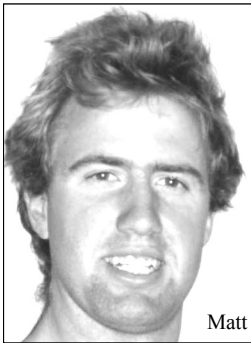


## FROM OUR ROVING REPORTER, MATT RUSSELL



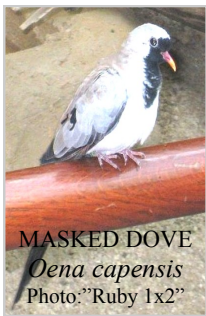
Matt

It was the first real rainy day of autumn when I visited Craig at his home in a North-Eastern suburb. This was the first time I have visited Craig's aviaries and was keen to view his birds and learn about the reasons for his avicultural passion.

His passion for birds came from his father's bird-keeping when Craig was a child. Craig got back into birds after a break of a few years. He started back because his interest was always there, and he wanted to introduce his kids to the hobby. So he thought he would get back into aviculture with Stars and Emblemas. He chose these for their ease of keeping and breeding...and breeding is exactly what the Stars have done for him, as he has managed to breed a good number of good looking, well-coloured, healthy birds.



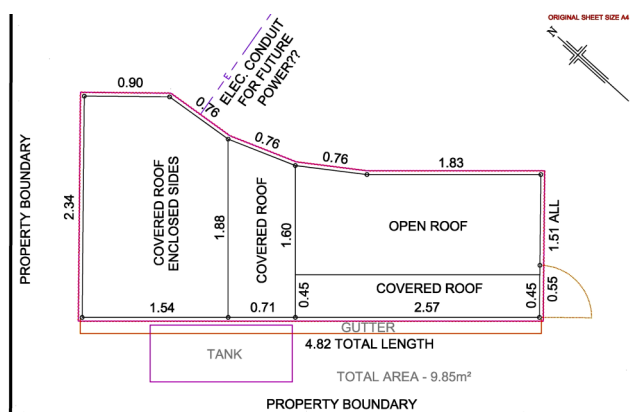
SOME OF CRAIG'S STAR FINCHES



MASKED DOVE  
*Oena capensis*  
Photo: "Ruby 1x2"

In the past he has kept Orange-breasts, Javas, Saints, Double-bars, Canaries and Diamond and Masked Doves. Of all the birds he has kept the Masked Doves are the ones he has enjoyed keeping the most. This is partly due to the success he had breeding them. They would lay 2 eggs hatch and raise them with no worries at all. During the time he had them there were not too many around and so there was a demand for his birds.

Craig's aviary is located in the back corner of his block about 1m off each fence, to catch the very first rays of morning sun within the yard. There are no trees close to it. This is to stop predators getting in. It is 4.5m long and it averages 2.3m wide. It's about 2m high in the flight and there is a small step up in height going into the shelter, which has a partly concreted floor. Grasses grow in the flight, which is made out of salvaged water pipe and connectors. The shelter is clad with salvaged corrugated iron. The wire netting is 12mm by 12mm, with a 400mm high corrugated kick-board running around the base of the flight. There is a concrete path extending out from the aviary about 1m to prevent predators digging in. A small sprinkler system is installed in the flight, and there is a rain water tank on the North-Western side.



The thing that sets Craig's aviary apart is the innovative measures he has put in place to make the management of the aviary easier on himself and the birds. When you look at the aviary it comes across as a normal medium



size stand-alone aviary. It's not until you have a good look that it starts to stand apart. Take the shape for example, a normal enough looking flight with a slightly larger shelter area, with what would be an odd shape for most aviaries. Aviaries are usually built with both sides of the flight parallel and with the sides of the shelter a continuation of the flight. What Craig has done is provide a sheltered area for his birds when the wind is blowing head on to the aviary.

Then there is the way he has used a sheet of plastic fly mesh with a piece of steel running along the bottom as a weight. This acts as a curtain across the door when entering and exiting the aviary. Rain water is collected from the roof, and used to water the birds. This is done twice a day through PVC pipe running in to a galvanized water dish. PVC is used to prevent parasites.



THE WATERING SYSTEM

The shelter is insulated for better climate control, this might sound silly to you, after all there is a side missing that will let the heat and the cold in. But if you put a thermometer in the shelter and one in the flight you will find a there is up to a 2 degree difference. That small variation could well be the saving grace between life or death on an extreme hot or cold day.



PVC HOLDERS FOR THE BRUSH, AND ADJUSTABLE SHELF BRACKETS

The best innovation, in my opinion, is the way Craig supports perches, seed hoppers and any other things he wishes to hang in the aviary. The use of adjustable shelf brackets gives him the advantage of moving things to wherever he feels is best. There is no fussing around with wire, no sharp edges, and most of all is the speed with which alterations can be made, which reduces stress on the birds by not having to be in the aviary too long. Having lost a chick to ants Craig is looking for ways to deter or even ant-proof his aviaries.



PART OF THE AVIARY FURNISHINGS

So if any one has any ideas he would appreciate input and advice. (Please send any solutions to the Editor)



DIAMOND FIRE-TAIL  
*Stagonopleura guttata*  
Photo: BS Thurner Hof

Craig is looking at expanding his aviaries in the future with a number of breeding flights and a large holding flight being envisaged. If the chance ever arises he would love to get a larger block so he can expand the aviaries even more. Like most of us, having the space to build our aviaries is the biggest hurdle. He is planning to



PICTORELLA MUNIA  
*Heteromunia pectoralis*

focus his skills on particular species that are diminishing in aviculture with view to assisting in increasing their numbers. He is keen to breed any finches, native or exotic, but is looking at Pictorellas and Diamond Sparrows in particular.

I would like to thank Craig for having me at his aviary. I will be adopting some of his innovative ideas in my own aviary. May he keep up the good work and I hope to see his new aviary block when it's up and running.

If you would like me to tell your avicultural story, please call me on 0422660955, or e-mail me at: [tara\\_matt@hotmail.com](mailto:tara_matt@hotmail.com). Complete confidentiality as to your identity and whereabouts is guaranteed.

Cheers,  
*Matt*