

# Juvenile Psittacine Environmental Enrichment



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## KEYWORDS

- Environmental enrichment • Juvenile • Nutritional enrichment
- Occupational enrichment • Physical environment • Psittacine • Sensory enrichment
- Social enrichment

## KEY POINTS

- The juvenile time-frame is the first developmental stage during which most owners of psittacines have direct control over environmental enrichment.
- Social enrichment is facilitated by understanding the young parrot's communication signals, establishing and strengthening the human-parrot bond.
- Independent play is an important skill that must be learned by young psittacine birds, and toys from various categories should be provided for occupational enrichment.
- Nutritional enrichment includes variation in dietary offerings in type, presentation, and foraging opportunities.

## INTRODUCTION

“Environmental enrichment” is a term that came into common use initially to describe modifications of the captive habitat of zoo animals. Because the concept is becoming increasingly applied to the living environment of companion animals, it is reasonable to wonder what environmental enrichment entails for psittacine birds. Because parrots are intelligent, highly social, emotionally complex animals, it is reasonable to ask “What is developmentally appropriate environmental enrichment for juvenile psittacine birds?”

Although environmental (particularly social) enrichment is of great import in the neonatal and preweaning psittacine, the juvenile time frame is the first developmental stage during which most owners have direct control over enrichment. A bird may be considered a juvenile once he or she is weaned, and before puberty (**Table 1**). The

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<b>Table 1</b> <b>Ages of weaning, puberty, and sexual maturity for common species of companion psittacines</b>			
<b>Species</b>	<b>Weaning (wk)</b>	<b>Onset of Puberty</b>	<b>Sexual Maturity (y)</b>
Budgerigar	6–7	4–6 mo	1
Cockatiel	7–11	4–7 mo	1
Peach-faced lovebird	7–11	7–8 mo	1
Sun conure	8–9	9–18 mo	2
Green-cheeked conure	6–12	9–18 mo	2
Congo African gray	12–16	3–5 y	6
Eclectus parrot	14–16	3–5 y	6
Blue-fronted Amazon	12–16	3–5 y	6
Yellow-naped Amazon	15–18	4–6 y	7
Rose-breasted cockatoo	11–18	1–2 y	4
Umbrella cockatoo	12–18	3–4 y	8
Moluccan cockatoo	16–25	3–5 y	10
Yellow-collared macaw	10–12	1–2 y	4–5
Blue and gold macaw	14–22	4–6 y	8
Green-winged macaw	16–35	5–7 y	10–11

*Data from* Wilson L. 10 steps to a better relationship with your bird. Handbook of avian articles. EH Wilson; 2000. p. 14–7.

hallmark of this phase is increased athletic ability and a disinclination to cooperate, and may be the most common age of bird offered for resale by private owners.<sup>1</sup> From the onset of puberty until sexual maturity, a bird is considered an adolescent; physical, mental, and emotional needs for enrichment remain essentially the same during this time, although enrichment with potential for hormonal stimulation should begin to be phased out at this time.

In captive animals, the goals of environmental enrichment may be summarized as increasing behavioral diversity while (1) decreasing the frequency of abnormal behaviors, (2) increasing the range or frequency of normal (wild-type) behavior patterns, (3) increasing positive use of the environment, and (4) increasing the ability to cope with challenges in a more normal way (ie, resiliency).<sup>2</sup> For animals as intelligent as parrots, which are also possessed of such a rich emotional range, the list of goals for them may be expanded to include developing a sense of curiosity, a sense of well-being and happiness, healthy bonds to the family (human and nonhuman), and a certain degree of autonomy and self-care. In addition, owners should be aware that normal behaviors in a psychologically healthy psittacine bird are often loud, messy, destructive behaviors; a human who cannot tolerate living with a loud, messy, destructive creature should not try to live with a parrot.<sup>3</sup>

According to some behaviorists, environmental enrichment can be divided into five major types: (1) social, (2) occupational, (3) physical, (4) sensory, and (5) nutritional.<sup>2</sup>

### SOCIAL ENRICHMENT

Social enrichment may be with either a conspecific or contraspecific (humans or non-humans), and may include direct contact or noncontact, such as visual or auditory interactions.<sup>2</sup>

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