

Building a Bird House

by L. Lorraine Lyons
Von Iwo, Canada
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Having a bird garden in southern California was one thing; trying to raise the same birds in "super, natural British Columbia" — even on the Sunshine Coast — was an entirely different matter. We knew we had to make some drastic changes when I began having nightmares about bird seed. Sacks of sunflower seed vied for space with finch mix in each of two bedrooms. Getting into the broom closet past the various pails and boxes of mixed seed was virtually impossible. The bathroom shelves stocked — not tooth paste or face cream, but jars, bottles, boxes of avian vitamins, minerals, tonics and moulting powders. The kitchen counter overflowed with nestling mixes and egg food.

In the living room every conceivable surface held a cage of some sort. Two huge dog cages wired together took up six feet of valuable floor space right in the middle of it all, while two African Greys growled at all who passed. Meal worm beetles navigated the house; the confused flour beetle proved not to be so confused after all; fruit flies refused to stay wingless and hovered everywhere. Since this was *reality* it shouldn't be hard to imagine what the nightmares had become. Even the cheery, "Hi, Mom. Tippy wants out!" from the pet cockatiel did little to help. An aviary was a must. We had to build a house for our birds.

Planning began with trips to a number of aviary set-ups. Most proved to be converted garages and garden sheds or flights wired into sunless basements. But each visit seemed to provide us with some new idea, and so the plans were drawn up and presented to a contractor for an estimate of what it would cost to build a modest house for our birds. It had to be large enough to house a growing collection, but small enough to stay fun to operate; large enough to be efficient, yet small enough not to be a financial burden.

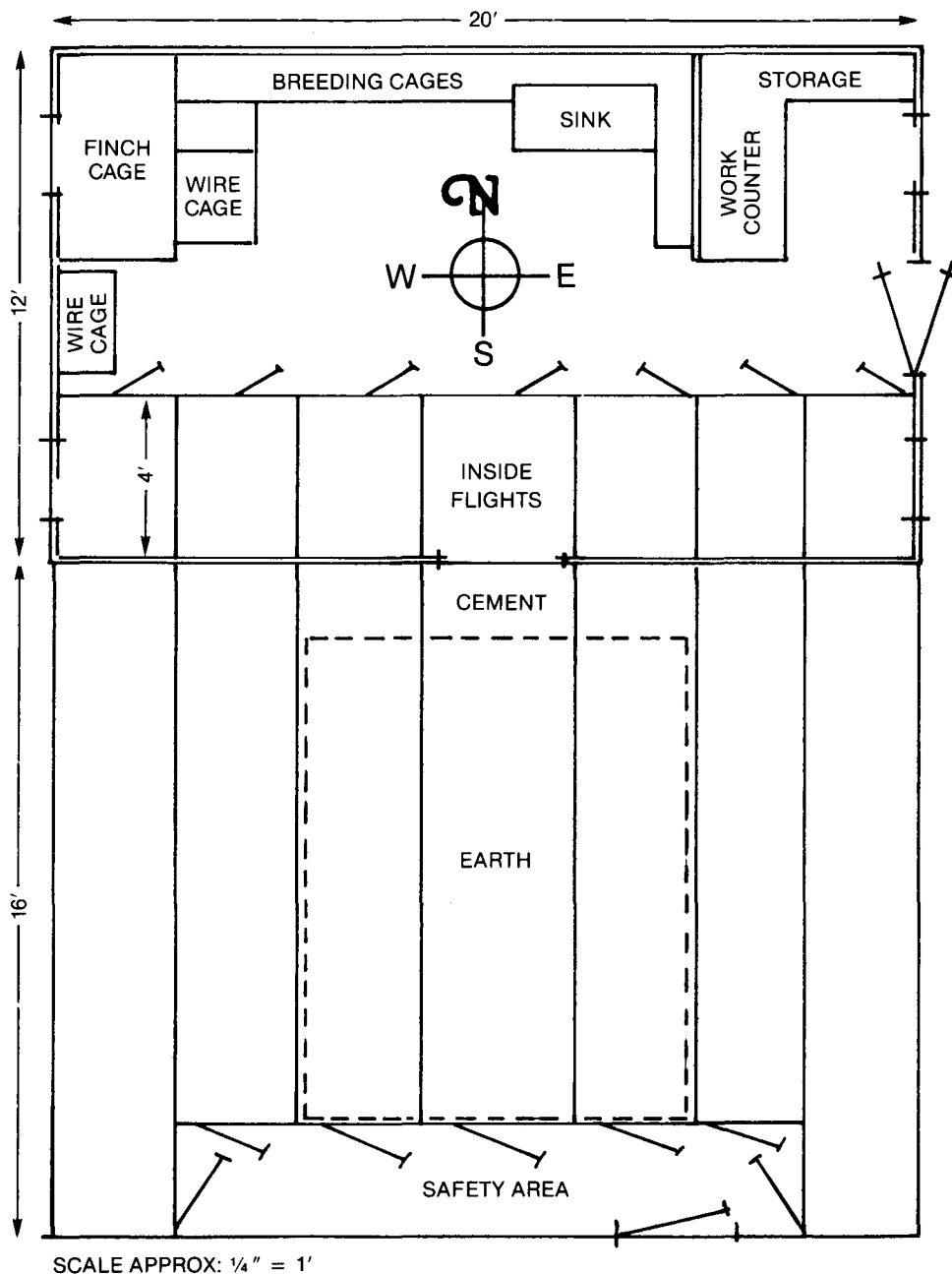
The contractor felt that he could prefab most of the structure at his lumber yard on the mainland before trucking it over to our island residence.

His price seemed reasonable so we gave him the go-ahead signal and before you could say chickweed the roof trusses were taking shape. The husband half of this team headed north while the wife half was left to wrap up a few details.

The first detail was to have an additional five feet in length added to the original plans. This, the contractor was

told, would allow us to have three smaller flights on either side of a windowed five-foot center flight. Something must have happened in the translation, because not only did the window not end up in the center, this small addition somehow resulted in a final price of more than double the original estimate.

The next detail was to find some place to put the proposed building on our densely treed property. The first plan, to bring in a machine via the rear of the property, proved to be impossible for a number of reasons, trespass being only one of them. The solution was to extend and widen the existing driveway at the front of the property, taking it past the house and greenhouse, up to the desired area at the rear. This



was done soon enough, but at the expense of some very nice hedges and two areas of lawn. Several fine old trees, including an apple tree, had to go.

We were next informed that for ecological reasons no dumping would be permitted anywhere on our side of the island. It was necessary to truck six loads of rock and other debris across island while the \$40 an hour bulldozer sat idle between trips.

At last it was cleared and the area was leveled in readiness for the new bird house. The new driveway was graded, and after two truck loads of gravel it was considered complete, just in time for the arrival of the partly prefabbed building.

The twelve by twenty foot floor was constructed on site; first it was framed in and sheeted with plywood. Metal venting strips were installed before it was turned over, filled with pink insulation and sheeted over with a covering of plywood. The side and end walls rested on the assembled floor. That meant that we were now short at least eight inches each way on our original calculations and some rapid figuring had to be done to determine what size the inside flights would now have to be. The window that was to have been an essential part of the central five-foot flight was now located where a partition was to go between two flights. After much discussion, the contractor was convinced that the window would have to be relocated to the center of the building, but the center flight had now mysteriously shrunk from five to four feet in order that the other flights be of approximately equal size, three on either side. More pink insulation was added to the walls and ceiling, and the thermo-glass windows were framed in.

The electrician arrived right on time wearing about thirty pounds of equipment around his waist. He suggested two ways of doing what was required. The least expensive and most attractive way involved digging a trench in which to bury the electrical line from the main house to the bird house — right down the middle of most of the new driveway. Fortunately the decision was made to use the same trench for the water line before the trench was filled in. The driveway has yet to fully recover.

Another contractor was located for the cement work and construction of the outside flight area was begun. Our rural location makes it necessary to protect our birds from all of the usual hazards such as cats as well as coons, weasels, hawks and the occasional otter



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that makes it's way up from the beach.

We planned on double heavy gauge wire for all of the flight exterior and, because of our mixed collection, it was necessary to double wire between the flights as well. Since we house large, destructive birds as well as tiny gold-breasts, it became quite a problem in logistics to frame the flights in such a way as to incorporate all of the different types and sizes of wire mesh that would be in use, protecting the small from the large, keeping the safety area a safe place for all.

When the wire was finally in place we found it impossible to see through it all

to view the birds. It took only a few minutes for \$25 worth of black paint to disappear, but it had little effect on the area where it was tried. Later it all became academic when the entire outside flight was covered in plastic for the winter months. The birds are viewed quite comfortably from the safety area whatever the weather.

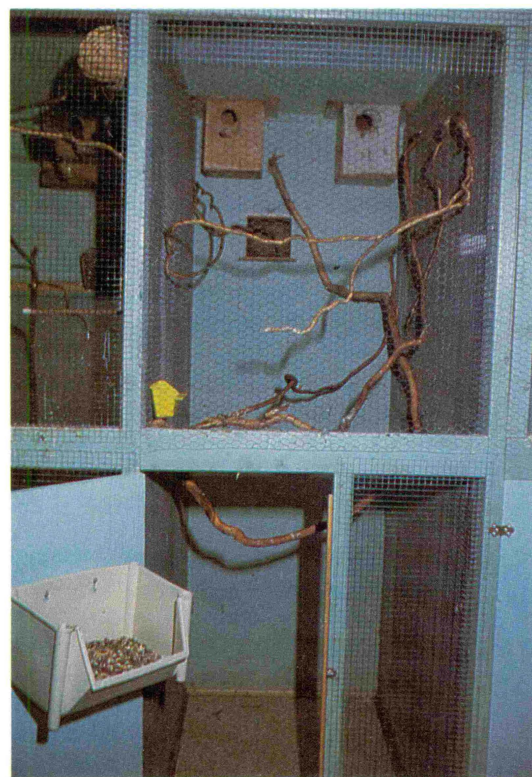
With the exception of the lovebird quarters we decided all inside flights would have layers of newspaper over the plywood floor with top layers pulled daily. All papers were to be removed once a week with the cages swept and scrubbed. Once a month this



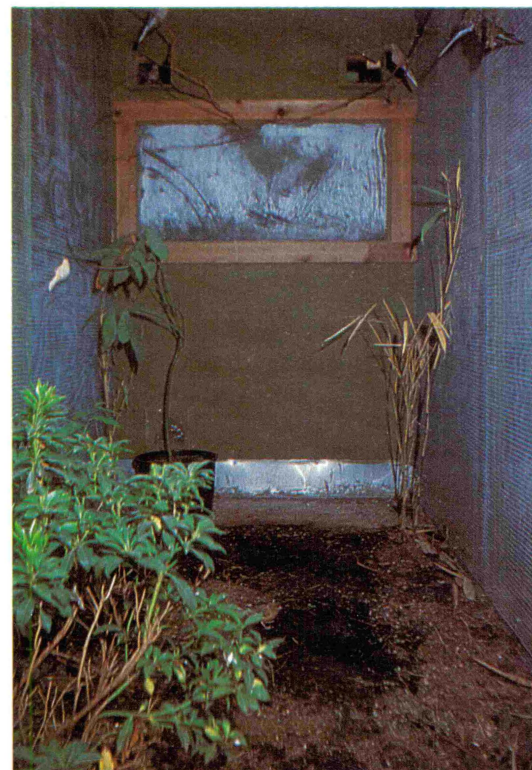
As walls go up it is noted that the central window is not in the center.



By the time the cement work has begun the window opening has been changed. Three center flights have earth floors. The lower pop hole is for quail.



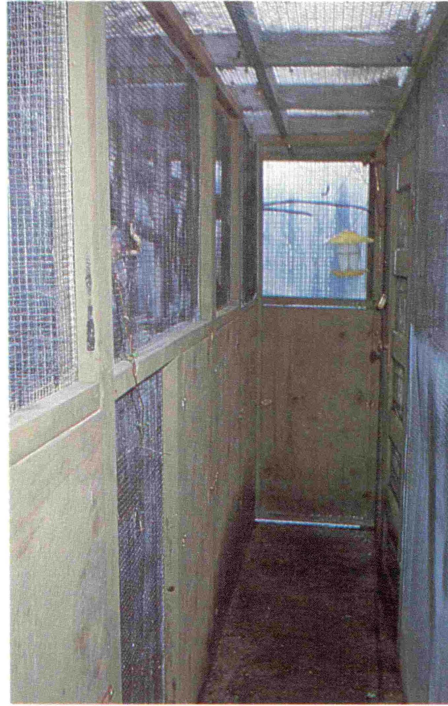
Kitchen bins are mounted on doors and save waste of seed. Nest boxes slide into grooved plywood nailed to ceiling which is seven feet high making birds easier to catch.



Controversial center window is deliberately opaque to keep birds from trying to fly through it despite the inside wire. Bourkes are hard on plants.



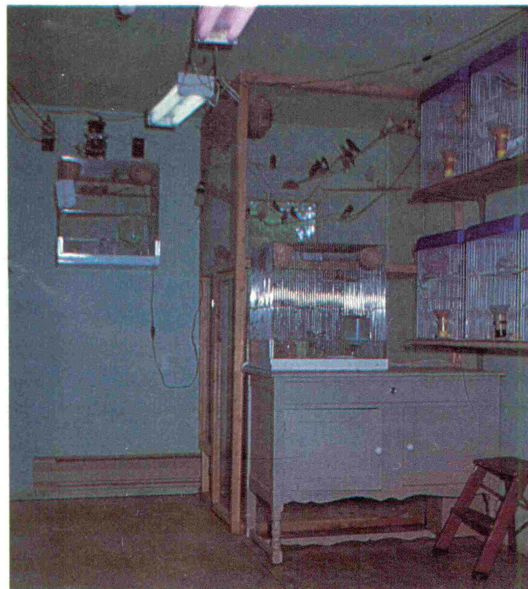
African Greys in 14 ft. flights have ample drift-wood but demolish nest boxes anyway.



Safety area allows for the two outside flights to be longer, a fact appreciated most by cockatiels.



Small breeding cages are hung on wall with hooks. Plexi sheets slip out for fast washing. Small night light will reach any cage in need of it.



A place for an extra cage is where you find it. Step stool is necessary to reach top cages.

removal of the screws. Incidentally, an electric soldering iron has become a permanent fixture in our bird house tool box. It enlarges openings in small plastic feeders that are so inclined to plug up, and it turns much common junk into useful aviary equipment.

Small wattage bulbs such as night lights are fitted to long extension cords so that they can be slipped into any cage where a bird might show signs of needing that extra warmth. Many electrical outlets were placed at ceiling level where they would be more useful than the usual floor level position. The plant-light fluorescents are controlled by timers in series. The overhead light bulbs have a dimmer control allowing a constant dim glow at night. We are able to enter at night without introducing either a sudden blast of light or instant total darkness.

An old door was screened with aviary wire to allow us to safely leave the outside door open in warm weather. It also allows us to watch for escaped birds before we enter.

Having a partition between the sink and the work counter area gave us extra wall space on which to hang shelves and breeding cages. The counter provides a safe place to band birds or treat injuries and is a place to isolate hospital cages when needed.

The small breeding cages are suspended from the walls above wooden shelves. The bottoms have been removed. In their place, cut-to-size plexi-glass sheets slide out for easy cleaning. After trying various materials we found plexi washed off most easily under the tap and the extra initial cost has been made up by the time saved in cleaning up. Covered drinkers are placed inside with plastic dishes meant for house-plants taking the place of more expensive bird baths.

An alarm system was installed to the inside safety door and connected to the house. Additionally, an intercom system allows us to monitor the bird house from our home. We've had a telephone extension installed so that we don't miss any calls while we are enjoying our birds.

At last the day came when all of the birds had been moved into their new quarters, including Tippy, our house pet. As I went out the door that day I could hear Tippy's piping voice, "Hi, Mom! Tippy wants OUT." With a lump in my throat I returned to the flight that was to be his new home. I needn't have worried. He wasn't talking to me. A little lutino hen had his complete attention. ●