



### Bronwyn Bailey SVN

Bronwyn is a 2nd year Veterinary Nursing and Companion Animal Behaviour student at the University of Bristol. Her interest in enrichment was sparked during placement when she was doing discharges and owners are told to limit movement, but not about other forms of stimulation to occupy their mind. Bronwyn finds animal behaviour fascinating and looks forward to becoming a certified Clinical Animal Behaviourist. She aspires to be part of making legislative changes to the way we train our pets and making learning a positive experience for all involved.

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# The importance of enrichment for our pets

## Bronwyn Bailey SVN

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### The importance of enrichment for our pets

Many dog owners know the importance of walks for their pets' health, but the importance of mental stimulation for all pets is not discussed as much. As there is progress in the validity of human mental health, there should be equal consideration given to our pet's psychological status.

Behavioural enrichment is defined as providing species-appropriate challenges, opportunities and challenges as a form of stimulation specific to that species (Wild Welfare, 2021). Enrichment comes in many forms, including social, physical, sensory and occupational enrichment. Social enrichment focuses on the pet's need for spending time with others, including humans. Physical enrichment encompasses their body condition and being able to express normal behaviours. Sensory enrichment is stimulation of all our pets' senses (Figure 1). Occupational enrichment focuses on giving a pet a job to do, such as throwing something to chase or catch.

### Benefits for your pet

There are many benefits of enrichment, including improving pets' quality of life (Mallatratt, 2019). Enrichment can prevent unwanted behaviours such as excessive vocalisation, to destructive behaviours including destroying furniture (Croney et al., 2016). Incorporating social enrichment early on can help the pet learn social etiquette with other dogs such as knowing when another dog wants to play, and when to give them space if they do not. Physical enrichment can prevent destructive behaviours and also maximise their body condition and joint function (Figure 2). Mammals have been detected using movement as a form of exercise in the foetal stages, highlighting the importance of appropriate exercise our pets need (Broom and Fraser, 2015).

Dogs are known for their enhanced sense of smell, being estimated from 1,000 to

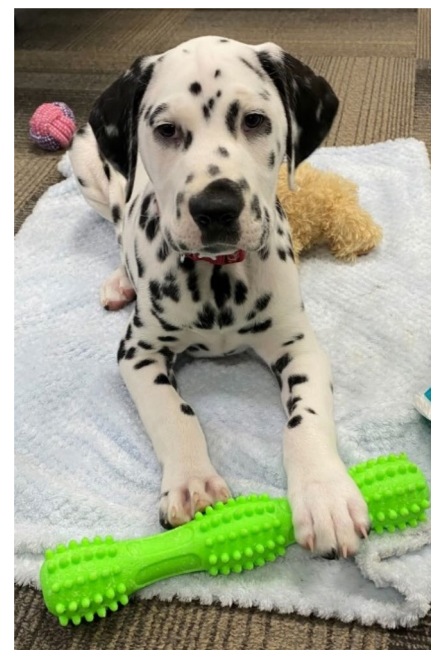
10,000 times better than humans, so utilising this as a form in enrichment can be very beneficial, whilst being aware not to overpower the sense. It is important to note that some forms of enrichment will not be favourable for all species, for example, Crean et al. (2020) showed classical music had a calming effect on dogs, but whilst some cats enjoy classical music, they can be very sensitive to noise and may not find it calming. Species needs will vary but breeds and personalities should also be considered.

### Implementation

There are a number of simple enrichment techniques that can be used to stimulate both mental and physical aspects whilst strengthening the human-animal bond (Figure 3).

### Benefits to the owner

Enrichment is not only good for pets, but also instrumental in improving both



**Figure 1.** Author's dog using a chew-toy for sensory stimulation to aid with teething pains.



▲ **Figure 2.** Author's pet exhibiting physical enrichment by playing in an obstacle course.

humans' mental and physical health. Even though more research is needed in this subject, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have already seen decreases in circulating cortisol levels, decrease in blood pressure and even a decrease in loneliness when in the presence of animals (Hicklin and Piazza, 2018). Enrichment can develop training, forming a more obedient pet, further reducing the owner's stress in public settings such as taking a pet out for a walk, whilst

- Scent work (hide and seek)
- Kong
- Chew toy
- Snuffle mat
- Scratching post
- Cardboard boxes
- Food maze
- Mounted toys
- Activity board
- Music specific to their species

▲ **Figure 3.** A list of occupational, sensory and physical enrichment options.

stimulating their pets' senses and joints. Enrichment strengthens the bond between an owner and their pet, which has been shown to minimise their pet's stress as well as having transferrable anti-stress effects to scenarios like a visit to a veterinary practice more manageable (McMillan, 1999).

## Conclusion

There are many forms and benefits of enrichments for pets and their owners, and a multitude of opportunities to profit from them. As the field of animal welfare continues to expand and develop, it is important for all pet owners to become well versed in enrichment, the effects and how they can incorporate enrichment into their daily lives.

## Acknowledgements

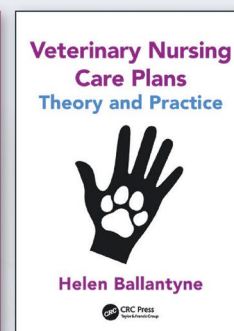
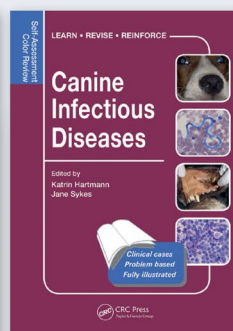
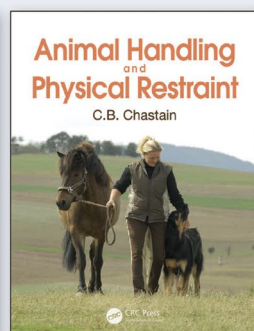
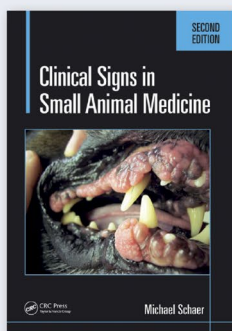
My mum for always finding creative ways to enrich our pets, and my pets for always being good sports for our inventions!

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