

A Mixed Flight That Works For Me

by Paul Lepiane
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When I received my October-November issue of the *AFA Watchbird*, I was pleased to read in Dale Thompson's editorial that the February/March issue would feature mixed species flights. This is one area where I feel some people in this hobby are missing out on a lot of enjoyment.

Having had birds of all types, on and off, for over 30 years, the mixed flight was what I had started with and gradually gotten away from as my bird involvement and knowledge advanced. I had had success breeding various finches, grass parakeets, rosellas and even a few Amboina King Parrots when some business commitments began to take their toll, time wise. Breeding activity would have to be put on hold for at least a few years. I did keep one pair of Kings, but the other birds were consolidated to one mixed flight in the garden closest to the house. To my surprise, this group of birds has given me a type of enjoyment I had forgotten about when I was more concerned with nesting dates, chick survival rates and selling the extras.

This particular aviary measures 16 feet in length, six feet in height and five feet in width. It is situated in the garden, surrounded by citrus trees and is partially covered by a honeysuckle vine. Ten feet are covered by a wood shake roof with the other six feet open to let in rain (or the "rain" from a misting system during our nine dry months of the year). The aviary sits directly on the ground with a two-inch deep covering of coarse sand which is easily raked and sifted every few weeks. There is a semi-enclosed five-foot wide by two-foot deep by three-foot high wooden box hanging under the covered end of the aviary with perches to allow protection from any wind, but it is almost never used. Various perches and tree branches (with the smallest twigs left intact) are positioned at each end of the flight with the center area left clear for free flying. An elevated bath bowl is positioned under the open roof section and two

large seed bowls are at the other, covered, end of the flight. These 12-inch bowls are placed on inverted black plastic five-gallon flower pots which mice cannot climb. There are two in case one is being dominated by a particular bird. There is also a separate water bowl and a third inverted flower pot on top of which I put the daily soft food/fruit/vegetable mixture.

Originally this flight was a "catch-all" of various extra birds which I thought would be compatible, including some paired birds. Over the last two years, I have narrowed it down and now have birds which are in complete harmony, make a pleasant combination of chirps, whistles and songs, and all eat the same diet.

One of the most important aspects of this group is that *all the birds are males*. I found that with any females present, their particular mates would become aggressive and disrupt the harmony of the flock. The group now consists of one Plumhead Parakeet, four Scarlet-chested Parakeets, one canary, two Zebra Finches, one Paradise Whydah, one Orange Weaver, one Green Singing Finch, one Japanese Robin (Pekin Nightingale), one Diamond Dove and one Strawberry Finch.

I am sure there are many other species that would work well in this mixture, but I haven't tried them and this one works for me. The Plumhead is particularly peaceful and totally ignores the smaller birds. The only two birds that have had to be removed for over aggressiveness were a Budgie and another Orange Weaver. When there were females present, even the tiny Green Singing Finch became quarrelsome, attacking almost all the other birds.

Another advantage to this particular mixture is the ease of feeding. The large bowls are filled once a week with a combination of cockatiel, canary and finch mixes. The daily soft food contains ground up dog kibble, corn, rice, beans, mixed chopped vegetables and various fruits. Other than the Japanese Robin, these birds could do with just the seed mix if one needs to be away for a few days.

Whether you have room for only one flight, or if you need a break from the rows and rows of breeding cages, a casual little group of birds such as the one that has worked for me is highly recommended. ●

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