



WHAT ABOUT THE "OTHER" ANIMALS?

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Last year, our Northern fur seals were relocated to Mystic Aquarium & Institute for Exploration and New York Aquarium while their new exhibit was being built. During this time, the marine mammal trainers had an opportunity to try their hand at training other kinds of animals. We convinced the Visitor Experience staff and a few aquarists that we could improve the visitor experience by training the frogs, toads, snakes, fish, lobsters, and turtles using standard operant conditioning techniques.

We modified general handling and acclimation techniques, addressed some behavioral issues, encouraged the animals to cooperate for veterinary procedures, and trained a few behaviors just for the fun of it.

Developing an effective way to deliver the primary reinforcement was the most challenging aspect of working with these animals. Reinforcement ranged from live fruit flies, crickets, and worms to Cyclop-eeze and brine shrimp. None of these were nearly as easy to manage as the dead herring and smelt we were so accustomed to using. In addition, we found the snakes were in a league of their own as we were not allowed to use food with them at all.

Working with these species was humbling and intriguing. It also gave the training staff a better appreciation for operant conditioning and the timing of reinforcement as the lobsters tried our patience, the angelfish learned target discrimination, the lumpfish stole our hearts, the lungfish followed targets and swam through tubes, the toad and bull frog learned to keep their cool, the poison dart frog learned about clicker training, the snakes lined up for x-rays, the sea dragons learned to eat dead Mysis shrimp, and the turtles did much more!

FIRST STEPS OF HUSBANDRY TRAINING AT MARE NOSTRUM AQUARIUM

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Located in the south of France, Mare Nostrum was designed in the late 90's as a traditional aquarium. A few months before the grand opening in 2007, the running team was chosen by the owner (the agglomeration of Montpellier), and there was a wish to integrate animal training within the aquarists' daily duties, together with, food preparation, water quality, and life support system monitoring. Though none of the aquarist team had experience in the animal training field, it was decided to apply operant conditioning techniques as used with many zoological species. Since training is still in its infancy in the true aquarium world, we engaged the help of a consultant. From the very beginning we used positive reinforcement with African penguins (*Spheniscus demersus*), fish such as sawfish (*Pristis microdon*), bowmouth guitarfish (*Rhina ancylostoma*), leopard ray (*Aetobatus narinari*), and later with zebra sharks (*Stegostoma fasciatum*). Our first steps, had successes, errors, and difficulties in pursuing this goal in a facility not designed for training. Numerous technical improvements or adaptations of the facilities were necessary to render this possible. The progress is still very slow but the results already achieved are very rewarding.