

Building an Aviary in the Great White North

Jeff and Janice Clark
Northwestern Ohio

We're moving. We cannot wait. We'll finally have space for all of our "stuff" and our hobbies. The only thing to haggle about is where to keep the birds. This new house does not have an outbuilding we can insulate and heat like the detached garage at our other house. What to do? The basement is huge, they would fit there. Jeff reminds me about the noise factor and the dust factor and also, just where is he going to do his woodworking projects? Jeff decides that the best thing to do is to construct a building just for the birds. Who am I to argue?

Of course, the haggling starts all over again. How big to build, where will it go on the property, how to keep it secure, who will build it, what size

cages and on and on and on.

It takes us about a month to iron out most of the details. Now to find someone to build it. This is where it really becomes fun—only if you are into pain, though. We were scheduled to move into our house on July 1st, 1996. We decided on a builder in mid May, signed the contract in June and were told a start date of late July to early August. HA! A contractor's sense of time is different. It is appropriate, perhaps, only for the Procrastinators Club.

Jeff and I staked out where we wanted the building, got the building permit, dug the trenches for both water lines and drain lines and installed all the pipes. We also installed conduit pipe and ran the wiring for

telephone and video cameras. Now we wait for the concrete to be poured. This is the most expensive part. Concrete accounted for better than one third of the total cost of the building. We're waiting...

In late August we started calling the contractor. His wife probably hates us. He, I hope, was getting tired of coming home to hear that the Clarks had called again. Know this ahead of time, contractors are always too busy and always take on one or two jobs too many. It's part of their training.

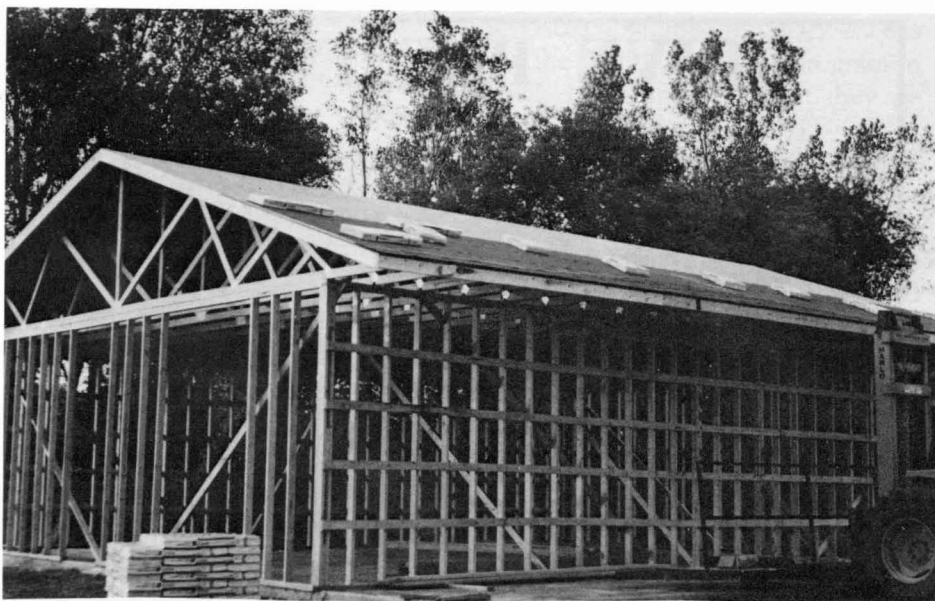
September 18th and we now have a concrete pad. I thought, not too bad, only a month and a half late. We could still get this done by November and beat the really cold weather. The birds are all in the attached garage. It's going to get interesting just trying to keep them warm enough if construction is delayed later than that. We shall see.

September 21 was a beautiful, sunny day and, amazing as it sounds, the contractor showed up with help to start framing. On a Saturday, no less. September 26th sees them back again to put the roof trusses up. The trusses are huge. As an aside, the building we decided on is 30ft. by 40ft. with a 10 foot ceiling. I had them put four foot overhangs on the roof eaves since eventually we're going to build flights outside also. The overhang will give some shelter from the weather.

September 28th and 29th, more perfect weather and here they are again to put the roof on. Since they had been so consistently here working, I made lunch for them. Of course, I was thinking that if they didn't get the chance to go out to eat, then they couldn't find a reason to not come back. Just my way of trying keep them in a sort of hostage situation.

October 5th through 12th the steel siding and soffits went up. Now it really looks like a building. October 13th the heating guy came out to install all the ductwork and place the forced air furnace where it will stay. It is an 80,000 BTU propane furnace. October 22nd and 23rd the electrician installs all the wiring and the circuit box. October 30th and all the wall insulation is in. We opted for R-19 in the walls and 12 inches of blown in up in the attic.

Photo by Janice Clark



The framing is up and the roofing is begun. It is starting to look like a building.

we have power so the crew can heat the building and finish the drywall. Maybe I'll stop having to run and turn breakers back on, too, now that all those extension cords will be gone.

November 22nd the propane company came out and tied the aviary building in to the propane tank. We're still heating with a large portable unit as the furnace guy has to come back and do the final hookup. The drywall is finished and on December 8th the furnace man came and did his thing. Now we have heat and can paint—but wait, we forgot about the electrician. December 11th and 12th the electrician was here to finish wiring, install all the light fixtures and tie it all into the circuit box. There are three rows of two-tube fluorescent fixtures. Each row is on a separate timer so I can stagger the times they go on and off. I also had two incandescent fixtures installed in the center that I'll use as night lights with red bulbs. These will come on (by way of photo cells) when the other lights go off.

Well, the contractors have finished their part. Now it's up to us to finish

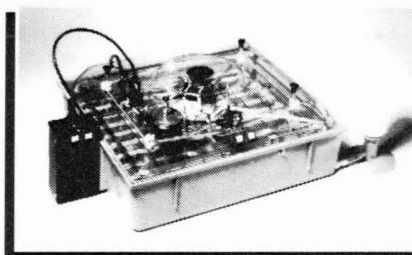
the rest. That means painting, installing kitchen cabinets, sink, food and supply storage, sealing the floor seam where it meets the walls and, last but not least, building all the cages for nearly one hundred birds. We are a long way from being ready for birds.

You're probably wondering just how those birds are doing while all this mess is going on. Well, they actually handled the crowded conditions better than I would have. I am truly amazed that there was no trouble at all with the birds. We did have trouble more than once keeping the garage warm enough but we insulated the garage door and covered it with plastic, ran three portable heaters and kept the door open from the garage to the house. I learned that birds are much hardier than we give them credit for. The electric company loves us!

Our part of the work took just as long as it took the contractors to do theirs. The painting was done during January and February. I don't ever want to paint a ceiling again. Jeff doesn't either. We both had sore necks for weeks. We first used two coats of

A front view of the finished exterior.

The weather has gotten cold now. It's typical Fall stuff. Windy and gloomy. November 2nd through 5th all the drywall is installed but not finished off. We opted for greenboard on the lower four feet of wall as that is water repellent. November 8th the power company came out and installed the power pole and tied into the meter on the building. We installed a separate meter to track the expenses incurred for this addictive hobby. At least now



RX-2 *Exotic Bird Breeders Favorite Incubator*

- Solid State Temperature Control
- Preferred By Top Breeders Around The World
- Unparalleled visibility with Impact Resistant Polycarbonate Domes
- Whisper Quiet Fan Motor
- Improved Turner Power
- Unique "Wall of Air" Design on All Four Outside Walls

We also carry a complete line of reptile products including scales, digital thermometers, candelers, heating mats, and more!



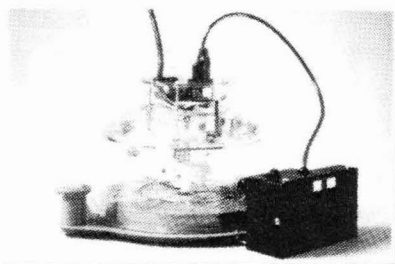
LYON

ELECTRIC COMPANY, INC.



AICU *Intensive Care Unit*

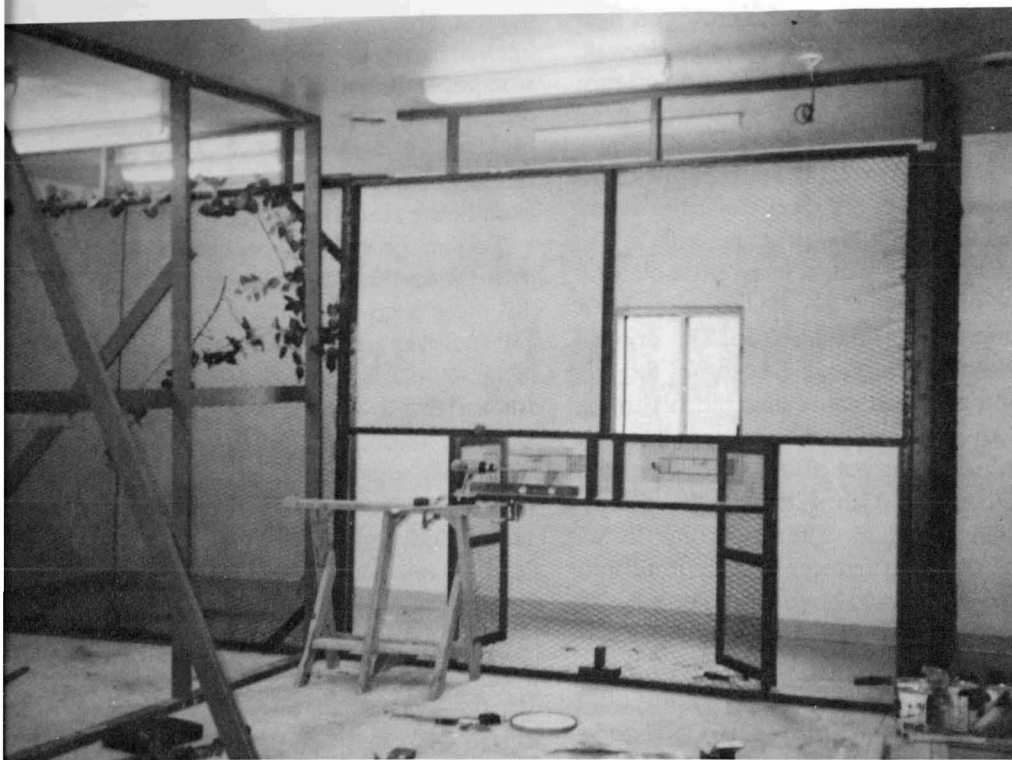
- Hospital Unit for Ill or Injured Birds
- Nursery Unit to Hand Raise Young Birds
- Large LED Temperature/Humidity Read Out
- Veterinarian Designed and Tested
- Audio and Visual Alarm
- Provides Safety and Security
- Easy to Clean and Sanitize
- Filtered Air
- Nebulizer Adaptable



TX-7 *Incubator*

- Preferred and Used by Tens of Thousands of Bird Breeders, Schools and Hobbyists World Wide
- Total Visibility Polycarbonate Dome
- Improved Turner Power Motor
- Solid State Temperature Control
- Unique Humidity Control
- Adjustments Can Be Performed Without Opening The Incubator
- Highly Reliable Mercury Thermometers

Free Catalog Available Call, Write, or Email:
2765 Main Street, Chula Vista, Ca 91911
Tel: (619) 585-9900 Email: lyonelect@aol.com
Fax: (619) 420-1426



Photos by Janis Clark

Constructing a 10 foot by 6 foot by 20 foot long flight for the Plainain Eaters.

primer sealer then three coats of scrubable semi-gloss latex. Then we installed heavy vinyl cove molding along the edge of the floor and sealed

the whole thing with silicone. This way I can hose the floor down and not get any of the wallboard wet.

Then we found and installed

kitchen cabinets, the sinks, and the hot water heater. Jeff also built shelves and a stand for the seed bins. The building was now ready for cage building. This would be the most frustrating part of the whole effort.

About one third of our collection consists of softbilled type birds. We have Lilac-breasted Rollers, Western Grey Plantain Eaters, Bearded Barbets, Pekin Robins, Silver-eared Mesias, Brazilian Cardinals, Japanese White Eyes and White-crested Laughing Thrushes.

The other two thirds are parrots. We have five species of Amazons, five species of Asian parakeets, two species of *Poicephalus* and a few odd singles that we're working on pairing up. We wanted to give everyone the largest enclosure possible so it took some time to lay it all out on paper. The fun part was the actual construction. It was a lot of work but the end result was well worth it as you will see.

For the small softbilled birds we built flights that are 10 ft. tall, 10 ft. long and 3 ft. wide. For the medium sized softbilled birds we used the same dimensions except the width went to four feet. The Plantain Eaters got the most space of all. Their flight is 20 ft. long, 6 ft. wide and 10 ft. tall. They use every bit of it too. It also solved the problem with aggression from the male towards the female. Now he just attacks me if I get too close. This is not a problem. I would rather he pick on me than her. It's too hard to find these birds anymore. We did build a sliding divider panel into their cage just in case he changes his mind.

All of these flights are framed with standard, untreated 2x4 lumber that we painted with four coats of scrubable exterior latex paint. We used nylon heavy duty gamebird type netting in one half inch mesh instead of wire. For softbills this helps avoid any damage if the birds are flighty—no broken feathers or necks. We did use wire on the doors as that is where we mounted the outside access feeding stations. We also made the doors short (4 feet) so no one is likely to fly out over my head. We double netted the walls between each flight. I am sure the Thrushes are sorry they can't reach those little White Eyes. The Plantain

it's official...

BALTIMORE

is the place
for the AFA Convention '98
at the
beautiful Omni Inner Harbor Hotel
July 29 thru August 2
(Wednesday thru Sunday)

Mark your calendar...make your plans early!
The '98 promises to be the best ever...filled with exciting
lectures, seminars, tours and the largest exhibit hall ever!

You don't want to miss this lovely historic location
and all the action and excitement already in planning!
More details will be confirmed and announced soon.

spread over the netting just as real grape vines would. Of course, I found out the hard way that Silver-eared Mesias like to pick leaves off of any and all plants. They don't do anything with them, just pick them off and drop them on the floor. They now have a hanging basket of sticks. It's really very attractive. I recently added a five foot ficus tree and so far they have left it alone. We'll see how long that lasts.

Decorating the softbill flights was actually fun. We are fortunate to have a major wooded area on our property with a variety of trees and miles of wild grape vines. Grape vines are the greatest perch material for non chewing birds. It is flexible and bouncy, which I think the birds really enjoy. It feels more natural and it looks great. I used lots of it as perches. I have found over the past few years, that it holds up very well so only needs rare changing. It is non-toxic so it can be used for parrots but it is not very hard so they will chew it up fairly quickly. I have also learned that Brazilian Cardinals like to use the peeling pieces of bark in their nest construction. They haven't done that here yet but I saw it at a friends place that raised this species. Hope that our birds will use it here when they're ready.

I already mentioned the types of live plants I used but I also use a lot of artificial "silk" plants. There is a huge variety of vines available at several craft type stores that are reasonably priced and they are wired so they can be shaped to fit the spot they're put in. The Mesias are going to see a lot of this stuff.

As a final detail for the softbills, I put different types of wooden nest boxes, nesting platforms, and wicker baskets in various places within the flights. For the barbets, we found a hollow tree trunk which we hope they will like well enough to nest in. Jeff got creative on how to get it into the building. It's a cherry tree and though it was hollow, it still probably weighed 300 pounds. He cut it lengthwise into two parts and cleaned out a lot more of the rotten parts—good thing too as it was loaded with several large ant nests. The individual halves were much easier to pick up and take into the building. He built a stand that extends up

inside the log then we used clamp straps (nylon) to hold it together. There was a knothole already in a good spot so I just decorated it further with artificial plants and vines. One other detail is that Jeff also made a false bottom in it so the birds can't go all the way to the floor. Then we back filled it with pine shavings and mulch. Fingers and toes are crossed.

Now for the parrot side of things. Actually, that's literal too. The building is set up so that the left side is for softbills and the right side is for parrots. The middle area has a few pairs of parrots that didn't get lucky enough to get flights. They're young or not-producing birds. There are also two large free-standing flights to be used as fledging cages for chick flight training.

We wanted to give all the pairs of parrots large flight type cages. We had just under forty feet (the length of the building) and needed to build 10 large cages with room between them for nest boxes. I didn't want anything hanging out in the aisle. We came up with six cages that are 6 ft. long, 6 ft. tall and 3 ft. wide and four cages that

The bottom access door is used to position perches and to catch birds when necessary.

Eaters flight is partially covered in one inch mesh as there will never be small birds in that flight.

All of the softbill flights are floor to ceiling. We keep the floor covered with cypress mulch. It's very easy to spot clean the areas that need it and then, once per year, we'll change the whole thing and use the old as garden mulch. I also put a small pile of hay or straw under the feeding stations. This catches most of what gets dropped and can be changed every couple of days if needed.

We use lots of plants in these flights. Most of the softbills will not bother foliage, however, some of them will tear it to pieces. I made sure to use only plants that are non toxic. Ficus in a couple of species, spider plants, *Spathophyllum* (Peace Lily), Pothos and Grape Ivy. Your choices are quite wide but make sure you have enough light. All that I chose have medium light requirements as the aviaries are not bright all the way to the floor. Grape Ivy was a wonderful choice in most of the flights as it is starting to

Our 60th Bird Mart

EVERYBODY'S

BIRD MART

March 15, 1998

L.A. County Fairplex, Bldg. #4
Pomona, California

9:30 A.M. to 4:00 P.M.

Admission \$5.00

Kids under 12 free

The Pomona Bird Mart has
become the marketplace for
buyers and sellers.

**BIRDS • CAGES • FEEDERS
NEST BOXES • VITAMINS
SEED • PERCHES • GIFT ITEMS**

parking \$4.00

Use White Ave. parking lot
(Tram service from parking lot to building G)

a division of
J. Williams Financial Services Inc.
P.O. Box 794, Acton, CA 93510

(805) 269-0424

The Original, The #1 Bird Mart

are 6 ft. tall, 4 ft. long and 3 ft. wide.

As I said earlier in the article, the ceiling is ten feet high so we built a frame out of iron pipe that has the cages just about three feet off the floor. This gives me just enough room to sweep and clean under the cages and enough clearance above to still get to the lights when bulbs need changing. Of course, my little three step ladder was no longer going to get me up high enough to look in nest boxes. Time to find a real ladder that doesn't weigh 50 pounds. The new one has five steps.

Back to the cages. We had the dimensions down, now we had to find the wire. When I lived in Florida, I could find welded wire anywhere but up here where people look at you strangely when you say you raise birds, the only thing I could find was field fence. There are lots of cows here in this part of the world.

Well, I started asking around and finally found a company in Chicago that sells all kinds of wire and the really wonderful thing they will do is cut the panels for you. For a fee of course. You just fax them the sizes and number you need and they come back with a quote. The beauty of this is, number one, no crippled hands from cutting all that wire, number two, you don't have to buy complete rolls. If what you need is less than an even number of rolls, it doesn't matter. They only charge you for the footage ordered.

The bad part of all this is you have to pay in full up front. Even that wouldn't have been so bad if they had delivered when they said they would. I sent them a check in March 1997 and didn't see my panels until the end of May. Oh well, what's a few more delays. We've already missed breeding season. Of course the softbills were doing just fine, we moved them into their new flights in mid May. Thank goodness parrots are seemingly patient.

The wire arrived and what a pleasure to work with. They not only cut it to your specifications, they also flatten it. First we took all the bundles apart and spread all the wire out on the lawn. We needed to get the oxidizing process going and give each panel a

good scrubbing. I wanted to make sure that all possible loose pieces of zinc were gone.

Then we sorted the panels by size and started building cages. We used hog rings instead of "J" clips. They're much easier to get off if you ever need to take a cage apart. We put all the cages together except for three edges of the top. This made it easier to get large and long perches in place. After all were assembled, we started cutting holes for doors. In the six foot long cages, not only did we put a front door but also a door in the bottom so I can get up inside the cage if I need to catch a bird or replace perches.

So you know, I went with 12 1/2 gauge, 1 x 1 inch wire. It's heavy enough that no one is going to chew through it and it's free standing. I did not want to have to frame every cage. Once all the cages were assembled, all perch material inside, and doors mounted, it was time to place them on the stand we had built and lock them in place with pipe clamps. After clamping a cage down, I placed perches where I wanted them and Jeff bolted them in. We used wood screws and large flat washers to mount perches, they make it easy to access them from the outside when it's time to replace them.

I am so glad I have a husband who can build things and actually enjoys it. He built all the nest boxes I wanted in several different designs. Some are standard grandfather clock style and some are boot or "L" shaped. He mounted ladders inside all of them and even hung them up when I was ready. They are all made out of at least half inch plywood and some are three quarter inch. I put nesting material in place using a mix of cypress mulch and pine shavings. The birds seem to really like the mulch as they chew it to a very fine consistency but rarely throw it out.

Well, the perches are in, nest boxes are up, doors are on and all the cages are ready. Time to move birds. I am so excited about this part.

These birds have tolerated being in a small room, cages right up against each other, low light, inconsistent temperatures....the list is endless. I can't wait to see how they react to their new

homes. We both worked on this task as we don't often physically hold these birds. We checked everybody out, making sure weights were ok, recording band numbers I had missed and just doing a general look-see.

The birds were not really happy but they didn't have much choice. All seemed in good shape. Moving the birds probably took about one and a half to two hours total then it was time to just sit back and watch.

A couple of them sort of stood there looking shocked but for the most part, they were off running, climbing, checking out everything. The Mealy Amazons even checked out their nest box. I think that I can honestly say that they all seemed happy. The Derbyans were busily chewing on all the wood I had given them, the Senegals were in and out of the nest, she likes to sleep in her box, the Mealys and Tucumans were arguing through the wire. Have to work on visual screens before next breeding season.

It took a full year to get this project done and it was a lot of work but it was worth it. The birds seem happy and we are very happy with the results. It is definitely something to be proud of and we are. We took pictures of just about every stage of this project and some of them are here for you to see. Hope this inspires someone else to realize that it isn't impossible to have a nice aviary in the cold parts of this country—just a bit of work. Hopefully, by the end of the year we'll follow up with an article about adding the outdoor flights and what kind of breeding results we've gotten from the birds.

List of sources for materials;

- Game bird netting and hogrings:
Cutler's Pheasant Supply
Carsonville, MI
phone: 810-657-9450
fax: 810-657-8858
- Welded wire cut to size:
Valentine Equipment
Chicago, IL
phone 1-800-438-7883

The rest of our building materials came from local sources that can be found in any area.

For more information, please feel free to call me at 419-825-2839 or e-mail me at janisclark@aol.com



Releasing the first parrots into their new home.



Decorating the new softbill flight.



Overall view of the breeding room.



The hollow cherry log is for a barbet nest.