

The AAZK Behavioral Husbandry Committee Presents

Training Tales...



Where you can share your training experiences!

*Training Tales Editors – Jay Pratte, Zoo Atlanta; Kim Kezer, Zoo New England;
and Angela Binney, Disney's Animal Kingdom*

Training Tools on a Budget

By

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Training tools can be expensive and often a stumbling-block, or excuse, for not training. Creative reuse, recycling, and shopping can greatly contribute to a training program while putting little to no strain on the budget. This paper is written to provide some alternative ideas for basic training tools that are inexpensive or even free! In many cases, these alternatives have been better at with- standing the rigors of the training environment than some of the more expensive items available for purchase.

Training Pouches

Many donated or reused items make excellent training pouches. A favorite item at the Oakland Zoo is a small camera bag (lower left in photo) that clips to a belt via a snap hook. Often these bags have a variety of pockets which are helpful for sorting reinforcement or holding smaller training tools, like laser pointers, syringes or pen flashlights. Some of these bags have loops on the side, which you can use as a target pole holster and/or attach a clicker via a rubber band or hair tie which helps free hands and prevent dropping.



Recycled belt packs, conference name badge holders and camera bags make great treat pouches. (Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)



Reinforcement for a cotton top tamarin fits nicely in a lanyard pouch. (Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)

Lanyard name badge holders from conferences also make great training pouches (upper and lower right in photo). While some organizations, like AAZK, Inc., have adopted a greener conference policy and now reuse these pouches from year to year, others do not and send attendees home with a new badge. A clicker or whistle can easily be clipped to the lanyard. Again, the multiple pockets can assist with sorting reinforcement types. These pouches can be conveniently worn around the neck or clipped to a belt loop, depending on your preference.

Fanny packs (upper left in 1st photo), tool belts, or two-pocket waist tool aprons (left) also make great training pouches. These are frequently donated to our zoo. No donations? Try the hardware store, tool aprons can be found for less than \$2. If you are using moist food as reinforcement items, it is easy to find inexpensive plastic containers, or reuse yogurt containers that slide into the pockets. All of these types of training pouches hold up well to washing and drying over many times. Each training pouch can be tied around or clipped to the trainer, leaving hands free.



A keeper trains a zebra using the tool apron pouch.

(Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)

Targets



A lion is trained using a flyswatter as a foot target. *(Photo by Erica Calcagno, The Oakland Zoo)*



A camel is trained for radiographs using a reflector as a target. *(Photo by Erica Calcagno, The Oakland Zoo)*



A cotton swab is used as a target for a cotton top tamarin.

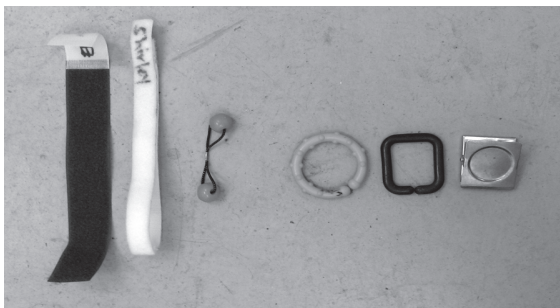
(Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)

Some low to no-cost target ideas include: flyswatters, tennis balls on the end of a dowel, or broom handle, reflectors on short lengths of PVC pipe, wooden rounds on the end of a dowel, and even cotton swabs. Except for the cotton swabs, these items are fairly durable, and all are easily replaceable at little to no cost. Cotton swabs can be restocked with a stop at the vet clinic, flyswatters are available at the dollar store, most of us have extra wooden handles around waiting to be reused in a new creative way, and wooden dowels and round ends can be found at a craft store for less than a dollar. A length of

scrap PVC pipe or bamboo reed with either non-toxic paint or colored taped at the end is another no-cost target pole used by trainers. Ping Pong paddles attached to the end of a stick work well too.

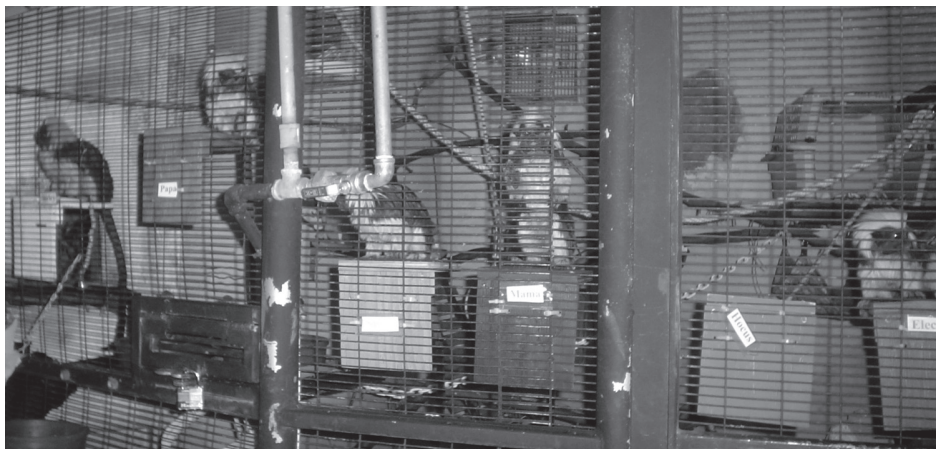
Training Stations

Training stations can be made from just about anything: lengths of Velcro®, hairclips/ties, child toy links, Wiffle Balls®, shower curtain rings, PVC segments, bucket lids and many other items. Most of these items can be easily moved by the trainer and adjusted to attach to various sizes of caging, perching or fencing. Many come in various colors or can be painted when working with multiple animals. Colorful Velcro® strips can be purchased from a cattle supply company for less than a dollar each. (The most challenging part of using Velcro® stations is getting the animal used to the sound of the Velcro®). At the Oakland Zoo, bags of children's toy links are often donated, but they can also be found at thrift shops for less than a dollar.



Examples of station props for smaller animals: Velcro® straps, link toys, and hair ties.

(Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)



Color coded stations work well when training in groups. These are cotton top tamarins, each with their own station. *(Photo by author, The Oakland Zoo)*



A lion is trained for radiographs of the front feet using a cat litter box as a prop for desensitizing the animal to the visual presence of the machine. *(Photo by Erica Calcagno, The Oakland Zoo)*

Training Props

In training, many times we need to desensitize an animal to various pieces of equipment. At the Oakland Zoo, we have used empty cat litter containers to mimic portable x-ray machines when working with lions (shown here) and camels (target section). To desensitize our tamarins to our microchip scanner we have made imitation hand-held scanners from painted cardboard and used shoelaces as a wrist-strap. Scrap pieces from old stall mats

have been cut into shapes and used as foot targets for hoofstock. Another idea is to use an empty roll-on deodorant bottle to desensitize an animal for the ultrasound probe.

Conclusion

Many training tools can be created from discounted, dollar store items for under \$5, donations, rummage sales or even from spare parts lying around. Post a “Needs” list in your break room for keepers or volunteers to bring in items they no longer want or use. Try adding some of the items described in this article to your “wish list” - you may be surprised what may be donated. Remember, creatively reusing discarded or old items doesn’t have to stop with enrichment – use your creativity for training items as well!

(Editor’s Note: Articles dealing with all aspects of training may be submitted to akfeditor@zk.kscoxml.com for consideration for inclusion in the Training Tales column. Articles should be submitted in MS Word only and accompanying photos, charts or graphs should be submitted as separate jpgs or tifs. If you have questions on making a submission, please contact the Editor via email or at 785-273-9149).