



Enrichment suggestions for captive born, hand-reared serval held in captivity

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**Liesl Smith
Cheetah Outreach, Stellenbosch**

Enrichment

Animals in captivity have a lot of time on their hands. Whereas wild animals would fill their time with activities such as hunting, searching for water or shelter, protecting their territory or searching for a mate, captive animals very often are provided all of these. This could potentially create problems such as boredom, frustration, stereotypic behaviors and stress. Undesirable behaviours include self-injurious actions such as excessive grooming, abnormal behaviours such as regurgitation and reingestion, aggressive behaviours and stereotypic behaviours. Behaviour is an important indication of welfare and enrichment enhances welfare of animals in captivity.

Enrichment becomes a valuable and necessary practice by creating activities or providing stimulation that would maximize their quality of life and lead to inquisitive behavior. By enriching the animal's environment, you empower the animal to have control over its environment and you give the animal a choice. Ignoring something is still a choice.

Apart from the fact that enrichment provides methods of passing time, the added physical and mental stimulation might also cause better reproductive success and improve visitor's experiences since the image of healthy and well-adjusted animals are promoted. Different forms of enrichment are used for captive animals today, such as:

- Exhibit or cage design
- Visual
- Exercise
- Auditory or verbal
- Olfactory
- Social
- Tactile
- Feeding or foraging
- Novel objects or toys
- Training and handling

Enrichment should be considered part of the daily husbandry routine at all responsible animal care facilities. An efficient enrichment programme can be more important than the size of the enclosures the animals are kept in. Environmental enrichment is not a luxury but a management tool.

When developing an enrichment programme at a captive facility, the habits, behaviours and nature of the species and the personality of the specific individual need to be considered.

Some enrichment suggestions include the following:

Enclosure design and exhibits

Enclosures should be designed in order to address the needs for space, shade, shelter, privacy, stimulation, elevation and where appropriate, public viewing.

When designing enclosure layouts the following should be incorporated:

Shade

Structures providing shade is an essential element in every enclosure.

Shelter

Waterproof huts not only serve as sleeping quarters and as hideaway, but also provide a lookout post to the animal.



Water

Water should be provided in solid, non-toxic containers. Containers should be placed in an easily accessible and shaded area. All water containers should be disinfected on a regular basis and the same container used for the same cat preferably.

Logs

Big logs can be packed at angles to one another. Alternatively flat pieces of logs can be stacked loosely on top of and against one another. Logs provide an often-visited area to many cats. The serval at Cheetah Outreach often jumps on the logs to get a better view of the surrounding area.



❑ Vegetation/water features

In the wild servals are found in grasslands and often in reedbeds on the edges of rivers and swamps. They use the cover to hunt and hide away from threats. In captivity it is important to also provide enough vegetation and cover in the exhibit. This can be offered in the form of shrubs or sections of long grass.

Servals are often found near permanent water sources and many enjoy spending some time in water. Water features can be incorporated into the enclosure, but the design should allow for regular and proper cleaning. If this is not possible water can be provided by using big, shallow water containers. The serval at Cheetah Outreach has often been seen lying in the water in such a container on warm summer days.



Jumping platform

When planning to build a platform the following should be considered:

1. Materials used

Non-toxic, safe materials should be used.

2. Placement

The platform should be placed in such a position as not to allow any jumping or climbing over fences or other structures. The platforms are all erected on a flat, open section of grass, well away from any fences, huts or any other structure.

3. Construction

There should be no protruding or sharp objects. There should be no objects that could cut, injure or get the animal entangled.

To accommodate the development of the serval's jumping ability it is a good idea to construct a platform with an adjustable height mechanism. In this way it can gradually be lifted higher as the serval develops and attempts higher jumps.



Privacy

Concealed, private areas should be provided in all serval enclosures. Rocks, areas of shade cloth, palm bushes, reeds or simple bamboo walls can be used to provide these.

Security

Serval enclosures should be roofed to prevent escape.

Vertical space

The enclosure should offer vertical space to accommodate jumping and climbing behaviour.



- ❑ Manipulating enclosure layout

Gates separating adjacent enclosures might be opened and provides more space and opportunities for enrichment.

- ❑ Habitat modifications

Habitat modification by moving and changing exhibits inside the enclosures might provide stimulation.

Visual and auditory

Objects that provide visual and auditory stimulation include the following:

- ❑ Passing trains, motorbikes, running children, other animals, laborers, golf carts, bicycles and wheelchairs. Having visual access to some of these not only provide mental stimulation, but can also provide good exercise since some animals would chase some of these objects and show much interest.

- ❑ Other animals

Walking different types of animals on their leads past the serval enclosure provides much interest and stimulation. The serval would typically follow the animal along the fence and try and sniff it through the fence. Often this is associated with vocalization and posturing. Animals used at Cheetah Outreach to provide visual and auditory stimulation

by close proximity are dogs, cheetahs, goats, jackals, caracal and a meerkat. Be careful not to allow the animal too close to the fence, since the serval may try to grab the animal through the fence.

Exercising

Exercise is essential and is a part of husbandry that cannot be compromised on. Not only does the activity help to maintain a healthy physical condition, but it also provides excellent mental stimulation. Exercise can be provided by the following means:

❑ Toys

Balls and rubber snakes are some of the serval's favourite toys. Rubber snakes can be suspended from an elevated area to encourage the serval to jump up and retrieve it. Never leave any toys in the animal's enclosure without supervision.



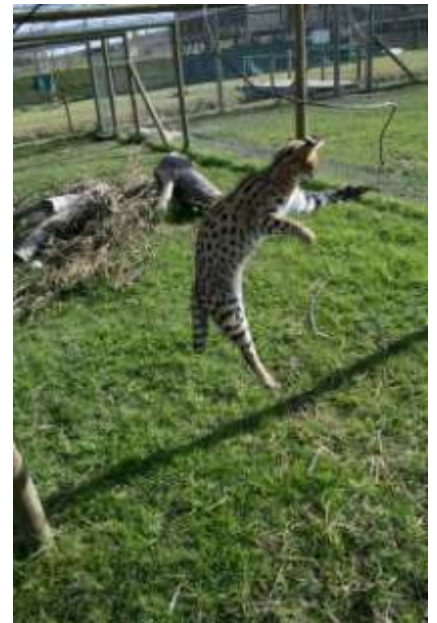
❑ Water

Servals can't resist water and squirting it from a hosepipe will encourage the serval to chase after it and play with it.



❑ Whip with novelty item

A piece of string can be attached to a whip or a stick with a novelty item attached on the other side of the string. This can be used to encourage jumping behavior. Wings and colourful rags seem to attract the most attention from the serval at Cheetah Outreach.



❑ Food

Food can be placed in trees to encourage the serval's natural climbing behaviour.



☐ Walks

Walks can provide the handler with many opportunities to enrich a serval's life. New and different environments can provide a variety of smells and sights to investigate and could offer hunting opportunities. The serval at Cheetah Outreach has been observed hunting small snakes, lizards, frogs and mice on these walking excursions.



Olfactory

Moving animal between enclosures

The serval can be moved into a foreign or lesser-known enclosure. It is important that the enclosure has a fenced roof to prevent escape. If this is not possible the animal should be walked on a lead and collar. Intense sniffing and investigating may be observed.

Providing scents

Scents can be provided by using spices such as cinnamon, chili powder and ginger. Lavender is not seen as a viable herb to use, since it has been known to contain secondary plant compounds that might cause mild toxicity. Perfumes or lotions can provide stimulation. Scented items should only be given in open, airy areas to provide adequate ventilation. Catnip may be tried.

Moving objects between different enclosures.

Some of the exhibits can be moved from one enclosure to another. The health status of all animals should always be known. Objects should never be moved from a sick or compromised cat to the enclosure of a healthy cat.

Social interaction/Tactile

Interaction with staff/volunteers

For animals kept in captivity and thus exposed to people, it is to their benefit to view humans positively. This greatly minimizes one of the main stresses in captivity.



Interaction with other animals

Seeing, smelling and interacting with other animals through a fence or at a distance can greatly enrich a captive serval's life. This should be a positive experience for the animals

and not lead to anxiety. Care should be taken to assess the demeanor and behaviour of all animals carefully.

❑ Interaction with the public

These could be by means of personal encounters at the facility, school visits, private functions, public events and photographic or film shoots.

Individuals that work with the public should be selected carefully and must only include animals that are temperamentally suited to having interaction with the public.



Feeding

❑ Elevating food

Food can be placed in a tree or other elevated areas. This encourages the serval to jump or climb for his food.



Bones

Big bones can be provided to chew on. Whenever the serval at Cheetah Outreach is presented with a big horse bone, he spends considerable time rubbing his neck and cheeks up against it.

Plastic tube

Food can be offered in a long plastic tube to simulate the normal hunting behavior where servals would grab rodents from their burrows.

Fur/Feathers

Sections of horsemeat with fur on can be given. Apart from providing roughage, it also changes the texture of the food and increases the length of feeding activity. Whole birds like guinea fowl can also be offered, but the feeding should be supervised and remnants from the carcass removed.

The origin and health status of the animal offered should be known.



“Blood popsicles”

These are made by freezing blood in small plastic containers and can be offered on warm days.

Carcasses

Whole carcasses can provide hours of stimulation. A variety of stalking, hunting and feeding behavior may be observed when offering whole carcasses.

The origin and health status of the animal offered should be known and the session supervised.



Novel objects and toys

Toys encourage young servals to play with and direct their energy towards objects and not people. When there is no supervision, toys should be taken away and be put out of reach, to avoid being ingested. Toys may include the following:

Soft and rubber toys

When choosing objects for animals to play with, care should be taken that these objects are non-toxic and preferably organic in nature. Inside stuffing as well as solid objects such as button eyes should be removed before allowing the animal to play with it. Favourite toys for servals include fluffy toys, balls, rubber snakes and small mouse toys. They also respond well to any toy that has feathers attached. Never leave any toys unsupervised with the animals.



Balls

Servals respond well to balls. It can either be thrown with a rolling motion for the serval to chase or placed in a big plastic container from which he can try and retrieve it. Another idea is to place the ball on the inside groove of a tyre that is lying flat on the ground. If the ball is made to roll fast the sound and movement and the difficulty in retrieving the ball can keep the serval occupied for a long time.

Plastic bottles

These can be offered loose or attached to a whip toy to chase after.

Splash pools

These can be filled with water and offered to the serval as a place to cool down. Alternatively toys can be placed inside for the serval to retrieve.



Cardboard boxes

Cardboard boxes would be stalked, carried around and ripped apart. Any harmful substances such as staples or plastic tape should be removed first and cheetahs should be carefully supervised while playing to make sure they do not eat and ingest part of the cardboard.

Mirrors

Interest has been shown in mirrors, especially by some of our young cubs.

Miscellaneous

Feathers have been given to cats at some facilities to play with. It is imperative to make sure these are disease- and parasite-free. This can be done by freezing, washing, microwaving or leaving the objects in the sun. Felids have been seen to toss feathers as well as chase them and pounce on them.

Behavioral Conditioning

Behavioral conditioning is very important since it provides mental and intellectual stimulation. The level of conditioning depends on the individual and might be one or all of the following:

Lead Walking

Lead walking begins at an early age in order for young cats to get accustomed to the restricted feeling of harness or collar and lead. Lead walking is important for all ambassador cats.



Venue Conditioning



Clicker Conditioning

This type of conditioning is used to shape behavior by means of positive reinforcement. Use of a clicker can be extremely helpful in situations where you might have to manipulate the animal's movements, such as on a film set. It is essential that the handler display a good sense of timing when using a clicker.



❑ Transportation

Crates may still be used to transport animals to the vet or in the event of a fire or other emergency. Reinforcing familiarity with crates can be done by feeding inside the crate on a rotational basis. This will ensure that the animal does not harbor negative feelings toward the crate. This is very often the case since the crates are used to transport them to the vet and represent negative experiences. Crates should always be disinfected before being moved to a different enclosure. Crates will also be needed in the event of a fire and being able to load the animals quickly and without resistance might mean the difference between life and death. By increasing the length of time the animal stays in the crate you can train them to accept the crate as a safe place for flying etc.



Miscellaneous

Having staff and volunteers wear different clothing such as big hats etc might entertain them and desensitize them to guests dressing up in the same way.
Have floating apples in water buckets.

