



## Introducing the Bottom's Up Toy/3 Cup Foraging Toy

While birds are very clever and able to learn to complete a variety of complex tasks, many need some help to understand what they need to do when given new puzzles. It is important to introduce a toy in a way that they learn how to do it and gain confidence. This makes them more confident and more likely to try other puzzles in the future.

Remember the aim of foraging is not for your bird to struggle to/take a long time to work out how to do the puzzle – it is that they're learning and working to get their food, taking them longer to eat and expelling some energy while doing so. This reduces boredom and gains confidence.

Each step is intended to be repeated a few times (3 days to a week), but depending on your bird, you may need to do each step for longer. If they struggle when you make it harder, take it to the previous step and repeat more times before making it more difficult.

Step 1: Let them win.

Introducing a new puzzle/concept is all about letting them succeed with the new toy, so they associate the toy with food/treats and success.

The easiest way to do this with this toy is to use a small amount of household sticky tape to hold the lids completely open. Your bird will be able to reach in and retrieve the goodies inside. Make sure the toy is hanging beside a favourite perch and is easy to reach, making it more likely that they'll check it out.

Add food/treats every day for a few days consistently (you can even add more throughout the day if you're home). Once your bird is in a habit of going to the toy to check what you've left for them, you know that they associate the toy with treats. You may see them beeline for the toy when you fill it or you may notice it's been emptied every day for 3+ days in a row.



*Cup with sultana and large, coloured pellet (treats). Lid sticky taped all the way open.*

Step 2: Gradually increase the difficulty. Next make the toy just a smidge harder that it was before and use enticing treats to encourage your bird to continue to use it.

The first difficulty increase should be only minor – enough for your bird to see that something is different and work around it with ease, but not enough to put them off entirely.

For this toy, you'd just sticky tape the lid in a way that it sits partly open, but starting to tilt over the opening.

Add treats/food daily or multiple times per day. Repeat for a few days to a week, until your bird is confident with this step.



*Cup with sultana and large, coloured pellet (treats). Lid sticky taped half way open.*

Step 3: Continue to increase the difficulty. After your bird is confidently accessing the treats from the slight difficulty increase, it's time to make it a bit harder.

Here, you sticky tape the lid so that it is nearly closed, but just sits a bit open (about 1cm off the edge of the cup). Your bird can see there's food inside and has successfully been accessing treats from the toy for over a week. Now they just have to use their head (literally) and push the lid up/off to the side, to be able to get into the cup for their treat.

This is the most critical step to monitor and where less confident/experienced birds may struggle. Be sure to still be using a high value reward, give the toy before their main breakfast, so they're hungry and more eager to try the toy.

Some birds may open the lid straight away, some may take longer. It's generally best to give them a day or 2 to figure it out. If they don't, then showing them you opening it can encourage them. Let them see you put the treat in. If they're not succeeding at this, take it back to the previous step for a couple of days before making it more difficult again.



*Cup with sultana and large, coloured pellet (treats). Lid sticky taped one third of the way open.*



*Cup with sultana and large, coloured pellet (treats). Lid sticky taped a tiny bit open.*

Step 4: Standard difficulty.

Once they've been pushing the lid aside for a few days to a week, you can remove the tape entirely and let the lid sit over the cup.

Due to their previous problem-solving skills with this toy, they will likely be quite confident at pushing the lid aside now, to reach in and grab their treat.

They may even learn to push the lid in a way that it sits up and to the side of the cup and your bird might hold the side of the cup with their foot, to pull it closer to them.

They're using the toy now at a normal difficulty. Make sure they're emptying their toy every day and have confidence with it.



*Cup with sultana and large, coloured pellet (treats) at standard difficulty (no sticky tape on lid).*

Step 5: Make it part of their meal.

Now, instead of using high value treats every time, mix it up. Reduce the amount of normal food they're getting in their bowl or foraging tray and put some of it in the toy. It is now part of their normal feeding regime.

You can still add the occasional treat/surprise for them, to make it exciting.

Use the toy all or most days and move it to different positions in the cage, to keep things interesting. It's now a suitable time to introduce an additional foraging toy, that is different.

Mix their seed or pellet dry food with foraging substrate, so they're working a little harder for their food. You don't have to fill the cup with food.



*Roudybush Nibles pellets with foraging substrate in a cup.*



**Step 6: Advance the difficulty.**

This is up to you and depends on the bird, but after a good long while of using the toy, they're probably quite speedy and confident at emptying it. There are a number of things you can do that can make it more difficult.

- This includes mixing in bird safe foraging substrate with their food, so they're searching through the substrate and taking longer to eat (as above).

- You can also use foraging foot toys inside each cup (2cm vine balls, Feather Weight foot toys, treats or larger pellets wrapped in paper).

- Wrap each cup in tissue paper, toilet paper or scrap paper. You may need to poke a hole or 2 at first to get your bird started, but then they'll shred the paper away to get to the toy.

- Sticky tape the lids closed! Yes, you started sticky taping them open, but now you could sticky tape them closed and your bird will have to chew the tape to be able to open the lid.

- Hang the toy in a hard to reach place. This will encourage them to climb, reach and fly to their toy, which gives them more exercise and problem-solving skills.

Do one or 2 of these steps at a time, not all at once and still ensure that your bird is 'winning' at the toy.



*Examples of foraging foot toys. A large, coloured pellet inside a 2cm Vine Ball, half a pumpkin seed stuffed inside a mini Feather Weight Foot Toy and a treat tightly wrapped in paper (with a tiny tab of tape to hold it closed)*



*The top cup has the Vine Ball, middle has the Feather Weight plus is sticky taped closed on 2 sides, while the bottom cup has the paper parcel buried under some foraging substrate. Roudybush Nibles are also sprinkled on top of the substrate.*

Some key points for introducing foraging toys are:

Let them win.

Show them how to use the toy.

Use high value treats to entice them.

Start off easy and gradually make it harder.

Monitor their use of the toy to ensure they're not getting frustrated.

Repeat each difficulty level multiple times so your bird gains confidence, before moving forward.

Remember – some birds are perch potatoes and may need extra encouragement. In some cases it may be best to not offer their breakfast in a bowl first up in the morning and just give them the toy, encouraging them to use it. You can give their bowl later, but they may be more motivated to check out their toy prior. Don't starve them, but don't let them just fill up out of the bowl and ignore the toy if they're a bit too used to 'free food'.

A quick note on the use of sticky tape: I am frequently asked by people if sticky tape is safe to use. I've been using sticky tape in my birds' foraging, at the recommendation of my avian vet, for over 9 years now. I've recently checked with my vet, who is still happy with its' safety. It is still your decision whether to use this or not. As with any toy or item used in your birds' environment, it's important to monitor them and their use of the item, to ensure they are playing safely with it.

I hope this information is helpful. If you have any questions or would like to know more, please message me at my [Facebook Page](#) or send an email to [contact@animalenrichmentaustralia.com](mailto:contact@animalenrichmentaustralia.com)



*The toy as previous, but now with the top cup wrapped in scrap paper and the bottom cup wrapped in tissue paper.*