

Wintertime Blues? Not Anymore!



Cockatoo flying through a covered patio in the winter.

By Lara Joseph

Summer has so many benefits to our parrots and our relationship with them. Summer is a time of warmer temps and breaking out of the house and into the aviaries, open windows, fresh air, and neighborhood sounds. It can be easier for us to shower our companion parrots or birds we call our pets because of the warm weather and the natural sunshine that helps with their drying.

So many times I hear of people and their companion parrots having the wintertime blues. Often times if people don't live in warm enough climates, aviaries are shut down for the winter and windows are closed. Daylight ours are shorter and therefore, for many, the time we have to spend with our companion parrots is shorter also. It doesn't have to be.

Winter is a favored time for me and my parrots! The shorter days cause me to be a little more creative with my time with them and I'm always up for a challenge.

Daylight hours are shorter. This means evening hours are longer. Why not take advantage of the evening hours being the time in which we think about, design, and create toys and activities for our birds to interact with and do with us during the next day? Evening hours give me time to think about what behavior issues I may have recognized that are developing now that the birds don't have the space or time they had in the aviary during the summer. I like to hang window perches with suction cups on different windows throughout the house. This gives birds extra places to perch. The great thing about window perches, is that they can be moved every day to new places giving new views of the outdoors for our companion birds. If living with flighted birds, moving the perches can cause them to think quicker and look for the new perch placement. I don't like anything getting predictable around here, including perch placement. (Photo B - window perch)

Some of my birds love to run on the floor, so I get out a ball of their choice and roll it on the floor and reinforce them for running after it. The great thing about this is teaching them to do a retrieve, go get the ball and bring it back to me! Many of my birds love this! This is a great way to burn off extra energy they may have built up in the cage. Throw the ball, get it back, throw it again. Do you know how much energy our companion parrots can burn off chasing a ball for ten minutes?

I make many floor perches from pvc pipe also. These are great because, like the window perches, they can be moved to different areas throughout the house. I usually get some or all of the birds out and place them all on a perch, and we interact together tossing the ball up in the air and catching it, and they seem to really enjoy watching me toss the ball with the others. This gives them time to release energy with their screaming from watching my interaction with the other birds. Ten to twenty minutes of screaming, flying, wing flapping, and running can burn off a lot of energy. When this is done several times a day, that's even more of a bonus for us and for them. This causes them to take more time to refuel, preen, and sleep.

The evening hours when most of my companion parrots are sleeping is the time I take advantage of making foraging toys. I'm a big promoter of teaching our companion parrots to forage for many reasons. One of those reasons is because it creates opportunities for mental and physical stimulation for our birds. Many times, the mental stimulation can wear out our companion parrots just as much as the physical stimulation. Foraging through toys gives our companion parrots a job to do. Often times I see my birds choosing to not come out of their cage for the opportunity to continue working on and solving a foraging toy. I also use foraging toys as a reinforcer and reason for my companion parrots to want to go back into their cages.

In summary, another behavior I keep strong and often spend more time on in the winter, is training my companion parrots. With each time our birds hear us or see us, we are training them whether we realize it or not. So, why not take this time to train them behaviors that we want to see them maintain or increase? Training is a form of communication with our companion parrots and is one of the strongest forms of communication and one of the most valuable forms of enrichment that I have found for the birds that live with me. This is the opportune time to teach them to recall from the air or from the ground. Teach them to pick up or drop items on cue. Teach them that spending more time with visitors or others in the family has value to

them. Winter-time can be a time to sharpen training skills for summer and can be a time to re-design or design that dream aviary you've always been wanting. Happy training! Happy Foraging! Happy Winter!

Lara is the owner of The Animal Behavior Center, LLC in Ohio. She presents workshops, travels, lectures, and consults focusing on positive reinforcement interactions and modifying behavior through applications in behavior analysis. She is also the Director of Avian Training for a wildlife rehabilitation center where she focuses on taking stress out of animal environments. Lara is an active member of The Animal Behavior Management Alliance, The American Federation of Aviculture, a professional member of the International Association of Avian Trainers and Educators, The Pet Professional Guild, and the founder of The Parrot Society of NW Ohio. For more information visit her website at TheAnimalBehaviorCenter.com.



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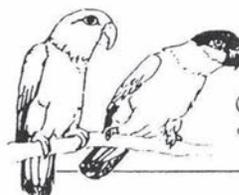
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