

Aviaries for Their Viewing Pleasure

by Bruce Robinson, Escondido, CA

Until recently, the usual purpose for keeping exotic birds was as a pet or out of curiosity. Until the last several hundred years, an average person was familiar only with what was seen in his native land. Early zoos and parks offered a chance to view these beautiful creatures up close. Although captive breeding is now the emphasis of private aviculturists, zoos, and theme parks, there is still an occasional reason to set up an aviary just for viewing pleasure.

There are well planned small aviaries scattered around southern California, and many other places, that relieve the boredom for convalescent, or retired people. For people trapped in these unfortunate conditions, a peaceful spot in an outdoor garden watching the movement and color, and listening to a song, provides hours of enjoyment.

I've always had a Love for animals and birds and great compassion for people. I found a way to put my interests together by creating and maintaining aviaries at a number of convalescent and retirement homes in my area. To make these aviaries a pleasure, and not an embarrassment, there is a critical formula for structure, location, birds, plants, feeders, waterers, ground cover, and other details. Morning sun, in this part of the world, is best, with afternoon shade, permanent roofing and little wind exposure.

Building materials are usually 1 inch x 1 inch welded steel framing with 1/2 x 1 inch, 16 gauge wire mesh. Wood framing works for some applications but dry rot, aging, splitting, and insects can be problems. Steel will provide more maintenance-free longevity. Where possible, aviaries are planned with double safety doors, otherwise the door is a very low-stooping head-banger to make sure the birds do not have a line of escape into the great beyond.

Good drainage is common sense regardless of what the bottom material

may be. A cement slab is easier to keep clean. I've found that redwood or cedar bark chips make a very good bottom cover. It can be gently hosed off, washing dropping and seed hulls out through the drains. About every three months I completely remove the old chips and lay in a fresh supply. This keeps the aviary looking nice. In some locations, fresh small green plants and even seasonal flowering plants are regularly introduced to enhance the viewing. Also, the birds seem to enjoy new plants to explore.

All the perches are manzanita branches which are placed for optimum flight room. There are plenty of high, dry, wind-proof roosting and sleeping perches none of which are placed under food or water containers. Each enclosure contains three one-gallon plastic waterers. Two large feed crocks are placed on the floor at opposite ends of the aviary. Millet and fresh pyracantha berries are hung in the larger trees.

Aviaries in these greatly varying situations must be planned for viewing (not on breeding) and, of course, for the comfort and safety of the birds. From years of working with these aviaries, I've worked out a comfortable maintenance routine — a visit every five days, with attention to all feeders, waterers, grounds, and plants. It is important to study the birds to see that all are looking well.

It has been my experience that birds fighting for nest sites, babies on the ground or, worse yet, falling into a water bowl, causes great stress to the viewing residents not to mention the birds themselves.

Usually there will be an on-site maintenance person who has a key in case there is a problem and who will hose out a bath bowl on a hot summer day. But picking up a deceased bird is not a highlight in their day.

A mixed collection of finches, doves, and quail seem to work best in these aviaries. Hookbills (with the pos-

sible exception of a few *Neophemas* — especially Bourke's Parakeets) are too destructive to the vegetation.

Birds Used:

Pekin Robin, Tri-colored Nun, Zebra Finch, Orange Weaver, Society Finch, Pin-tailed Whydah, Shaft-tailed Finch, Saffron Finch, Orange-cheeked Waxbill, Red-eared Waxbill, Diamond Dove, Button Quail, Bourke's Parakeet.

Recommended Plants:

Ficus trees, Ivys, Schefflera, Bromeliads, Pyracantha, Callestemon (Bottlebrush). Note: All plants are kept in containers. Plants that tend to grow too large are kept trimmed. On Broad-leaved plants bird droppings are too noticeable. Plants with variegated leaves lessen that problem.

Bringing peace, tranquillity, and pleasure to one segment of our population is one aspect of aviculture not often thought about. It is, however, a very fulfilling and wonderful reason to keep birds in captivity.

Photos for this article continue on the next two pages.

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Alvarado Convalescent Hospital, San Diego, CA. Due to the abundance of good light, this aviary is well planted. Although nesting is not overly encouraged there are some nests provided for the ambitious pairs. This aviary is 12' x 12' x 8' high, all metal construction on the already existing cement pad. Redwood bark covers the bottom.

Moss Creek Apartments, Garden Grove, CA. This six-sided unit uses the wall for its backside. It is 12 years old, wood log vertical supports, cedar shake roof and 1/2 x 1/2" wire. The floor is cement covered with redwood bark chips. This apartment complex does live up to its name. It has nice landscaping complete with a fountain and creek.



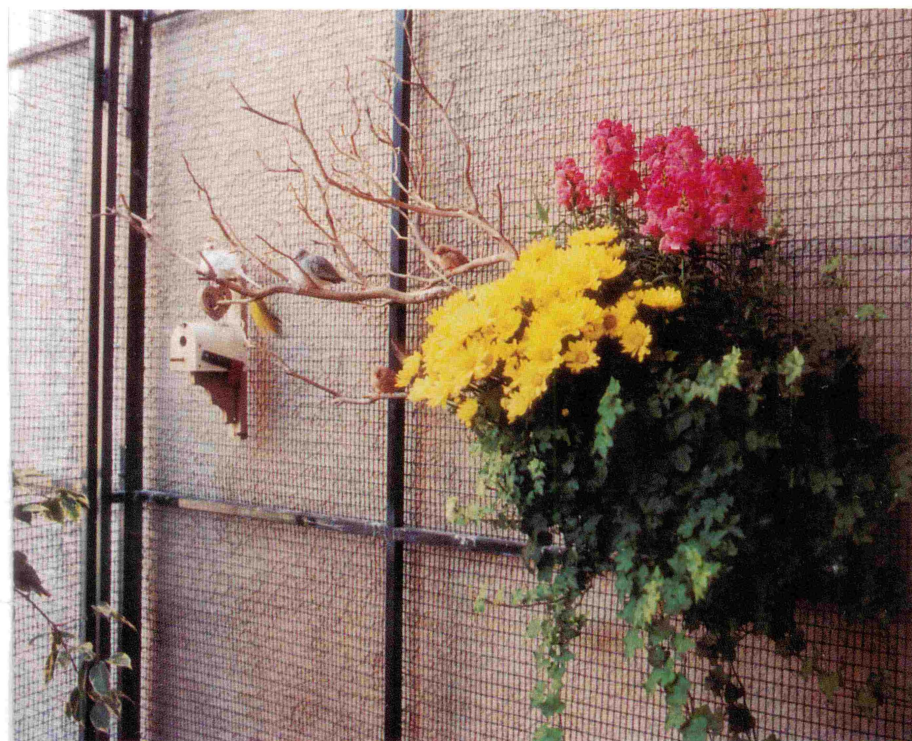
Photos by Bruce Robinson



Leisure Court, Anaheim, CA. This 16' diameter all wood aviary is covered with a bamboo reed roof. This is the only aviary that has a linoleum covered plywood floor. Cleaning takes a lot more care.



Ashton Court Assisted Living, Orange, CA. This triangular aviary was made to fit in the corner. It is made with 2" x 2" and 1" x 1" steel welded frame with 1 x 1/2" 16 gauge wire. The floor is cement with redwood bark covering. It measures approximately 10' across the front viewing area and 6 1/2' high. It can also be viewed from the window inside.



French Center for Alzheimer's Research, Los Alamitos, CA. This is another triangular aviary made to fit a corner. It is 10' high and measures 12' across the wire outdoors-viewing front. Another side is glass allowing good viewing from the inside. There is no wire against the glass wall. This gives the viewer a sense of being closer to the birds. The photo above was taken from an inside hallway. The wire and solid wall back side supports a wall planter to add greenery and seasonal color. It is constructed of 1" x 1" welded frame with 1/2 x 1" wire. The floor takes advantage of the existing cement pad. Redwood bark covers the cement.



Photos by Bruce Robinson