

Lightening Up the Chores

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Whatever happened to the idea that keeping birds was fun? I wondered as I reviewed the bickering of the previous few days... "It's YOUR turn! I did the birds last week!" Sound familiar? "How was I supposed to know they had babies in the nest? Nobody ever tells me ANYthing!" Sound TOO familiar? We heard a lot of this long before we built the aviary that now houses our mixed collection. In our initial plans the first consideration was to eliminate verbal exchanges of this sort, but it was only after a lot of trial and error with the aviary in use that we were able to reduce it to a near-acceptable level.

The ideal, of course, would have been to have something like the dream setups pictured in the magazines, with everything from automatic watering and seed dispensers to regular hired help taking care of acres of birds. But this was obviously beyond our small needs, so we began by planning exactly what our needs would be in a twelve by twenty aviary housing no more than a hundred birds at a time.

First imperative: Our birds were to have fresh water daily, and one of the reasons for wanting the birds out of the house and into an aviary was the constant puddles left around as we ran back and forth with little cups of water. While we couldn't have automatic watering devices and hired help, we could have water in the aviary with a sink for clean-ups. The sink took care of our next imperative. The birds and their quarters were to be kept scrupulously clean.

While the building of the aviary and attached flights was in progress, we repeatedly heard phrases such as, "Where did that other hammer go?" Or, "Who stole the pliers?" We learned our lesson well, because the aviary now holds a complete tool kit containing anything and everything we will ever need to make small repairs on the spot without having to run around searching for the proper equipment. This includes nails, wire, screws and screw driver and even an electric soldering iron which comes in handy to melt holes in plastic containers of all kinds so that they can be put to some good use.

The installation of an intercom system, and a telephone extension saved

us more than a lot of shouting...it saved us a lot of running back and forth. To save even more steps the new aviary was supplied with broom, dust pan, mop, pail, detergents, paper towels and everything else that would be required to keep it clean. It wasn't the exercise we minded...it was the waste of time.

To save even more time in cleaning up, the cage bottoms were removed from our small breeding cages. These in turn were mounted onto hooks on the wall and suspended about 6mm over a wooden shelf. Cut-to-size plexi-glass sheets were then slipped into place under each cage and could be slipped out again for a fast wash under the tap at the sink.

Even steps such as these left us with several questions. Why, when it was HIS turn to do the chores, did it take so much longer than when SHE did the same chores. It was found, for one thing, that she never took two trips to the sink if she could do it in one. She also took care of each type of bird one type at a time. Obviously then, birds of a feather SHOULD flock together. Birds that had similar needs were relocated. Birds that needed live food were not only moved closer together, they were moved closer to the live food. If any "livestock" decided to go exploring it stood a good chance of having its journey cut short before it got out of the area.

Other differences in management were soon discovered. If HE mounted a nesting box it was mounted for all eternity and nothing SHE could do would ever pry it loose for use elsewhere. When SHE took on the job of installing a similar nesting box it tended to teeter on the brink of disaster long before the babies were safely out.

A method was found to mount the boxes to the ceiling of the inside flights, whatever the size of the box, with a simple tongue and groove arrangement. Two grooved boards as deep as the nest box were mounted to the ceiling a fixed distance apart. The open top of each box, whatever its size, was fitted with a "tongue" on either side that would fit into the grooves...the smaller the box, the larger the tongue and vice versa. Boxes could then be exchanged from

one flight to another as the need arose without the necessity of using a crowbar to pry them free.

We decided there was no point in being all that systematic if we weren't regular as well, so a schedule was drawn up and has been adhered to only because it has worked so well. Cages and flights that appear to need it are cleaned then and there. Otherwise they are cleaned every third and fourth day...that is, twice a week, with Friday set as the major clean-up of the two. Seed containers are emptied and cleaned, the seed itself cleaned and recycled. The last Friday of every month has been set aside as the major-major clean-up. At this time the entire aviary is gone over with a vacuum cleaner so that no debris is collected where it might harbor unwanted guests. When we know that something will disrupt our usual cleaning day we make a point of doing it a day in ADVANCE. We found that it simply doesn't pay to postpone jobs because they are too easily not done at all.

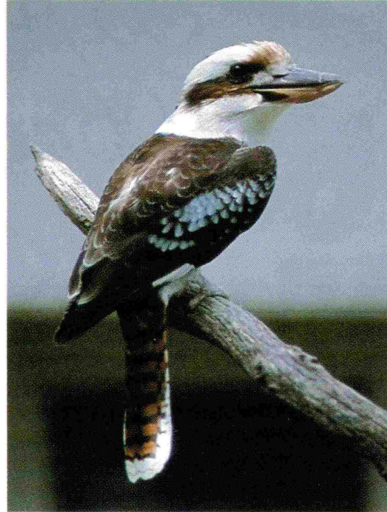
We have not yet been able to solve the problem of missing pens and pencils. They never seem to be where you need them. So instead of writing notes to one another to point out who is sitting on eggs, a wooden clothes pin attached prominently on the cage door delivers the message. The addition of a second clothes pin announces the arrival of the newly hatched.

Besides having a place for everything and everything neatly in place, we found that the thing itself often provided the key to what was — in fact — the place for it. Whenever we looked for the nail clippers or the band cutter, they were never where we had planned...in with the first aid supplies. Invariably they would be found on a window sill, since we worked there for the best light. Now that is where they are kept, and we've had no further trouble keeping track. No doubt we will continue to make additional changes as time goes on.

We make no claim to having perfected our bird chores to the point where they could be called pure pleasure, but we have reduced the daily work of providing fresh water, soaked seed and fruit or greens from a two hour chore to a half-hour, and the major clean-up from an all-day effort to a matter of a few hours.

The biggest question we now have is: Having spent so much to build and equip the aviary, how did so many of those birds find their way back into the house? ●

Rare.



Kookaburra (Dacelo Novaeguinae)

3 (European) Sexed Pairs will be hatched soon

April/May delivery of

8 Male, 8 Female Jackass Penguins
8 Male, 8 Female Rockhopper Penguins
2 Male, 2 Female Wattled Cranes
1 Male, 1 Female Lead Beater Cockatoo
4 Male, 4 Female Vietnamese Pot Bellied Pigs

Rare birds, cats, primates
and other Collectors' Specimens
available upon request

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