

[Mickaboo Discuss] Assessment of visual enrichment in the FTB bird boarding room

1 message

 -- via Discuss <discuss@mickaboo.org>

Sat, Jul 26, 2025 at 4:33 PM

Reply-To:  < >

To: General Mickaboo Discussion <discuss@mickaboo.org>

Hi everyone,

This first of five emails is focused on the quality of visual enrichment of the boarded birds visible in the FTB tour video.

Launch the FTB tour video, and you can use it to follow along as I gather visual enrichment information from the video.

My information gathering begins after the door to the bird boarding room is opened and the tour enters the room. We've entered the boarding room. Let's look around and see what information we can gather regarding visual enrichment of the caged birds.

The room walls are light green. No decorative elements are visible on the walls.

There are five gray cages on the left. All but one of them appears to contain crippled conures that require flannel bedding to lie on. The fifth is a smaller cage with a conure visibly able to perch, that also contains at least two hanging toys. The five cages are of sturdy grey metal without decorative elements on or attached to them. On the right of the room are two columns of black cages stacked three high. There are no decorative elements visible on or attached to these cages.

There are perches and toys in some, if not all, of the black cages.

Another grey cage is seen to the far right, containing another crippled conure lying on flannel bedding.

Each cage contains a single bird that is visible to many, if not all, of the other birds in the other cages.

During the video, an FTB staffer rolled a cart into the room containing bowls of different shapes and colors of food items.

These are seen placed in one of the cages. All the cages likely receive such food.

FTB staff are visible to the birds as staff come and go during the day, as we saw for feeding, and no doubt for routine cleaning of the cages.

Now, let's assess the visual enrichment significance of the information we've gathered.

The room surfaces lack anything of enrichment interest to the birds.

None of the metal cages in the room appears to provide any visual enrichment.

There are perches and toys in a few of the cages, and these items would provide visual enrichment to the birds in those cages.

The flannel bedding is not likely to provide any enrichment to any of the birds.

The birds seeing other birds provides some enrichment.

The food placed in the birds' cages is in diverse shapes and colors and provides substantial enrichment while it is present in the birds' cages.

The staff coming and going doing tasks, for feeding, cage cleaning, and room janitorial, provides some visual enrichment, but staff visits are likely brief, and the room is presumably empty of staff except during the few short staff task visits during the day.

Except for seeing the food, other birds, a few bird toys, and occasionally the staff, the birds experience no additional visual enrichment in the boarding room. The visual enrichment in the FTB boarding room is minimal. FTB could do a much better job of providing visual enrichment in the boarding room to improve the psychological health and well-being of the boarded birds.

Research into bird enrichment, focusing on the psychological and physiological health and well-being of birds, definitively shows that imitating the natural environment in a bird's artificial environment should be central to the design and operation of its physical environment. This is as true for birds in zoos as it is for birds in homes and bird boarding facilities. In the FTB bird boarding room, there are no visual elements that imitate the birds' natural environment.

So, what happens to a bird that suffers from deficient visual enrichment?

This email, and the forthcoming four other FTB enrichment assessment emails, do not provide a tutorial on bird enrichment research, principles, and practices, or relevant LEED green building research, principles, and practices. If I conduct an online seminar on bird enrichment, I'll discuss in detail key research, principles, and practices of bird enrichment and LEED.

A lack of visual enrichment can significantly impact a caged pet bird's well-being, potentially leading to boredom, stress, and associated behavioral issues.

Here's how this lack of stimulation can negatively affect them.

Boredom and Frustration: Birds in the wild spend a considerable amount of time exploring their surroundings, foraging, and interacting with their environment. In a confined cage with a monotonous visual environment, these natural behaviors are suppressed, leading to boredom and frustration.

Stress and Anxiety: A visually bland environment can contribute to stress and anxiety in birds, as they may feel a lack of control over their surroundings and experience a sense of confinement. Stress can also suppress the immune system, making the bird more susceptible to infections and diseases.

Behavioral Problems: These negative emotions can manifest as a range of undesirable behaviors, such as lethargy or decreased activity. A bored bird may become lethargic and lose interest in playing or interacting with their surroundings.

What are some reasonable, practical, innovative measures already implemented at some zoos, bird care facilities, and bird owners' homes that FTB might also implement to improve visual enrichment for the boarding room birds?

Let's use imitating the natural environment as a guiding principle to help plan our visual enrichment improvements. Below, I mention a few enrichment improvements that could improve the psychological health and well-being of the caged birds in the FTB boarding room.

Place outdoor vegetation photo scene wall posters and backdrops on walls adjacent to cages. The vegetation images would show colorful shrub, tree, and flower vegetation of types familiar to the birds. The vegetation would visually appear to be within a foot of the cage, seemingly to the bird to be close enough for the birds to hop onto a branch in the leafy plants.

Install wall-mounted monitors adjacent to cages showing videos of colorful natural vegetation scenes familiar to the birds. The video vegetation should seem close enough for the birds to feel they could step into the foliage. The colorful, moving natural images would provide strong visual stimulation for the birds and help them feel as though they were living in a natural landscape.

Place fake shrubs, trees, and flowers adjacent to the birds' cages to create the illusion for the birds of living nestled in a vegetated thicket of trees, shrubs, and flowers.

Offer a variety of colorful toys of different shapes and sizes. Birds are visually stimulated, so brightly colored toys can help keep them engaged and prevent boredom.

Include sanitized natural elements. Incorporating branches, leaves, and wreaths in the cage can mimic their natural habitat and provide visual interest.

This concludes my use of the FTB tour video to assess the visual enrichment of the FTB bird boarding room and possible improvements.

Feel free to email me if you have comments and questions regarding what I've presented in this email.



[Mickaboo Discuss] Assessment of tactile enrichment in the FTB bird boarding room

1 message

 --- via Discuss <discuss@mickaboo.org>

Tue, Jul 29, 2025 at 3:04 PM

Reply-To:  < >

To: General Mickaboo Discussion <discuss@mickaboo.org>

Hi everyone,

This email focuses on the quantity and quality of tactile enrichment of the boarded birds visible in the FTB tour video.

We are using the video again to look around inside the bird boarding room. Let's look around and see what information we can gather regarding tactile enrichment of the caged birds.

There are five gray cages on the left, made of gray metal. All but one of them appears to contain crippled conures with flannel bedding to lie on and no other tactile objects visible. The fifth is a smaller cage with a conure visibly able to perch, which also includes at least two hanging toys. On the right of the room are two columns of black cages stacked three high. There are perches and toys in some, if not all, of the black cages.

Another grey cage is seen to the far right, containing another crippled conure lying on flannel bedding. There are no tactile objects visible.

Each cage contains a single bird.

During the video, an FTB staffer rolled a cart into the room containing bowls of different shapes and textures of food items. These are seen placed in one of the cages. All cages likely receive such food.

FTB staff come and go during the day, as we saw for feeding, and no doubt also for cleaning the cages regularly.

Now, let's assess the tactile enrichment significance of the information we've gathered.

Except for flannel bedding that provides a soft surface and a possible chewing experience for tactile enrichment, there are no other tactile enrichment objects in the four of the five grey cages on the left that contain crippled conures.

The fifth cage contains a perch and a couple of toys that provide the ambulatory conure with tactile enrichment through playing with and chewing the perch and toys.

There are perches and toys in some, if not all, of the black cages in the two columns. These perches and toys provide tactile enrichment for the conures in these black cages.

Except for flannel bedding that provides a soft surface and a possible chewing experience for tactile enrichment, there are no other tactile enrichment objects in the grey cage on the far right that contains a crippled conure lying on flannel bedding. There are no other tactile objects visible.

The food fed to the conures has a diverse range of shapes, textures, and tastes that provide tactile enrichment for the conures.

I presume that the crippled conures are picked up by vet staff when the cages are cleaned and the flannel bedding is replaced. I don't know if the conures enjoy this tactile contact or whether it causes distress; therefore, I can't determine if it's positive tactile enrichment.

Except for the birds beaking their food, the ambulatory birds' black cage bird toys, and staff handling the crippled conures during cage cleaning, the birds experience no additional tactile enrichment in the boarding room. The tactile enrichment in the FTB boarding room is better for the ambulatory birds than the crippled birds because the ambulatory birds have toys and perches.

The overall tactile enrichment for the boarding room caged birds is minimal. FTB could do a much better job of providing tactile enrichment in the boarding room to improve the psychological health and well-being of the boarded birds.

Research into bird enrichment, focusing on the psychological and physiological health and well-being of birds, definitively shows that imitating the natural environment in a bird's artificial environment should be central to the design and operation of its physical environment. This is as true for birds in zoos as it is for birds in homes and bird boarding facilities. In the FTB bird boarding room, except for wooden perches in the black cages, there are no tactile elements in their cages that imitate the birds' natural environment.

So, what happens to a bird that suffers from deficient tactile enrichment?

A lack of tactile enrichment can significantly impact a caged pet bird's well-being, potentially leading to boredom, stress, and associated behavioral issues.

Here's how this lack of tactile enrichment can negatively affect them.

Physical effects

Feather picking and self-mutilation: Birds may engage in excessive feather picking or even self-mutilation as a way to cope with boredom, stress, or frustration arising from a lack of stimulating textures in their environment.

Beak overgrowth and poor beak health: Chewing and manipulating objects with various textures helps maintain a healthy beak. Without proper tactile enrichment, a bird's beak can become overgrown and potentially unhealthy.

Obesity and muscle weakness: Lack of appropriate tactile enrichment can lead to reduced physical activity, contributing to weight gain and weakened muscles.

Psychological effects

Boredom and stress: Birds are intelligent and naturally curious creatures. A monotonous environment lacking opportunities for tactile exploration can lead to boredom, stress, and anxiety.

Stereotypical behaviors: Some birds develop repetitive and seemingly purposeless behaviors, like pacing, head bobbing, or screaming excessively, as a way to cope with the lack of stimulating engagement.

Increased fearfulness and aggression: Lack of enrichment can make birds more prone to anxiety and aggression, potentially leading to undesirable behaviors like biting.

What are some reasonable, practical, innovative measures already implemented at some zoos, bird care facilities, and bird owners' homes that FTB might also implement to improve tactile enrichment for the boarding room birds?

In essence, a bird's environment needs to cater to their natural instincts and curiosity by providing ample opportunities for tactile interaction. Let's use imitating the natural environment as a guiding principle to help plan our tactile enrichment improvements. Below, I mention a few enrichment improvements that could improve the psychological health and well-being of the caged birds in the FTB boarding room.

Offering access to destructible, manipulable toys, as well as foraging opportunities, can promote a happier, healthier life for a caged pet bird.

Provide tactile enrichment toys and foraging objects in the cages of the crippled conures to improve the birds' opportunities to physically interact with their cage environment.

Include sanitized natural elements. Incorporating branches, leaves, and wreaths in the cage can mimic their natural habitat and provide tactile interest.

Provide natural materials for chewing and shredding. Birds have an instinct to chew, so provide safe and destructible materials like untreated wood blocks, wood branches, sola logs, yucca chips, banana leaves, palm leaves, coconut shells, pine cones, cardboard, and paper-based toys.

Hide food in foraging toys or other items to stimulate their natural foraging behaviors. This could involve crumpled paper cups, paper bags, or food stuffed into natural materials like wood blocks, vine balls, or corn husks. Foraging trays with various substrates and hidden food items can also be beneficial.

Always prioritize safety when choosing and implementing tactile enrichment items. Ensure materials are non-toxic, durable, and free of small or easily detachable parts that could be ingested or cause injury. Avoid treated woods and synthetic fibers that can be harmful.

Clean and disinfect perches, toys, and other tactile objects regularly to prevent bacterial growth.

Offer a variety of tactile items and rotate them regularly to prevent boredom and maintain engagement.

Pay close attention to a bird's individual preferences and reactions to different enrichment items. Tailor the enrichment based on each bird's individual behavior and interests.

This concludes my use of the FTB tour video to assess the tactile enrichment of the FTB bird boarding room.

Feel free to email me if you have comments and questions regarding what I've written in this email.



[Mickaboo Discuss] Assessment of Audio Enrichment in the FTB Bird Boarding Room

1 message

--- via Discuss <discuss@mickaboo.org>

Wed, Jul 30, 2025 at 10:39 AM

Reply-To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]>

To: discuss@mickaboo.org

Hi everyone,

This email focuses on the quality of audio enrichment of the boarded birds visible in the FTB tour video.

My information gathering begins after the door to the bird boarding room is opened and the tour enters the room. Let's see what information we can gather regarding audio enrichment of the caged birds.

The video soundtrack doesn't appear to include any sounds that might be present in the boarding room. The video replaces any FTB sounds with a soundtrack that verbally narrates the video tour of FTB.

If there are audio speakers in the bird boarding room, they are not visible in the video.

Using the video, it is not possible to determine if audio enrichment is present in the bird boarding room.

What if the boarding room has no audio enrichment and, except for occasional bird vocalizations and staff visit sounds, the room is silent?

A lack of audio enrichment can significantly impact the well-being of caged pet parrots, potentially leading to stress, boredom, and abnormal behaviors.

Here's how this deficiency can affect them:

Boredom and Frustration. Parrots are intelligent and social creatures who rely heavily on sound in the wild for communication and environmental cues. A quiet, sterile environment can be incredibly monotonous and lead to frustration.

Increased Vocalization/Screaming. Paradoxically, a lack of appropriate auditory stimulation might lead to excessive screaming as the bird tries to elicit a response or relieve boredom.

Stereotypical behaviors. Repetitive behaviors like pacing, feather picking, or self-mutilation can develop as coping mechanisms for boredom and stress in the absence of engaging stimuli.

Mental and emotional health decline. Just like humans, parrots need mental stimulation for optimal well-being. A lack of auditory enrichment can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, and overall reduced quality of life.

If the FTB bird boarding room is a quiet environment, then it can be detrimental to a parrot's physical and mental health. Providing a variety of sounds that mimic their natural environment and encourage engagement is crucial for their overall well-being.

To enrich the lives of indoor caged parrots, providing a variety of audio sounds can be very beneficial.

Here's a breakdown of sounds that can be helpful.

Natural sounds and bird calls:

Forest sounds or nature recordings. Sounds of rustling leaves, gentle wind, rain, and water flowing can mimic a parrot's natural environment and can be calming and stimulating.

Calls from their own species. Playing recordings of parrot calls, especially of their specific species, can help them feel more connected to a flock, potentially reducing feelings of isolation.

Human interaction and vocalizations:

Engage in vocal play. Talking and singing with the boarding room parrots can be a very enriching form of social interaction and provide the birds with mental stimulation.

Establish a contact call. A specific call used when staff enter or leave the room can help the birds feel connected to staff, a form of flock communication.

Recognize and respond to natural calling times. Parrots often call out during the morning and evening to locate flock members. Staff joining this natural behavior can be enriching.

Environmental sounds:

Bird-safe audio toys and noise makers. Bells, rattles, and other toys that create sound provide auditory stimulation and can encourage playtime.

In summary, a rich auditory environment provides mental stimulation, reduces stress, and allows parrots to express natural behaviors. Be observant of the parrot's reactions to different sounds and prioritize sounds they enjoy and that promote their health and well-being.

This concludes my use of the FTB tour video to assess the audio enrichment of the FTB bird boarding room.

Feel free to email me if you have comments and questions regarding what I've written in this email.