

Growing up with Birds in Australia

by Paul Stevens, NSW Australia.

Introduction.

This is an article based on growing up with birds in Australia, experiences of my own and of my father, to whom I owe the majority of my knowledge.

It seems we all have some interests in our lives growing up as kids, and my childhood was no different. Of all the interests I had as a kid, the one that stuck with me throughout my life was the love for birds, mainly parrots, because, as most people are aware, we have some magnificent bird life here in Australia.

As a boy living at home in NSW Australia, I was involved with birds, watching and learning about their ways, either from my father, or the birds themselves. My father, Bill, was a major influence in my early years as a bird lover, and still is today.

Living at home with my parents

in the 1970s, I was to be introduced to the lows and highs of keeping birds. The lows of course being the cleaning of aviaries and cages, feeding and watering, and the highs, naturally, the many different characteristics and beauty of the birds.

My father allocated a few aviaries in which I kept the birds that were available to me at the time – parrots such as, the Rosella family, Red-winged Parrots, Superb Parrots, Mulga Parrots, Mallee Ring-necked Parrots, and of course the spectacular Major Mitchell's Cockatoo. (Some of these birds may be called by different names in other countries.)

My father kept a bigger range of parrots than the ones just mentioned, but these were among his favorites, with the Major Mitchell's Cockatoo still being his all time favorite. (Who could blame him?)

Here in Australia we keep birds a little different than in Europe or America. With our different ranges in climate it is only natural to keep our birds outdoors in either conventional or suspended aviaries, depending on the bird species. For example, seed eating birds such as the parrot or cockatoo families are kept usually in conventional on-the-ground enclosures, with birds such as lorries and lorikeets being kept mostly in suspended cages.

My father has always been a believer in conventional aviaries with natural dirt floors so his birds can have access to the ground to play and forage. He has three large flight cages, measuring 6 meters (19.8ft) long x 2.4 meters (7.92ft) wide x 2 meters (6.6ft) high. These aviaries are for colonies of Superb Parrots, King Parrots, Red-winged Parrots, and Major Mitchell's Cockatoos.

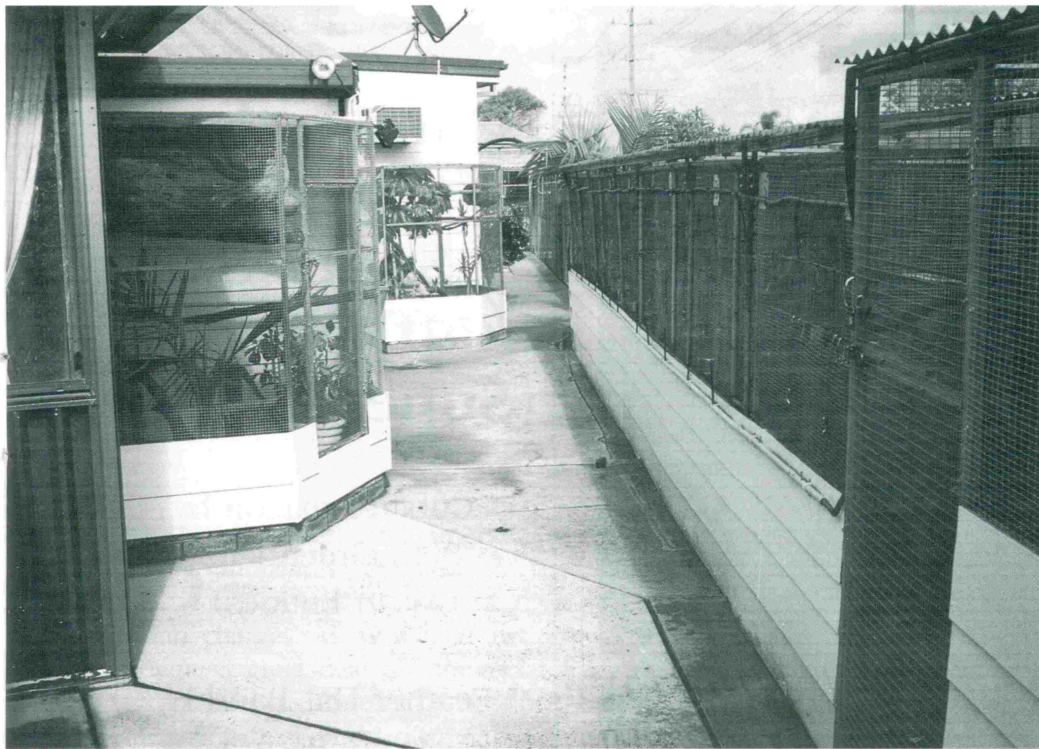
He also has a row of 12 smaller breeding type cages measuring 2 meters (6.6ft) long x 1.2 meters (4ft) wide x 2 meters (6.6ft) high for individual pairs of the birds mentioned earlier.

My father has been involved with birds for over 60 years, the first birds he kept as a boy in Europe were Gold and Shaft finches. The Goldfinches were kept in an open planted aviary, and the Shaft finches kept in small cages main-

Photo by Paul Stevens



This view shows a portion of my conventional aviaries, a must for larger species of birds.



A partial view of suspended aviaries, excellent for breeding lorikeets, etc. Note the two pylon aviaries on the left.

ly for singing birds. He kept this line of birds for many years until he married and finally moved to Australia in the 1950s. Here he branched out into other birds, especially the parrot family, and as he made friends with other aviculturists, his collection grew. Over the years, and as his knowledge grew, he would keep hard-to-breed birds such as the parrots mentioned above.

My own collection as it is today includes the following bird species: Gang-gang Cockatoos, Major Mitchell's Cockatoos, New Guinean Eclectus Parrots, Alexandrine Parrots, Slatey-headed Parrots, Mustached Parrots, Plum-headed Parrots, mutation Rainbow Lorikeets, mutation Red-collared Lorikeets, mutation Scaley-breasted Lorikeets, Weber's Lorikeets, Black-capped Lories, Cardinal Lories, Pope Lories, and Bishop's Lories. (Both the Pope and Bishop lories are hybrids).

Currently, my wife Donna and I moved here into our newly built house in 1985, with my first birds being several species of lovebirds including Peach-faced and some of

their mutations, such as blue and yellow masks, and yellow, ivory, pastel blue, and slate peach faces.

We kept various lovebirds and improved upon them for many years and eventually developed the yel-

low-lime, Lutino, and black-eyed white Fisher's, white and albino Masked, and many colors in the white-faced Peach-faced Lovebird.

These birds need very little space to breed, so they were put in cabinets stacked one on top of the other and arranged in order in our double garages. I built small flight cages in our back yard to keep some of the young birds for further breeding. They were closely watched and then paired off to make up young breeding pairs.

The other young birds were either sold to other bird keepers or the local pet shops. Eventually it was time for a change, so these birds made way for others such as, Indian Ring-necks in green, yellow, and green split for yellow. This species and its mutations was the flavor of the month in Australia at the time.

Eventually I started to collect the Australian birds mentioned above. Back then, these birds were kept mostly in timber constructed aviaries, but over the years were changed to steel pipe aviaries.

Many species of Australian parrots can be very aggressive in mixed collections so for safety single pairs



Photos by Paul Stevens

A beautiful breeding pair of Major Mitchell's (or Leadbeater's) cockatoos. With crests raised, the hen, at right, shows a little more yellow.



ing pair of Gang-gang Cockatoos

were placed in aviaries on their own – in my opinion this is the only way to keep Broad-tails of any description.

To upgrade my operation, I sold off most of my birds and most of the old aviaries were pulled down or rebuilt where they stood. Self-watering and sprinkler systems were introduced, almost maintenance-free feed stations, and drainage all became part of the new aviary complex.

I have had many different experiences in my years as an Australian bird keeper, most of them good ones, but, as every bird keeper knows, there are also bad ones. I have bred a large range of parrots, both Australian and, as we call them here in Australia, Exotics, and I have found the lorikeets to be among those I like best.

Lorikeets have been part of me for many years now and I will continue to keep and breed them for many years to come. Of course my lorikeets and lories are kept in suspended cages, and all my other parrots in conventional aviaries.

With new types of cages and

easier feeding, lorikeets are being kept more widely here in Australia, which I feel is a great thing for these fascinating little birds.

But, as much as I like the lories and other parrots, my all-time favorite species is the Gang-Gang Cockatoo. Its character is above the rest and its delightful calls are pleasing to hear.

Conclusion

My father and I keep birds these days for enjoyment, for the pleasure of keeping birds. Although our birds breed well enough as it is, when they do breed it's a bonus, not a must. If they don't breed, there's no problem either. This is the way we feel that true bird keepers should be, no pressure put on themselves. I am in two bird clubs, only for the enjoyment of listening to other bird keepers experiences and ideas.

The aviary complex I have today is almost maintenance free, which is, to me, the only way to keep birds. No more hard, tiring work. The time one spends with the birds should be enjoyable. ➔

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