

PSITTACULA SIGHTINGS

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Aviaries and Cages for Breeding *Psittacula* Parakeets

I am often asked what size and type enclosure is ideal for Asian parakeets. There is, unfortunately, no simple answer to that question.

I can tell you my favorite breeding enclosure is an aviary. The minimum dimensions preferred being four feet wide, eight feet tall, and either eight or 12 feet long. We have had our best success using this size and type of enclosure. It is easy to get in and out of for catching birds or cleaning. There is plenty of room for parent raised birds to fledge and learn the dynamics of flight.

This size aviary also makes sense in terms of construction because it uses standard cuts of plywood, 2 x 4s and wire widths. However, not everyone will be able to fit many of these in their back yard or perhaps in their budget. We are on five acres, so space is not a problem. But, what about everyone else?

If space were at a premium, what constitutes an adequate breeding enclosure for Alexandrines, Derbyans, Ring-necked Parakeets and the rest of the smaller members of the *Psittacula*

genus?

Obviously there is no maximum from the birds' standpoint. So what are the minimum requirements to maintain health, vigor and fertility?

I asked a number of other breeders around the country just what size cages or flights they had been successful with, and I was quite surprised at some of the answers.

Aviaries

In California, most of the breeders are successful in outdoor aviaries similar to the size mentioned above. The width varied from a narrow 18 inches to 25 feet on some colony flights. The least successful production was for the flights that were two feet or less in width. Three feet wide seemed to be the minimum on the width.

The length of the flights that were successful ranged from six feet long to 20 feet.

Height requirements were not recognized so much by the human caretakers. Many flights were six feet high. However, those flights where the birds perches were hung higher than the

heads of the caretakers, at least seven feet high, were more successful and had calmer birds.

Cages

Many of the indoor breeders have no choice and are doing quite well with their birds in suspended cages. Cages can be mounted on the wall directly. If the birds can reach the wall to chew it, it makes better sense to mount brackets on the wall and place the cages on the brackets just far enough away so the birds cannot reach the wallboard. Balance the cage by running chain from the front corners of the cage back to the wall above it. Cages can also be suspended with heavy chain from the ceiling. Some breeders use pipe or PVC frames standing on the floor with cages secured on top. These frames can be free standing or mounted to the floor for stability.

Fortunately it made no difference to the birds how the cages were suspended, so make the decision on how to suspend your cages based on what will work the best for you.

The sizes of the cages varied the most, and most were successful in terms of production. We used to think that small cages were one of the major factors in infertility because the birds were not getting adequate exercise. However, many of the indoor breeding operations on the east coast have proven otherwise. Problems with infertility may be more closely tied to content of the diet and the amount of food consumed by the birds rather than cage size.

Since there are no scientific studies on this, it may be a good idea to give your birds flight space during the non-breeding season just to be sure. Several successful breeders routinely put their Asian parakeets in large group flights during the summer months and then return them to the small breeding cages in the fall when the birds are naturally pairing for the spring breeding season.

The smallest successful breeding cage was 3 feet L x 3 feet W x 2 feet H for Ring-necked Parakeet sized birds. While the smallest cage for the Derbyans and Alexandrines was 6 feet L x 3 feet W x 6 feet H.

In California the breeding cages

tended to be longer; at least 6-8 feet, and were usually 3 feet high and 3 feet wide.

Asian parakeets can become fiercely territorial during the entire breeding season, so all cages should have a space allowance or a solid divider between them to prevent chewed toes from neighbors.

Other Considerations

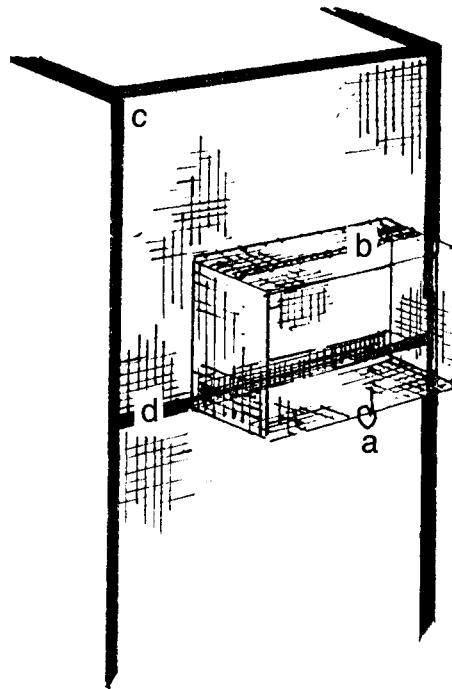
When designing your aviaries and cages, maintenance should be considered. If you are lucky enough to have the space for aviaries, by all means do yourself a favor and make your access doors six feet tall and at least 24 inches wide. I have only expletives for the small doors that many of the older style aviaries had as a standard. If the small door is hung too high, at the very least you will bang your shins going in and out, and if the door is hung too low you will eventually bang your head. This can be disastrous if you are carrying birds, food dishes, or delicate eggs through that tiny door, not to mention you can do some serious damage to yourself.

Perches are going to be impossible to replace in a row of suspended cages if there are solid dividers when they are hung parallel to the front of the cage. It makes better sense to place one long perch from front to back in the cage. Most builder's supply stores carry metal brackets for studs. We mounted one on each end panel of our 8 foot long cages, prior to putting the cages together. When the perches need to be replaced, it's a snap to just drop a standard 8 foot length 2 x 4 in for the perch.

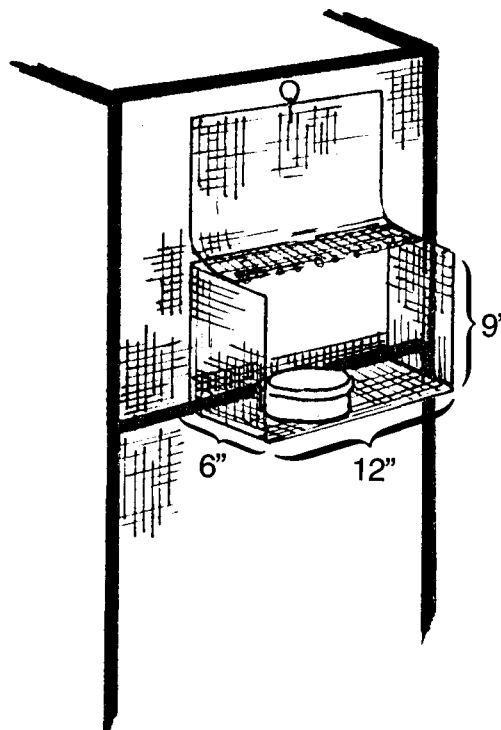
Feeding stations are another time saver whether you have cages or aviaries. They are essentially a "boot" sticking out on the front of the cage or aviary, with a small access door for seed and goodie dishes. A separate boot for water dishes is also nice, but should not be placed underneath or too close to the food dishes to lessen contamination.

I have found only one book on the subject of construction for aviaries and equipment, *How to Build Everything You Need for Your Birds* by Don La Rosa, La Rosa Publications, Simi, California, 1973. It is still in print and

Feeding Station



- a - latch
- b - hinge made by using J-clips or hog rings
- c - wood or metal aviary frame
- d - cross support



available at some bird farms. If you are a do-it-yourself person, this is a good book to have, and if you have to hire someone else to do the work, it makes a handy reference. It covers everything from aviaries to nest boxes with good drawings, measurement, and material charts. The basic designs can be modified to fit your particular needs and wants as well.

Do yourself and your birds a big favor....build safety aisles on your cages and aviaries. If you hang nest boxes on the back of your cages, you should enclose that area also. Birds sometimes chew through nest boxes and get out, or they may just jump out when you are checking the boxes.

This advice isn't just for those with outdoor flights and cages. Indoor facilities benefit from safety aisles as well. Many years ago, we had Blue and Gold Macaws set up in large cages in our garage. One of the male birds escaped out the door of the cage as I was feeding him. He flew as fast as he could straight for the huge picture window and smacked into it head on quite hard.

The sound of that beak hitting the glass with such force, the bird falling to the floor and my amazement that the thin window did not break, are indelibly etched in my memory. He was a bit shaken but alright other wise. He could have easily broken his neck. We were thankful that he didn't, and resolved to correct the situation.

There are other dangers too for escapees. I have heard many stories from people who have had their Asian parakeets get out of the indoor cages and drown in the utility sinks where feed dishes were being soaked. Some drank cleaning solution out of scrub buckets and died. Loose birds can also be very disruptive to other nesting birds, and it can be a real trick trying to catch them depending on the construction and arrangement of your bird room.

Some indoor breeders have designed and built lightweight portable safety aisles that are easily attached to a cage or aviary while needed. Which ever you choose, a simple safety aisle is a cheap insurance policy that will save you many headaches, and will help save your birds too. 