

Lovebird Husbandry in the North

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(n.b. Dr. Baer writes a monthly column for *Agapornis World*, the Lovebird Society Magazine, under the by-line, "A View from the North").

The breeding and raising of Lovebirds in the less temperate states poses problems different from those found in the south where the climate is mild. The changes in seasons from hot summers to cold winters must be taken into consideration by the aviculturist. The cold of winter requires that the aviaries in the north be enclosed or semi-enclosed and they usually are heated. (To date, little work has been done in attempting to adapt the lovebird to cold winter conditions without heat).

Enclosed or semi-enclosed aviaries limit the amount of space available in which to keep birds so the northern breeder must be content to breed his lovebirds in cages or flights of limited size. The number of birds in the average northern aviary generally is less than the numbers kept in aviaries in the south where there are less restrictions on space. The northern aviculturist's aviary is usually located in the basement of his home, a converted garage, or out-building, or, less frequently, in an aviary building constructed for this purpose. Most breeders keep their birds indoors the year round.

Birds confined indoors in more restricted space require more attention regarding proper nutrition, the provision of adequate light, ventilation, relative humidity and, to a lesser degree, heat.

First and foremost, birds in confinement are in need of a well balanced ration (1). The cage bird is totally dependent upon the aviculturist to provide for its proper nutrition. Proper nutrition is essential to insure a long healthy life and complete physiological efficiency. Failure to provide the proper food elements will result in dietary stresses which will be reflected in improper growth and decreased resistance to disease and para-

sites. Egg hatchability will be poor or weak young will hatch and not survive.

Lovebirds kept indoors may lack adequate light, both in quantity and quality. They do not receive the sunlight which is vital to their growth, reproduction and well being. Ordinary light bulbs and fluorescent tubes do not emit as much a full spectrum of light waves, from ultraviolet through red, as found in natural sunlight. This deficiency in light quality can be corrected, to an extent, by the use of "full spectrum lamps" in the aviary (2). The ones we use in our aviary are the Duro-test Vita-Lites developed by the Duro-test Corp. of North Bergen, N.J. (also marketed under the name of "Duro-Lite"). The quality of light can be compensated for by the use of timers on the aviary circuit.

Our aviary is centrally heated during the cold months, both for the comfort of the birds and for our own comfort. Until the last two years, heating the aviary has been no problem. Last year, however, the threatened natural gas shortage (we heat with gas) caused us some concern and we purchased portable electric heaters to use in an emergency in case our fuel supply was restricted. This year with

View of breeding cages in tiers. Note nest boxes attached to some, and metal seed hoppers in front of cages.



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Author's aviary in winter in Ohio, front and back view. Outside deck and flights yet to be added.

the great blizzard taking power lines down causing many homes to be without electricity, we were made painfully aware that without electricity our central gas heating system would not operate and our emergency electric heaters would be useless. Our solution to this is to purchase a portable gasoline electric generator. These light plant generators, which operate in much the same manner as a gaso-

line lawn mower, come in various sizes and depending upon the wattage, can operate a furnace fan or up to several appliances. One has only to experience a blizzard with its resultant power failure to appreciate the value of having such a generator as a standby in case of an emergency. It could not only save your birds from freezing to death, but could provide you with comfort during a power failure.

What has happened this winter here in Ohio and earlier in Buffalo, N.Y., could happen next winter in your area, so be prepared.

Different preventive measures could include the installation of a wood burning stove in the aviary, or the purchase of Coleman Catalytic heaters or BTU heaters for standby emergency use.

Artificial heat in winter creates another

As a power plant may be a once-in-a-lifetime purchase, choose a model that provides reasonable comforts during a power failure. List running watts for lights, appliances, etc. to be used at the same time. Add starting watts for all automatic and manually-started appliances that will be turned on and left on while other units are running (starting watts are higher than running watts). Add total starting and total running watts together. Order power plant 25% larger than combines wattage figure to allow for extra equipment.

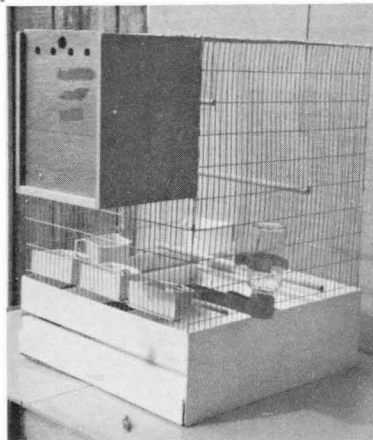
NOTE: Most appliances indicate wattage on label (if volts and amps, are given, multiply the two to get wattage). It's best to have power in reserve than not enough.

	1350	1700	2000	2700	3500	4500	5700	7000
Will run at one time	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
1/3 HP furnace fan	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
House lights	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Refrigerator		x	x	x	x	x	x	x
1/3 HP sump pump			x	x	x	x	x	x
Freezer				x	x	x	x	x
Television					x	x	x	x
Automatic washer						x	x	x
Electric stove (1 ele.)							x	x
1/2 HP submersible pump								x

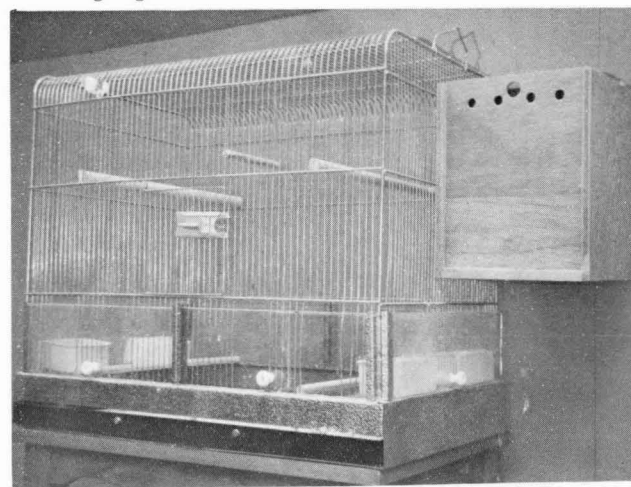
Breeding cages in tiers, note seed hoppers, chincilla water bottle and attached nest box.



Love bird breeding cage with nest box attached, showing self-water fountain.



Prevue-Hendryx F-088 cage converted to lovebird breeding cage.



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er problem, that of low humidity. Low humidity must be considered as a possible cause of lovebird chicks failing to hatch ("dead-in-the-shell") due to excessive dehydration of the egg (6). Relative humidity can be controlled by the use of a humidifier. In areas where there are lots of mineral in the water, a portable humidifier would be more troublefree than one which is a part of the heating system.

Relative humidity can be measured by a humidity meter available at most discount stores or more accurately with a hydrometer and reference to a table of relative humidity. (Marsh Farms offers an inexpensive hydrometer).

Methods of increasing the relative humidity in the nest box itself consist in the supplying of "sappy" nesting material, such as green twigs or honeysuckle vines, and the use of moisture adding devices which are a part of or attached to the nest box.

For the northern lovebird breeder, especially the urban dweller, sources of green twigs, honeysuckle vine or other good nesting materials are not always available. Some use green corn husks, willow branches or peach tree branches. We have been experimenting with the use of shredded newspaper and find it works well for us. (Our relative humidity is

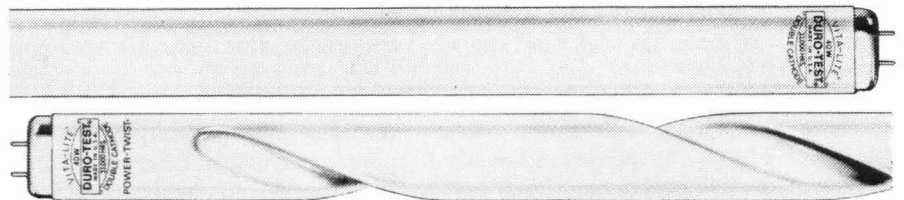


Fig. 1

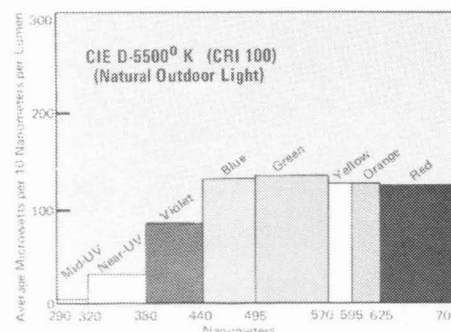
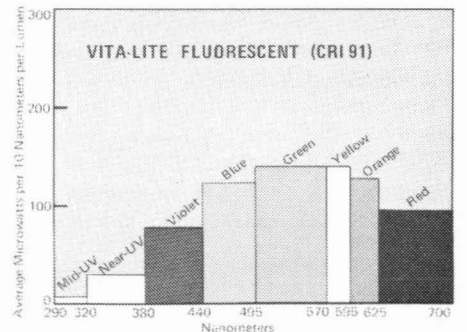
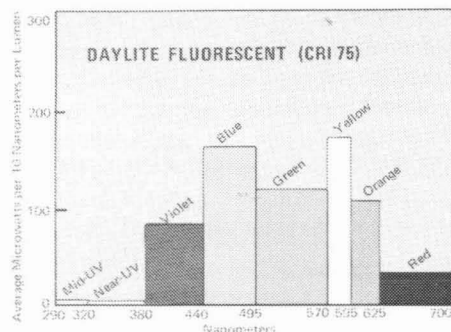
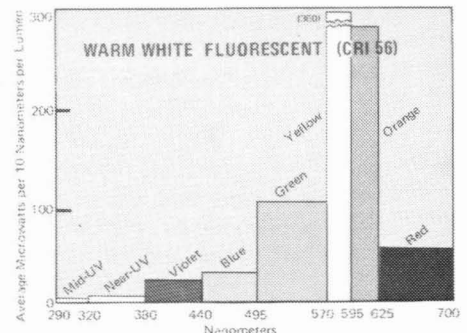
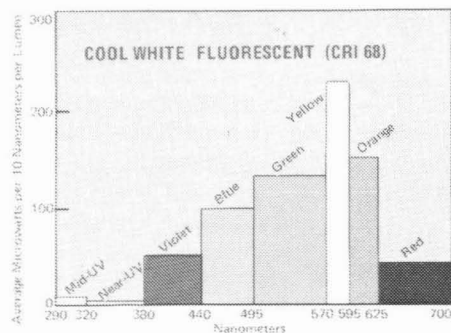


Figure 2

These are spectral energy distribution charts. They show the average amount of light generated in each color band by the light source being measured. These are the "color ingredients" of each type of light.

The chart at left (C.I.E. D-5500°K) is specified by the International Commission on Illumination as representative of natural outdoor light. Its Color Rendering Index (CRI) is 100.

The other charts represent the three most common fluorescent lamps and Vita-Lite. Their Color Rendering Indexes are shown on the charts.

maintained by use of a humidifier.) We buy unprinted waste butt ends from the printer and shred it through a small office type letter shredder. This is then compacted into the bottom of the nest box and some is left in the cage for the hen to carry in herself. This material is soft and pliable, clean, inexpensive, and provides good insulation.

Insulation in the nest box is important as loss of heat from the egg during incubation may be another cause of "dead-in-the-shell" (7).

No breeder of birds should be without a hospital cage, either a commercial one or one of his own construction (11). It will more than pay for itself in birds saved.

Another important consideration in lovebird husbandry in any part of the country, is the purchase and storage of seed that is clean and uncontaminated. Seed that is not kept in closed, tight containers, either at your suppliers or in your own aviary, can be contaminated with the droppings of rodents and other vermin which can produce disease and death to your birds.

In view of the different problems inherent with the raising of lovebirds in the north, are there any advantages?

The northern lovebird breeder has the

TABLE OF RELATIVE HUMIDITY																						
Dry Bulb °F	Wet Bulb Depression °F (Degrees wet bulb reading is lower than dry bulb reading)																					
	0	2	4	6	8	10	12	14	16	18	20	22	24	26	28	30	32	34	36	38		
30	100	78	56	36	16	3	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
35	100	81	63	45	27	10	2	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
40	100	83	68	52	37	22	7	1	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
45	100	86	71	57	44	31	18	6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
50	100	87	74	61	49	38	27	16	5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
55	100	88	76	65	54	43	33	23	14	5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
60	100	89	78	68	58	48	39	30	21	13	5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
65	100	90	80	70	61	52	44	35	27	20	12	5	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
70	100	90	81	72	64	55	48	40	33	25	19	12	6	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
75	100	91	82	74	66	58	51	44	37	30	24	18	12	7	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	
80	100	91	83	75	68	61	54	47	41	35	29	23	18	12	7	5	---	---	---	---	---	
85	100	92	84	77	70	63	57	50	44	39	33	28	23	18	14	9	5	---	---	---	---	
90	100	92	85	78	71	65	58	52	47	41	36	31	26	22	17	13	9	5	---	---	---	
95	100	93	86	79	73	66	61	55	50	44	39	35	30	26	22	18	14	10	7	---	---	
100	100	93	86	80	73	68	62	56	51	46	41	37	33	28	24	21	17	13	10	7	---	

advantage of being in closer contact with his birds. As a result, they are usually tamer and more domesticated (4). With the breeding cage (8, 9, & 10) or smaller flight, selective breeding is more practical. Birds get more individual attention; better selections are made for show standards (3); birds are usually banded (5) and records are more easily kept. In all, it is a closer, more intimate relationship and appreciation of the birds.

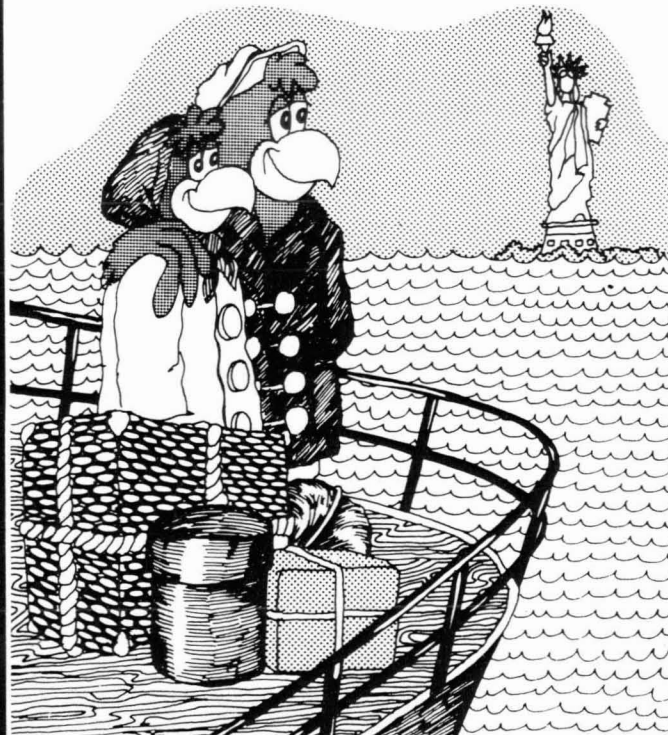
Further reading:

- (1) A Balanced Ration for Lovebirds — Agapornis World Oct. 1976.
- (2) Aviary Lighting — Agapornis World Dec. 1976.
- (3) Standards for Lovebirds — Agapornis

World Feb. 1977.

- (4) Domestication of Lovebirds — Agapornis World March 1977.
- (5) Banding — Agapornis World Apr. 1977.
- (6) Dead-in-the-shell (Dehydration) — Agapornis World June 1977.
- (7) Dead-in-the-shell (Heat loss) — Agapornis World July 1977.
- (8) Breeding Cage Construction — Agapornis World Sept. 1977.
- (9) Lovebird Breeding Cage — Agapornis World Dec. 1977.
- (10) Lovebird Breeding Cage — Agapornis World Mar. 1978.
- (11) Hospital Cages, Dr. W.K. Lindsay — American Cage Bird Mag. Mar. 1977.

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