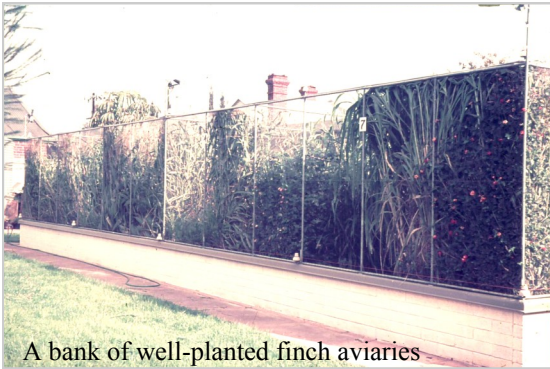


A LITTLE THOUGHT AND STUDY, CAN SAVE YOU TIME AND MONEY

By “*Estrildidae*”

This article has been written for the benefit of the novice bird-keeper...someone new to the hobby and not yet quite sure what type of aviary to construct, or what species to keep. I hope members in that category find the following to be of assistance in their quest to become an “aviculturist”.



A bank of well-planted finch aviaries

An aviary of colourful birds can add both interest and beauty to any garden. Aviaries can be of many shapes and designs, formal, rustic or utilitarian. However, rustic or formal will usually blend better in a garden setting. The average “handyperson” can easily construct one suitable for a particular situation; but if building things is not your

forte, ready to assemble kits are available through many retail outlets. However, if buying an aviary kit ensure it has a rigid internal frame, as some manufacturers keep costs down by relying on the profile of the cladding material to give structural strength. Unfortunately, frameless aviaries are notorious for “folding up” in strong winds.

There are a number of basic requirements to consider when deciding the siting and construction of an aviary. **The most important being the wellbeing of the birds.** It is no good building an ascetically pleasing aviary if the birds are uncomfortable or their health is at risk. It is usual to have an enclosed portion where the food can be kept dry and the birds can shelter form the extremes of weather; and a wire flight area where the birds can easily be seen and can exercise. It is advisable to paint the wire of the aviary flight with a flat black water paint, as this minimises the glare of the wire and makes the birds more visible.

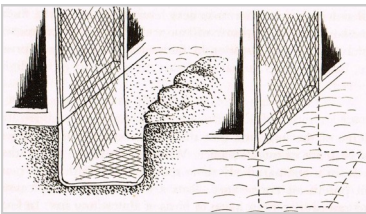


A bank of well-built parrot aviaries
The use of toys as illustrated is unnecessary, and can be dangerous to the birds

As in the real estate trade the most important factor in siting an aviary is.....position, position, position! Ideally, it should face east through to north, in other words opposite to the way the worst of the weather comes. If the floor of the aviary shelter becomes soggy, or worse still the food gets wet, the birds will be at risk. If you live in an area where the prevailing weather is affected by geographical conditions, such as hills and valleys,

the siting should take these factors in to account; and the east/north rule may not apply.

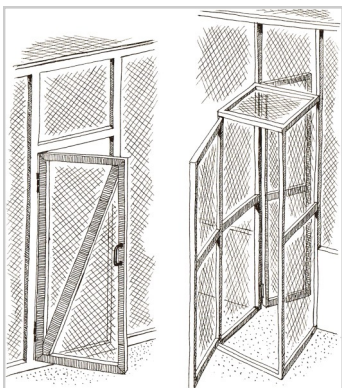
If parrot species are to be kept it will not be possible to grow any plants in the aviary as they would soon be destroyed. Therefore, the aviary should be fixed on a base of pavers, rather than dirt, so as to eliminate the risk of vermin entry. Pavers are better than solid concrete as they allow water to drain away and don't create a dry environment for mice to nest in. The pavers should then be covered with a centimetre of fine shell-grit or coarse river sand. This will not only look attractive but will also stop droppings from staining the pavers, particularly under perches.



Method of sinking wire into ground to keep rodents out. If using this method the wire in the ground will need to be given a protective coating to prevent rust.

If finches are your choice, you will be able to create an attractive garden within the aviary inhabited by a variety of active, colourful birds. As you would then have a dirt floor to the aviary it would be necessary to sink some flat iron or wire 45cm (18") into the ground at the perimeter of the structure to prevent vermin from digging in.

No matter what type of birds you decide to keep it is important to ensure the aviary is neither too hot in the summer nor too cold in the winter. It is recommended that the shelter part of the aviary have an insulated roof, as this will help overcome both of the above conditions. This can be achieved by the installation of a wooden, or cement sheet, ceiling, which would not only regulate the temperature but would also eliminate condensation on the underside of the roof and draughts from entering between the joint of the back wall and the roof. If it is not practicable to fit a ceiling, an old, but tried and true, way of stopping condensation is to paint the under-side of the roof with an oil-based paint and to throw sawdust on it while the paint is still wet. To stop draughts from the back wall/roof joint any gaps can be tightly packed with wet newspaper; and when dry painted over.



Left: Low door
Right: Safety door

It is important to take steps to minimise escapes, as aviary birds don't usually survive in the wild; they are either harassed by Magpies or Noisy Miners until they die of stress, or fall prey to one of the local cats.



Noisy Miner
Manorina melanocephala

The bane of aviculturists

Photo: Toby Hudson

The two main methods of overcoming accidental escapes are to either fit a very low door, or to build a safety door into the structure. Low doors are far from

foolproof, but as most birds fly upwards to escape from danger, they are better than a full height door. By far the better method is to incorporate a safety-door during construction. This works like an airlock. The outer door opens into a small enclosed area (a metre square is ample) then after the outer door is closed an inner door is opened into the actual aviary.



A selection of seeding-grasses and Australian native shrubs suitable for a finch aviary.

Photos: D. Hanel

As mentioned above, it is not possible to grow plants in a parrot aviary, but plantings can be made behind the flight area in such a manner as to make it appear that the birds are in fairly natural surroundings. Lower plants can also be placed around the front and sides to

enhance the overall appearance. An adjacent pond will also enhance the effect.

If keeping finches, shrubs, seeding-grasses and hanging baskets can be used to create not only an ideal habitat for the birds, but a very appealing visual effect. However, care must be taken when selecting the plant species to be used, as some are toxic and may kill the birds. Most plants with a “milky” sap should be avoided, and some ferns are also dangerous. As a rule-of-thumb most native shrubs and grasses are safe. Bottlebrush, Melaleuca and most flowering annuals will be suitable. Nasturtiums and Chrysanthemums will add colour and attract insects which will add protein to the birds’ diet. Clematis or Honeysuckle can be grown on a trellis to enhance the solid walls of the aviary.



Purple Clematis
Photo: “UpstateNYer”

In addition to the actual structure it will be necessary to furnish the aviary with utensils to hold the food and water. As wet seed goes mouldy very quickly (with disastrous results for the birds) it is important to place food dishes well out of the weather and in such a position as to minimise fouling by droppings. It is essential care is taken to keep rodents from the food supply. A useful method of doing this is to sink a piece of water pipe, or steel tubing, into the floor of the shelter with approximately a metre left above ground, then fix a tray (similar in size to an old-fashioned garbage bin lid) to the top. This will stop rodents from climbing to the food; and if the sides of the tray are about 75-100mm high seed spillage will be minimised. Water dishes should be of an easily cleaned material; glazed earthenware is ideal, glass is also suitable. Metal dishes should not



Lorikeet enjoying a bath in a safe bowl
Photo: Robert Lawton

be used, as they can leach chemicals into the water with eventual fatal results for the birds, they will also rapidly heat the water on hot days, and warm water can cause illness. Place the dish on the floor and make sure it is large enough for the birds to bathe, but not deep enough for them to be unable to stand; 30-50mm is about right. Fresh water must be available at all times and the dish(es) must not be in full sun, keep in a shaded area at all times.

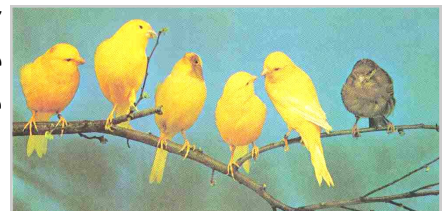
Perches will need to be supplied, with the size being governed by the type of birds kept. Care must be taken to ensure that the aviary is not over cluttered with perches. Finches in a planted aviary will require less artificial perching than is required in a plain parrot aviary. Too many perches can impede flight and will result in the birds not getting enough exercise. Part trees or twiggy perches are unsuitable, as the former will quickly become unsightly with accumulated droppings on the lower branches; while twiggy branches can cause injury if a bird panic flies, and damage to eyes or wings may result. Metal perches can cause arthritis, and round dowelling perches do not give the birds' feet enough exercise and are uncomfortable as the feet are always in the same position. Natural perches of varying thicknesses (fruit tree prunings or gum) are best, as they are both safe and comfortable. **It is important that perches are not placed above food or water dishes.**



Unfortunately many parrots can only be kept as one pair per aviary
Photo: www.parrot-bird.com

The type of birds you decide to keep is very much a personal choice, but it is important to bear in mind the compatibility of species. As most parrot species are very territorial they not only cannot be kept with finches, but usually cannot be kept with other parrots, even of the same species. Canaries are delightful whistlers but quickly destroy plants and tend to bully finches. No matter what species you choose it is important to carefully research their husbandry requirements before

you build the aviary or purchase the birds. The old adage of "it's important to crawl, before you walk and walk before you run", can save you much heartache, time and money.



Canaries...colourful and tuneful, but not good mixers in a finch aviary.

Many enjoyable hours can be spent watching the birds go about their daily activities; and your garden will be enhanced by their colour, movement and song.

