
Abstract

During the last decade there have been vast improvements in the husbandry of large animals in our local zoos. Instead of living in the solitary cages that were formerly the norm, animals now more often live in group enclosures, which provide them with surroundings similar to those they might experience in the wild and permit them to engage in species-specific behaviors. The animals’ antics may enthrall visitors, who may be impressed that the zoo has provided this new environment, in which the animals no longer show stereotypic behaviors, such as padding up and down the same small path, rocking their heads from side to side, and—in extreme situations—engaging in self-mutilation, resulting in patchy fur from excessive grooming. I have recently received requests to address the husbandry of laboratory rodents in a similar way, with the goal of finding simple ways of improving the lives of the animals in our care. Caged rodents often show dysfunctional behaviors similar to those just mentioned in zoo animals, and it was gratifying to learn how much improvement could be achieved for our caged rodents, in light of suggestions from recent reviews on environmental enrichment for mice and rats. Several interesting products are now available commercially, and I will review some of them here.