

A Playground for Animals

**Animal Enrichment
at Taipei Zoo**

This book is dedicated to all the colleagues engaged in animal enrichment at the zoo. Your hard work makes the zoo a healthier, livelier home for its animals and its visitors every day!

From the director of Taipei Zoo

Today most people learn about wildlife through documentaries on television which showcase the fascinating aspects of animals' lives in the wild such as their vigorous and graceful appearances or their cute and interesting behaviors. However, many people still don't comprehend the challenges that wild animals are facing for their very survival. Their natural habitats are disappearing or degrading at an alarming rate, and because of this countless animals have lost their homes in the wild. For some, the survival of their entire species is under serious threat. Who will be able to convey this message to the public, and encourage their connection to vanishing wild species through education and experience? I truly believe that zoos are the best-equipped for this task. When people come to our zoo to see the animals, we seek to provide the best information possible on the urgent action needed to protect wildlife populations and their habitats so that our visitors are eager to support the conservation work we do both within the zoo and in the wild.

Animals in captivity best serve as ambassadors for the wild when their health is maintained to the highest standards and they are allowed to exhibit natural behaviors. That is when people are most intrigued and have the best chance for appreciating the need for wildlife conservation. Of course, looking after the animals provides new challenges every day for their keepers and veterinarians. Due to the limited space in captivity, possible changes in social structures, and many other reasons zoo animals sometimes exhibit abnormal or undesirable behaviors, such as over-grooming and repetitive, so-called "stereotypical" behaviors like pacing. To prevent the development of these sorts of behaviors and encourage natural, healthier behaviors,

“animal enrichment” has been incorporated into nearly every aspect of animal husbandry practices. The simplest definition for zoo enrichment is “any activity or practice that stimulates an animal’s mind, instincts, and body, and encourages natural, active behavior. Some examples of enrichment are increasing the variety of food items; using puzzle-like feeding devices to extend the time animals spend foraging, and providing a wide variety of bedding or nesting materials. All of the enrichment methods we employ aim to fulfill the fullest range of captive animals’ needs and to encourage the display of a diverse range of healthy, natural behaviors.

The use of enrichment and the goals behind it are important indications of how the relationship between humans and animals in captivity has changed greatly compared to the past. When enrichment first began to be introduced, some colleagues were concerned about the amount of work all the new methods would entail, or whether or not it would bring new risks to the animals. However, after many years of careful testing, observation, and documentation, it is clear that enrichment has a positive effect on all the animals in our care. Today, enrichment is part of the daily work routine for nearly every member of the animal care staff. The keepers and curators are the most familiar with each individual animal’s preferences and habits, and so they’re often the first to present new ideas for improving the types and frequency of enrichment. Through trials, reevaluation, and adjustments made for an enrichment plan, our colleagues’ creativity is encouraged and the value of collaboration and communication are reinforced. This helps us become more open-minded and we commit to our jobs at the zoo with more vigor and broadened perspectives.

Director of Taipei Zoo

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