

# LABORATORY PRIMATE NEWSLETTER

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## Enrichment for Owl Monkeys: A Discussion

This January, Lisa Abbuhl [e-mail: [labbuhl@usouthal.edu](mailto:labbuhl@usouthal.edu)], an Environmental Enrichment Technician at the University of South Alabama, wrote to the Laboratory Animal Refinement & Enrichment Forum e-list: "I just wanted to know if anyone out there works with owl monkeys and if so what types of enrichment do you use? Thanks in advance!"

Autumn Sorrells [e-mail: [Asorrells@larc.ucsf.edu](mailto:Asorrells@larc.ucsf.edu)], the Enrichment Coordinator at UCSF-LARC, responded: "We work with these very timid guys. We give them hammocks and nest boxes as structural enrichment. Then we provide forage mix (Harlan Sani-Chips®, wax worms [*Galleria mellonella*], raisins, pumpkin seeds) inside a closed up toilet paper roll, or peanuts and grapes in a hanging whiffle ball feeder, and we hand feed dates (which they LOVE!). We have just started providing pinecones that we allow mealworms to burrow into so the owls have to pick them out. Some enjoy this and some are not too sure about it!"

Lisa wrote: "Autumn, thank you so much for the information. In your cages do you provide both the hammock and the hide box? If so, do they use each equally?"

And Autumn replied: "We tried to provide different levels of elevation, so the hammock hangs high in the cage and the nest box is below it. They use their nest boxes often to hide in, as they are very shy animals. But when they are just hanging out uninterrupted during the day, they will use the hammocks. Be patient when introducing ANYTHING new to these guys, as they require a long acclimation period. They may not use something you provide them for a long while but eventually warm up to it as their trust builds."

Mary Feurtado [e-mail: [mary.r.feurtado@vanderbilt.edu](mailto:mary.r.feurtado@vanderbilt.edu)] wrote: "We have owl monkeys here at Vanderbilt. Some are pair-housed and some are singly housed. We provide pair housing when possible and nesting 'tubes' in each cage (they are made of PVC about 16-18 inches tall, 8 inches in diameter, with a 4-inch 'peep' hole cut out of the upper third of one side for them to peek out of). We adapted this from a design in Baer et al. (1994). The owl monkeys utilize these tubes frequently."

"We provide a varied diet, move their cages around for variety, and provide small round mirrors in each cage along with a large door-sized mirror hung on an IV stand that we roll around to different cages. I hang seed bells (the kind you buy for birds) in each cage and occasionally give them clumps of straw to pick at. I give them juice (Prang Electrolyte Replenisher from Bio-Serv) in a small bowl a couple of times a week, a chewable children's vitamin once a week, and occasional Primatreats. Our owl monkeys have never cared for mealworms but do like sunflower seeds and peanuts and all kinds of fruit – especially bananas (and especially overripe ones). They also like sweet potatoes and yogurt (the latter is good for hiding medicine in).

"We have had some health problems (cardiomyopathy) with our owl monkeys, which have influenced our choices in food enrichment. Maintaining hydration by giving Prang seems to help. I give about two ounces at a time. Almost all monkeys will consume this in 24 hours."

Lisa then wrote: "Thank you so much for the information!! We also give lots of fruit and veggies throughout the week, as well as biscuits for a balanced diet. Also they get prima treats. I was looking for non-food enrichment ideas. So I am definitely going to look into the seed bells and straw. Thank you again."

*[Editor's Comment: The food being varied so much certainly makes the diet for individuals variable and difficult to ensure that animals are getting their essential proteins and vitamins and minerals in a balanced diet. When animals are fed a pelleted food that is properly formulated, it is obvious that the animals get all the nutrients they need in proper quantities. When animals are fed a variety of supplements, their diet can be distorted while they get enrichment. One has to be careful about being anthropomorphic about what is "good" based on human needs and desires. An example is the consumption of soft drinks by school age kids, which contribute to obesity when consumed "free choice." I am all for enrichment, as long as it is confined to foods that add nutrients which contribute to a balanced diet. – Morris Povar]*

### Reference

Baer, J., Weller, R., & Kakoma, I. (Eds.). (1994). *Aotus: The Owl Monkey*. San Diego: Academic Press.