

Aviary Design and Construction

by

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1. DESIGN

The design of any aviary or enclosure is very much dependent on what you are intending to house and you will have to keep this in mind at all times.

Having said that, there are three main points that should be considered regardless of what you are going to house.

These are:

**Shape & Configuration,
Orientation
and Materials**

First of all - **Shape & Configuration** - should it be:

Long and narrow? (suitable for Parrots, Possums, Gliders) or Square? (probably more suited to finches and softbills, again Possums and Gliders, but also Potoroos, Bettongs, Rat Kangaroos)

and

How high do you want it?

and

Where do you want the doors and how big do you want them?

and

What sort of roof do you have in mind?

Basically the shape of your enclosure can be anything you like. If you have a corner of your garden that is useless for any other purpose, consider an aviary. You don't necessarily have to make space in your back yard to fit an aviary, make the aviary to fit the space. It does not have to be a rectangle, in fact its size and shape is only bounded by the space available to you and the size of your wallet. I have a friend in the Riverland who has built an aviary that is 60m square and 7m high at the centre. The roof and walls are all shade cloth and the supports are steel with flat padded plates at the top and the whole thing is stretched over steel rope tensioned with turnbuckles. But I am digressing.

It is probably not a bad idea to get away from the convention of cuboid aviaries as it can make for interesting shapes but does become problematical if you want a bank of aviaries - then obviously rectangles are much more practical. It is entirely up to you!

So you have now decided what shape you want and where you're going to put it. The next thing to consider is:

Height

This is very important, even more so than the width or depth. I believe it should be higher than you by at least 3 - 400mm, in fact the higher the better. The idea is that when you walk into the aviary the creatures don't feel threatened, birds can fly over your head and arboreal animals are able to stay out of reach. Most of my aviaries are between two and three metres in height. This also makes it easier for catching (birds in particular) and remember when designing the internal fittings of your aviary, always leave yourself room to be able to walk about with a net in your hand without stumbling over things. (Digressing again for a moment - there is a knack to catching birds, particularly in a long flight and that is to wait until the bird is by your side or has passed you before you attempt to net it - don't try to net it flying towards you - you will probably miss or hit the bird with the ring of the net).

The alternative to catching with a net is to provide a place to trap your critters within the aviary. For example an old budgie cage is a useful tool into which you place their food and arrange it so you can close the door from outside the aviary. If you want to get a little more sophisticated you can make up a small cage to hang on the wall of your aviary, either inside or out whichever is the more appropriate for your set-up. I am currently using this method with the small cage outside the confines of the aviary - it's actually inside an adjacent shed. I made my cages using two cage fronts, which can be bought from any reputable bird dealer, one on the aviary side and the other accessible from outside. Obviously on the inside the door remains open and the other for you to have access for feeding. The creatures will quite readily crawl or hop into a cage like this to feed and you will be able to trap them when required. If you are going to make one of these, it's a good idea to use the inside cage front upside down so that the door can't drop shut accidentally - which leads us nicely into:

Doors.

Doors are often overlooked, but in fact they are one of the most vital parts of your design. One of my pet hates is aviaries with small doors. I much prefer large doors. There is nothing worse than trying to struggle into an aviary with an armful of gum branches through a tiny doorway; by the time you have squeezed through and then closed the door behind you, half your critters have escaped! The doors on my aviaries are generally not less than 1700 x 600 with a 200mm kick-panel underneath. I can honestly say that I have never lost anything because the door was too large, but I have lost

them through small doors.

The secret with large doors is to have a wire section above the door and below the aviary roof, (another reason the aviary should have plenty of height). Here is a suggestion that was brought to my attention at an Avicultural Society meeting, which I believe is a brilliant idea and was something new to me (we never stop learning). Place a horizontal wire platform inside the aviary immediately above the door, and then if the birds (or any other arboreal critter) head toward the door they will need to negotiate this platform before finding the doorway. Hopefully this would be enough to slow them up and give you time to get the door closed.

Which way do you want the door to open?

Once again my preference is for the door to open outward, (I always have built-in doorstops on the inside of the doorway so the door cannot swing inward). I also use pad bolts both inside and out. This leaves more usable space inside the aviary and I believe is less likely to cause birds in particular, to dive for an opening.

Positioning of the door is also important and is going to be a little difficult to try to describe in writing but I'll give it a go. If the door is on the end of an aviary at the farthest point from the covered end, which is the most common place to put it, it's not going to matter a great deal which way it is hinged, but, if you put it on the side, it should be hinged so that the hinge side of the door is away from where your birds spend most of their time. If the door is placed in the covered end, when you open it the birds are going to fly down to the open end of the aviary and again it won't matter which way it's hinged. However, I don't like surprising my birds by walking through, what was to them a few minutes before, a blank wall, so if you do have the door at the covered end make it from some type of see through material or make lots of noise before you enter.

You can alleviate the problems of escapees if you consider a...:

Safety door system.

This can be in the form of an 'airlock' with two doors close together. They can be opposite or adjacent to one another and can be either outside or inside the aviary. The outside door should open outwards and the inside door should open inwards (preferably against the side not into the body of the aviary).

Another safety door system is to have a corridor running along the length of a bank of aviaries with all the aviary doors opening into the corridor and only one door opening to the outside world.

To be continued