



Animal Care Tech Note

Preparing Your Avian Environment Enhancement Plan: It's More Than Adding Toys!

All avian facilities are required under Section 3.154 of the Animal Welfare Regulations to develop, document, and follow a species-appropriate environment enrichment plan to promote the psychological well-being of the birds in your care. If you operate or manage an avian facility that is licensed or registered with USDA Animal Care, please make sure you have a plan and know where it is. **Your attending veterinarian must approve the plan.** You must provide a copy of the plan to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service upon request. This tech note describes each topic that you must address in your plan. On the following page is a guide to help you write a complete plan.

Environment Enhancement Plan Exemptions

While uncommon, the attending veterinarian can exempt an individual bird from the plan if it is necessary for the health, condition, or well-being of the bird. The attending veterinarian must review and approve an exemption every 30 days unless the exemption is due to a permanent condition.

An Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee may also exempt a bird for research purposes. Such exemptions should be reviewed at least annually.

Exemptions must be documented in writing and available at the time of USDA inspection. Records of exemptions must be maintained by the dealer, exhibitor, or research facility for at least 1 year.

What Your Plan Must Cover



Social Needs

Many birds are social! Your plan must specifically describe what your facility does to address the social needs of avian species known to exist in social groups.



Environmental Enrichment

You must describe how you use materials or activities to enrich your birds' environment and provide them a way to express safe normal behaviors. Indicate how often you offer and change the materials. Examples of materials include pools, misters, water features, a variety of perching sizes and locations, nesting materials, toys, puzzles, special foods, foraging opportunities, and a variety of substrates and plants.



Special Needs

If any of the birds listed below are present at your facility, you must describe the special attention they receive.

- Young birds
- Birds showing psychological distress
- Birds used in research where activity is restricted
- Social birds unable to see and hear other birds



Restraint Devices

You must address the use of any restraint devices (most often used in research or facilities with free-flighted raptors) in your plan. Restraint must be done for the shortest period possible.

Environment Enhancement Plan Writing Guide

As you write your plan, follow the prompts in this guide to make sure you adequately address each topic.



Social Needs

- List which social bird species are housed in groups or have access to see and hear other compatible birds.
- Describe strategies to meet the social needs of individually housed social birds such as intermittent social housing, additional enrichment, or more time with human caretakers.
- Explain how you assess compatibility between birds.



Environmental Enrichment

- Describe how the housing allows for natural movements and normal social behaviors such as positions for resting, sleeping, feeding, preening, swimming, exploration and play.
- Describe the perches, water features, or substrate you provide, including whether there are multiple levels in each enclosure for species that climb, perch, or roost. Indicate whether you provide nest boxes or nesting material.
- Detail any enrichment that promotes foraging or task-oriented feeding, healthy chewing, shredding, stripping, or other destructive play behaviors. Indicate how often enrichment is changed to keep interest.
- List what you provide to stimulate the senses (smell, touch, taste, hearing, and vision) and describe any food enrichment used. Indicate how often you rotate those items to keep interest.
- Describe any other enrichment methods you use to promote species-specific behavior.



Special Needs

- Outline your enrichment strategies for chicks.
- Describe how you vary enrichment materials based on whether the chicks are parent- versus human-raised. Indicate whether the parents have materials necessary to provide for the chicks' needs and list those materials.
- Describe how you identify and manage abnormal behaviors, such as hyper-aggressiveness, stereotypies, or self-injurious behavior.



Restraint Devices

- Document the reason birds are to be held in restraint devices.
- Specify how long the birds will be held in the restraint devices. Indicate whether you provide times of unrestrained activity.
- Describe the program and strategies for managing birds held in restraint devices.

More Information

To learn more about environmental enrichment plans or ask questions about writing one for your facility, contact USDA's Animal Care staff at (970) 494-7478 or animalcare@usda.gov.