

Where To Put Your Lovebirds

by Sheldon Dingle

An avicultural old timer once gave me his one and only rule for housing birds. Big bird, big cage; little bird, little cage. Quite so. But it is not that simple. Emus, eagles, and albatrosses, for example, demand rather specialized housing if one is to keep them in captivity. African love-

birds, on the other hand, adapt themselves to a great variety of aviaries or cages. There are, however, a few basic rules one should observe when building lovebird shelters.

First off, nobody is bright enough to tell the world how to build proper cages. The human imagination is creative enough that anything is possible eventually. About the best one can do is explain a few principles of cage design based on experience.

I suppose it is obvious that the cage should keep the birds in and everything else out. We all know of a few cages where this is not true — the bird is perched in a neighbors tree while mice eat the seed in the cage. Seriously, though, an aviary should be designed to keep rodents and predators out. The most satisfactory way is to put the aviary on concrete and use a heavy gage small mesh wire for the flight. One inch by one half inch mesh is the largest that should be used, as a very large rat can squeeze through one inch square wire and kill your birds. African lovebirds are especially vulnerable because of their rather small size.

Another devastating predator that has to be taken into account is the two-legged skunk. These critters sniff around every bird location hoping to find an easy way in and out. I think I once mentioned that there are more bird thieves around than bird breeders. A good intrusion detection system is a must. Many birds are stolen by casual passers-by and misguided young people who sell the birds and buy drugs. Your aviaries should be built solid enough to preclude an easy entrance. A couple of dangerous dogs can assist in keeping intruders out. This security factor should be considered during every stage of your building program. Even if your cages are indoors, your house or building should have a burglar alarm to discourage the above mentioned skunks. Dogs, cats, racoons, and raptors are other common pests to exclude.

Now, your predator-proof aviaries can be built of any material your imagination can conjure up. Most folks, however, settle for wood or steel framing, plywood or plank shelters, and a certain amount of wire. Whatever the material,

when building it is well to have a master plan in mind. Build with some sort of uniformity — in fact it is easy to use a jig and make modular aviaries that can be assembled and disassembled.

There are, of course, two major ways to keep lovebirds — all together in one big cage, or individual pairs each in their own small cage. That is, colony style or individual style. Both styles have advantages. The colonies can be housed in pens as small as 4 x 8 feet by 8 feet high. Five or six pairs of peachface lovebirds do well in such a pen. One breeder I know has pens ten feet wide and sixteen feet long in which he houses twenty pairs of masked lovebirds. The results are excellent.

When you begin to breed various mutation lovebirds you will find the individual caging system more expedient. These cages can be built against a wall in tiers (like big book cases divided into compartments measuring two feet high by four feet long by two feet deep). Nest boxes are hung outside the cages. The cage floors may be solid wood covered with sand. This prevents droppings from soiling the birds in the lower cages. The sand can be easily scraped out with a small hoe-like tool hence the cages are very simple to clean. These cages, of course, have a wire front and tube-waterers are easily attached.

If your building skills are modest you can use large wire cages to breed lovebirds in. Any cage about three feet long, two or three feet high, and two or three feet wide will work. They can be stacked (using sheet metal trays to avoid soiling the lower birds) or hung from the rafters in your garage. The way you use your cages depends entirely upon your imagination. That's one of the joys of breeding African Lovebirds — they are adaptable.

In summary, there are a few basic things to remember. Cages may be made of many materials but wood, steel, and wire have proven rather satisfactory. It is wise to place cages on concrete and to use wire mesh too small to admit predators. Protect against thieves by using an intruder detection system. Large pens are good for colony breeding operations while individual cages work best for most mutations.

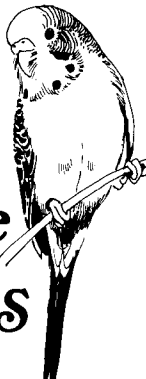
If there is anything made clear in this article it is my lack of preparation. For answers to the myriad questions that must be left in your mind please send said questions to your humble servant, S.L. Dingle and I'll refer them to master builder and lovebird breeder, H. Richard Mattice. He will answer all questions with authority and expertise ■



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