigs, finding fresh and

