

Environmental Enrichment for All Species of Tapir in Captivity

Feeding Enrichment

- If a pool is available then throw fruit and vegetables into it.
- Scatter fresh grass in the pool.
- Hide small pieces of produce (carrots, apples, lettuce, bread, fruit) throughout the exhibit under leaves and branches, or dig them in under a small layer of earth.
- Hide small pieces of fruit or raisins in hay or straw.
- Gather together bunches of branches, about 5-10 cm (2-4 inches) in diameter and place them upright inside PVC tubes or bamboo stalks that are firmly planted in the ground in several locations throughout the exhibit so the tapirs can also strip the bark from them without dislodging them. Change them daily and use a variety of browse species.
- Try difficult or new foods (like whole watermelons).
- Hang food from trees, branches or the fence. Be careful to hang it on material that cannot harm the tapirs (no iron hooks, or thin nylon rope. Better to try and attach it by spearing it onto a branch or wooden stick).
- Plant fruit trees inside the exhibit.
- Smear honey onto a firm wooden pole stuck in the floor, so that they can then lick it. Or better still: drill some holes in the pole and fill them with honey, which will then partially be absorbed by the wood and make the licking last longer. Honey can also be smeared on stones.

Of course other sweet-smelling and tasting products can also be used with the same effect (fruits, syrup, sugarcane juice, etc.).

Like other species with limited stomach volume (Janssen, Rideout & Edwards, 1996) tapirs consume several small amounts of feed frequently throughout the day, rather than one large quantity per day. It is recommended to feed them 2 or 3 times during the day; this constitutes enrichment in itself.

- Spread feeding over the course of the day.
- Try to change feeding times randomly, so the tapirs are induced to go and look for food instead of waiting for the usual feeding time.
- Add several feed stations to increase flexibility and decrease competition.
- Use logs as "steps" so that the tapirs can put their front feet up to obtain foods at different heights. This encourages their natural behavior of reaching for foods.

Environmental Enrichment

- Change objects in the enclosure, not too often and not too many at one time, so as not to frighten them with a big change.
- Different smells can be added now and again (dung from monkeys, birds and other herbivores, as well as some occasional carnivore dung (not too much!!)).
- Put a stick in another animal's stall for one or two days, then put it in the tapir enclosure. You can also use some straw bedding with urine from another species, or hay from other barns.

- Spray little bits of different scents or perfumes on trees or poles in the enclosure.
- Rubbing wood or stones with herbs and spices will make their day different from the one before.
- If the enclosure has concrete floors, provide earth and branches to make a sleeping place.
- Tapirs like their mud-bath as well as a good sand bath now and again. Although this is more work for the keeper, it need not be done every day. It provides not only an activity for the tapirs, but is a health measure for their skin against external parasites as well.
- Use substrate piles (mulch, sand, peat moss) for digging, foraging, rolling
- Incorporate hiding places, like high grass or substrate piles
- Plant shade trees in paddock areas
- Build brush piles or fabricate rock outcrops as visual barriers and/or windbreaks. Ensure that they are sturdily built and won't fall down and harm the animals!
- Keep the exhibit mowed (better grazing), but leave some patches high for "hiding".

N.B. Many of these ideas can also be used for other ungulate species.

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