

Birds and Toy Obsessions

Toy Obsession or Appreciation?

By Nikki Moustaki

Determine whether your bird is obsessed with a toy or if it's just enjoying it. Courtesy Wade Bischoff, North Dakota

There's some bit of controversy or misunderstanding when it comes to "toy obsession" and parrots. One school of thought says that the moment a bird becomes "obsessed" with a toy, the toy should be removed immediately. Another school of thought says that it's cruel to remove a favored toy. Like with most things, there is a middle ground.

First, determine whether the bird is obsessed with the toy or if it's just enjoying it. Obsession and hardy play are two very different things. A bird is obsessed with a toy when its behavior toward you changes as a result of an attachment to the toy. Perhaps the bird is protecting the toy using aggression. Perhaps the bird is regurgitating to the toy so often that you fear for its health. A bird that's just playing with a toy won't change its behavior toward you when the toy is "threatened." Some birds need security blankets and will sleep snuggled up with a favorite toy — this is not obsession, it is habit.

Bird Toy Ideas

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If you suspect that your bird is becoming obsessed with a toy, try to determine the cause. Is the bird mature and is it springtime? Has the bird been prompted into breeding behaviors but has no mate? It's possible that no matter what you do, no matter how many toys you remove from this bird, it will still find something to attempt to "mate" with. This isn't a crisis, and the behavior usually stops in the fall, when natural light starts to shorten. You can also use artificial lighting to prompt a bird to come out of breeding mode by allowing no more than nine to 11 hours of light per day.

If your bird's toy buddy isn't a mate and the bird's behavior hasn't changed — it just loves one particular toy over others — don't sweat it too much. It's like having a favorite pair of shoes or drinking from your favorite cup. It's just habit, and habit isn't always bad.