

## SEED BELLS...A STIMULATING ENRICHMENT FOR BIRDS WHY NOT MAKE YOUR OWN?

By Ian M<sup>c</sup>Arthur

In the wild birds spend their day going about their business and being stimulated by their surroundings. In the aviary situation, birds do not have the same amount of new things to see and do to keep up the same level of activity. And besides, adequate supplies of food are easily found. So what we need to do, as bird-keepers, is to try to put things into the aviary to stimulate our birds and keep them interested and active, and to prevent them from becoming too fat. One way to do this is to place seed bells in the aviary.

Basically, I'm a small bird-keeper - canaries, budgies and finches. I have been providing seed bells to my canaries and budgies for several years. The seed bells I make are readily taken to by the budgies who, most often, do not leave them alone until they are completely gone, while my canaries (ten to twelve pairs per aviary) pick away at them over a 2 - 3 week period. I also have a pair of Bourke Parrots, in their own aviary, who also show interest in the seed bells. I suspect most parrots would also take to them. I have tried them with finches, but they do not seem to show much interest, the exception was a few pairs of Bengalese I kept some time ago who pecked away at them.

### SO, HOW DO YOU MAKE THEM????



Photo: Ian McArthur

To begin, buy some small garden pots to act as moulds for the seed bells. I usually use eight or nine at a time. I use new pots to avoid any chance of contamination by chemical residue that may remain in used pots.

For the next part of the process, make a 'thickish' paste using two tablespoons of plain flour and three to four tablespoons of

water. Into this mix a cup full of whatever seed mix you prefer. (Increase the amount of mixture to suit the number of pots to be filled.)

Line the pots with baking paper and place a "squiggly" wire inside the pot like a wick, so that the seed bell may be hung in the aviary. One little tip; if, when pushing the baking paper into the pot, the paper tears or rips, replace it with new so the mixture doesn't stick to the pot in the baking process. If torn paper isn't replaced you will



A finished bell

have to break the pot to remove the seed bell.

Press the flour/seed mix into the pots, leaving part of the wire sticking out the top.

Finally, pre-heat an oven to 160° and place the pots in the oven and bake at that temperature for about an hour.

When the seed bells are cooked, and cooled, they can be pulled out of the pot quite easily and the baking paper stripped away. They are now ready to be placed in the aviary as needed. The pots can be kept for further use.

One last tip; the seed bells will tend to go mouldy if placed in an enclosed space. If air is allowed to circulate around them they will be fine.

While I have not done it, I have heard that some people add honey to the mix and claim that this works well.