

A Simple Cage

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Simple may mean easy but when one has never done or made something, it is not simple. Beginners are always asking about cages and Mr. Dingle presents the basics for building a cage that will do for almost any parrot, large or small.

The "AFA Visits" column has featured many beautiful, complex aviaries often built at great expense. We all enjoy looking at the elaborately designed and planted aviaries but we can't always afford to duplicate them on our own property. In fact, several letters have requested fewer fancy flights in favor of some simple cages. To hear is to obey. The following article written by your humble servant will concentrate on one sort of simple cage.

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I've often heard this type of cage described as the "Noegel" cage. It has also been advertised as the "California Breeder" cage. But, whatever its name, it is one of the most basic designs that can be called a cage. It provides security that keeps the birds in and predators out. It provides shelter from wind, rain, snow, and direct sunlight. In it the birds have food, water and nesting facilities and what more is necessary?

In effect, this simple cage is nothing more than a wire box four feet high, four feet wide, and eight feet long. Its dimensions, of course, can vary according to your desires. We have some that are six feet high instead of four. We built about 30 of these cages and scattered them about an acre or so around and amongst the more traditional aviaries. It's an experiment of sorts and thus far the results are extremely satisfactory.

To build this simple cage one must have four sections of wire 4 x 8 feet each (the same size as a sheet of plywood) and two sections 4 x 4 feet square. The eight foot sections are clipped together along their long edges to form a square tube eight feet long. The two square pieces are clipped on each end and *voilà*. You have a cage.

We made cages out of 1/2 inch x 3 inch 12-gauge wire for smaller cockatoos, and for the larger cockatoos we used 1 inch x 3 inch 8-gauge wire. Whatever wire you use should be stiff enough to make rigid cages. It also helps to double crimp the clips and make them as tight as possible.

Once this completely enclosed cage is made, you must decide where you want to put a door. For our purposes we decided upon a door in the center of the long side. We merely cut out a piece, 12 inches square and clipped on a piece of wire that was three inches larger than the door on three sides. The clips were put on the bottom side and serve as a hinge. The door swings away from the top and will hang down out of the way. The 12 inch square hole is plenty large enough for access to the cage but is small enough that a cockatoo is not likely to slip past an attendant. I know there are better ways but our doors are secured at the top with two small padlocks. All 30 cages

are fitted with the same locks so one key fits all.

It did not seem wise to put the cages directly on the ground and we wanted to scatter them about at random so the best method we could think of was to put legs on each cage. We cut chain link fence pipe into sections and secured them to the cages with U-bolts. This method allowed us to raise the cages two feet above the ground and even to make adjustments for keeping the cage level on sloping ground.

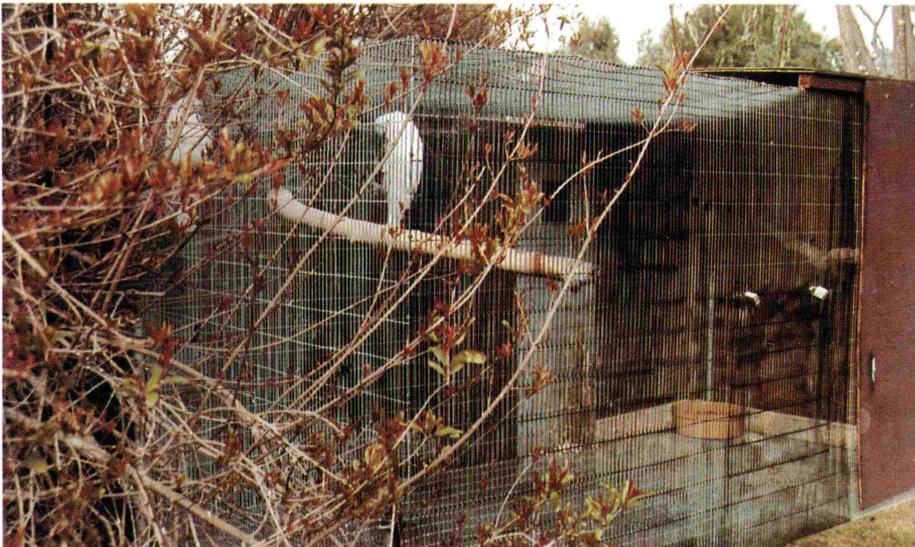
With the cages in place we next devised a simple but effective shelter. Using plywood, we built a box open on two sides and slipped it onto an end of the wire cage. The shelters were placed on metal racks to keep them about three inches off of the cage wire to inhibit the birds chewing the wood. The shelters were painted with a water-proofing stain to weatherproof them. The top piece of the box overlaps the side pieces to prevent rain from seeping in. During the past month we've had more than average rain and the seed crocks in the shelters have remained dry. Eventually we'll probably put an asphalt roofing on the shelters but I've had raw plywood last eight years in the California weather without falling apart.

At this point we have a simple wire cage on legs with one end covered. We put a perch inside the shelter and another one in the open. The perches are about five feet apart and permit flying from one to the other. We added a seed crock in the shelter and a water crock in the open. To each cage we next added one pair of cockatoos, assorted, and felt proud of our instant bird farm.

To breed the little buggers we added one nest box per cage. The boxes have to be attached to the outside of the cage so they had to be made chew proof. The boxes are made of 3/4 inch plywood and are completely lined on the inside with sheet metal. We considered readymade aluminum nest boxes but decided they would be like an oven in the summer heat and probably too cold in the winter. The heavy wood provides a lot of insulation and we feel it is worth the price. The boxes are 16 inches by 17 1/2



The aviaries on the right are constructed of steel, wire, and wood and situated on a cement slab. The simple cage in the center is nothing more than a wire box on legs with a plywood cover on one end. The birds seem equally happy in both types of enclosures and breed as well in one as in the other.



This breeding cage is seen from the open end showing the feed crock under the shelter, the opening to the nest box, the padlocks used to secure the access door, and the pair of Umbrella Cockatoos whose home it is. The birds were happy enough to raise a beautiful baby last year.



Most of the nest boxes are situated so the shy cockatoos can remain in their boxes while observing whatever goes on in the cage.



Ordinary U-bolts are used to secure the legs to the cages.

inches by 50 inches deep. There is an access door on the back side so the eggs and babies can be monitored with ease.

Most of the nest boxes are attached to the cages across from the cage door. We have found most cockatoos to be rather shy but curious at the same time. Now, when I approach to service the cages, the birds can dive into the nest boxes but easily peek out to see what is going on.

This spring will be our first full season with nest boxes up and everything in order and we are hoping for a good breeding year. So far we've had a total of 14 babies from four species and the simple little cages seem to be quite satisfactory.

It is our conviction that no one can force a given pair of birds to breed. You may give them the world's finest aviary and the most sophisticated diet ever invented; you may simulate rain and sunlight to the perfect degree; you can provide everything possible and still certain pairs will not breed. On the other hand, there are compatible pairs of birds that *want* to breed and will do it under almost any circumstances.

Perhaps the key to success is to provide the best one can for one's birds and try to avoid circumstances that would *prevent* a compatible pair from breeding. In our experience, the simple "Noegel" cage described here provides a basic environment that will not inhibit birds nor, in itself, preclude them from raising babies. Such cages are simple, inexpensive, easy to make, and are worth a try if you live in a moderate climate. 