



Individualized Enrichment Programs (I.E.P.'s) for Animals

Before we start creating or purchasing puzzle feeder, or inviting an animal to participate in novel enrichment activities, there are some very important factors that we need to consider:

- overall health
- Background
- foraging/hunting preferences
- medical needs
- dietary constraints
- temperament

In the zoo community, we used what is known as Individualized Enrichment Programs or IEP's. To determine the best enrichment for each animal, the IEP's was tailored to each animal's likes and dislikes, undesirable and desirable behaviors. We considered the individual's physical, emotional, and mental health, as well as the individual's background. The result was a program specific to that animal's needs. This should also be the case when we provide foraging enrichment to captive companion animals.

The Natural History of the animal is part of an IEP.

Here are a few examples:

- Cats' relation to humans began with hunting vermin.
- The Italian Greyhound was bred to hunt rabbits.
- The main reason cats were bred and kept around homes was originally for hunting vermin.
- The Dachshund was used to hunt badgers.
- The Bengal cat breed originally came from crossing domestic cats with wild Asian leopard cats.
- Although cats are carnivores, they still crave live green plants b/c much of their prey have this in their gut.

All of these natural history facts matter when it comes to providing proper enrichment.

Individual History of the Animal is also part of an IPE.

This is VERY important. If we want to ensure that we are really tapping into each animal's individual preferences, hunting styles, and prey preferences, it's helpful to know their past. For ex, I am aware of our four feline family member's individual histories and our canine's individual history, so I have been able to incorporate these individual histories into each of their individual enrichment programs.

Current Challenges or Constraints

- Medical issues – does the animal have arthritis? BP issues? Allergies? Physical or mental challenges?
- Nutrition – are there any dietary constraints?
- Behavioral – history of resource guarding, reactivity, fears, phobias, etc.?

Any food enrichment plan should be integrated with proper veterinary care and nutrition specialist. This ensures maximize effectiveness and quality of the overall animal care you are providing each animal. Our cats are all under the care of a feline veterinary specialist and a feline nutritionist. Our canine is under the care for a veterinary practice who specializes in the canine species. Their input is directly factored into foraging sessions.

Questions to Consider

We need to ask important questions BEFORE providing enrichment.

A successful food enrichment program is goal-oriented and considers The Big Picture.

- Do we have a goal in mind?
- Is the enrichment for one animal? Multiple animals? Multiple species?
- What behaviors of each do we want to encourage?
- How will these behaviors be encouraged?
- Will the foraging enrichment be created (or purchased)?
- Is it safe?
- How will we implement it?
- How will we evaluate the response and the effect?
- Are there any diet restrictions?
- Health issues?
- Is there any oversight that should involve a feline/canine/equine nutritionist or a species-specific health practitioner?

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