

Aviary Sizes



This fact sheet details the requirements for housing birds in aviaries.

BUDGERIGARS

If you have a garden an aviary is an ideal place to house and breed budgerigars. The size of aviary will depend on your garden and how many birds you intend to keep. A wooden frame (6' X 6' X 4') covered with ½" wire netting will comfortably house six pairs of budgerigars. Welded wire mesh (1" x ½") is a good alternative to the netting. 19 gauge (thickness) wire is thick enough, but 16 gauge is better. Always fix the wire to the inside of the wooden frame as this will help to prevent the budgerigars chewing holes in the framing. The birds will also need a waterproof and draughtproof shelter to sleep in. This can form one end of the flight and for the size of aviary described a depth of (2') would be large enough. The shelter should have a large door into the flight, which can be opened in hot weather and for cleaning out and a small door (6") square will do for the birds to get from the shelter to the flight. Both doors can be closed when the birds have gone inside to roost for the night. The shelter must be fitted with plenty of perches so that every bird can find a place it likes. In the flight, small branches from fruit trees can be used as perching. Do not use the wood of other trees. You will need to take care when building the door from the garden into the flight, which you will need to use when you go in to feed, clean out or even just stand admiring your birds. You must make sure that the birds do not fly past you and escape as you are going in. The first rule is that flight doors should always open inwards so that you fill the door opening as you go in. Safest of all is a small wire-mesh covered porch. With this you open the door, step into the porch, then a door only about 3'3" high can be used. You will find that as you enter the budgerigars will fly up and away and this will give you time to go in without any escaping.

The roof of the flight should be covered with sheets of corrugated plastic. This will keep out the droppings of wild birds – which could carry disease – and help to protect your budgerigars from cats. Garden soil and lawn are not suitable floors for budgerigar flights. They soon become messy and are very difficult to clean. Best are either concrete or a thick layer of gravel which can be washed with a hose pipe.

ZEBRA FINCHES

Zebra Finches are very easy to accommodate. They can be housed inside in cages, or outside in open flights. However, a birdroom with attached flights provides a successful combination with most Zebra Finch Breeders.

The Birdroom

Before any firm steps are taken towards ordering or building a birdroom or

aviary, it may be necessary to consult neighbours and the local authority, in the latter case all that may be required initially is a rough sketch, showing dimensions and general outline, with a plan of the garden to indicate the site.

Dry, draught proof accommodation is needed for your birds. A converted garden shed is an ideal starting birdroom. If your birdroom has a wooden floor it is best to support the whole shed six or nine inches off the ground so that no rodents will nest there. Once you know the birdroom is waterproof, it pays to line the roof and sides with hardboard or plywood. It is also a good idea to insulate the roof and sides with a suitable insulation material.

A birdroom 8' x 6' would be the minimum size recommended for the beginner. When planning your birdroom it is good policy to take into account future expansion - so allow yourself room for extra cage and storage space.

Outside Flights

Outside flights, or aviaries, are normally timber and wire mesh constructions, 2" x 2" square timber for the main panels proves ideal. The most popular aviary floor covering is coarse shingle. For cleaning purposes, it can be raked over, or hosed down in the summer. Natural perching is best employed in your aviary, apple tree branches for example, but lengths of dowling are acceptable.

Zebra Finches may be kept in planted aviaries as part of a mixed collection - but this is not recommended for the serious breeder and exhibitor.

When Zebra Finches are kept in outside flights they can withstand the coldest winters but there must be a dry, draught-proof shelter provided for them. It is recommended that your birdroom or aviary should be facing south to provide the most light and sunshine. A north facing aviary will be dark and cold.

Lighting and Heating

Electricity is very useful in the birdroom so that artificial lighting can be used, especially during the breeding season. You can seek the advice of an electrician if you are not certain of any installation. Faulty wiring poses a risk not only to your birds but also to you and your family. The best time to install the wiring is before lining the walls.

Heating may be used in the birdroom but it is not essential. Most breeders use some form of heating. Just enough to keep the temperature above freezing point during the winter months. A tubular heater controlled by a thermostat can be employed to do this job.

CANARIES

Canaries will quite happily live in aviaries, but it is with mixed success that breeding is conducted in these circumstances. The aviary should be sufficient for the canaries to fully open their wings, and should also have a reasonable depth from top to bottom. There is no minimum or maximum size to an aviary, but over-crowding is the worst possible situation for a bird to find itself. Pecking and bullying will take place in an over-crowded aviary, and this will result in nervous birds in poor condition. Observation is essential to ensure that this is not taking place. Aviaries should be vermin free and should include sleeping quarters that are draught proof. The feeding station should be accessible at all times so that clean water and food can be applied.

It is a matter of choice as to whether the aviary has a roof or is open to the elements. It is a known fact that disease can enter open aviaries through wild bird droppings and this must be taken into account when making the decision of having a roof or not.

Canaries are not normally a source of nuisance to neighbours in terms of noise but it is always advisable to check that the neighbours are quite happy to hear the singing cocks during fine sunny weather.

COCKATIELS

Cockatiels can live with many other species of captive birds, such as canaries, finches, kakarikis, quails, doves and other parakeets in a shared colony/garden aviary, providing a breeding programme is not intended. Lovebirds and Budgerigars can be difficult species to integrate once nest boxes are introduced into a colony aviary, because they will fight usually to the detriment of the cockatiels.

A pair of bonded cockatiels for breeding would be best housed in a flight 2m long x 2m high x 1m wide, with a covered part at one end. Exposure to natural light and sunshine are most important for development. Exercise, by flying, should be an important consideration.

Cockatiels are hardy birds and do not require artificial heating, however, ventilation is necessary. Ventilation is just as important during winter months as it is in warmer conditions. Siting, shade, protection from wildlife and, in particular, vermin must be taken into account at the planning stage. Protection from draughts and severe wind chill, in the form of screening, is also necessary

and, once placed in position, should remain in place throughout the winter months. Plastic sheeting, supported by wooden frames and placed in position, like windows, is one method.

Ensure a safety porch is included in the design process as Cockatiels, if they escape, are seldom found or returned.

Aviaries and flights require regular upkeep and cleaning. Smooth cement flooring covered with a blanket of wood shaving can be easily swept and disinfected followed by a good hose down. For breeding birds in particular, the best time to do this is prior to the beginning of the breeding season and after it has ended.

PARROTS

Aviary sizes should be as large as possible. The following sizes are recommended minimum aviary lengths :

The smaller Grass parakeets require 2 metres.

Rosellas 3 metres.

Princess of Wales 4 metres.

Kings 5 metres.

Amazon Parrots 6 metres.

FOREIGN SOFTBILLS

Planning a softbill aviary is easier if starting from scratch. When considering your new flight you should also bear in mind the species that you will be keeping in them. The larger species will need to be housed on their own in pairs. For example, Toucans will need to be housed as a single pair. If you put any other species of bird into the flight, they may be eaten by the Toucans or if they lay eggs may provide a tasty meal of eggs or chicks for the resident pair. Whereas, if your flight contains smaller species such as Zosterops, they will quite happily mix in the aviary with a pair of Bulbuls or Fulvettas.

Decide upon the species that you will be keeping before constructing the flight(s). Before purchasing the birds learn as much as you can from books, other fanciers and the internet about the ecology of the birds in the wild. Trying to duplicate their natural habitat wherever possible will greatly increase your chances of breeding the species.

Aviary planning

When planning your aviary, take advantage of existing structures in your garden. Provide interior quarters for your birds to feed within or shelter from adverse weather. Existing buildings such as wooden sheds or the end of your garage may be considered. It may be possible to site your aviary over existing well established plants and shrubs within the garden – softbills love to nest within shrubs and climbers. Quite often the softbill flight when planted correctly is considered to be an extension to the garden. The interior quarters should be large enough to accommodate all the birds held within the aviary during the winter, it should be easy to clean and also quite bright. Birds will not use the interior quarters if they are dark !

Aviary constructions

The foundation of the aviary is vital as this will provide the first defence against mice, rats etc. A concrete foundation should be used to support a small brick wall and the aviary panels mounted on top of this. If you are using a wooden shed, consideration should be made to raise the structure off the ground slightly. This will help prevent rotting. All timber can be preserved using non-toxic preservative – cuprinol is non-toxic but will need to be reapplied after a few years. If the shed is raised off the ground, remember to wire around the base. This will allow the structure to breath, and will stop vermin from moving in underneath.

Galvanised Wire

Many grades of wire are available from manufacturers. Purchase the best quality of wire that your pocket allows. Remember the cheaper the product the sooner you will have to replace it. Most aviaries for softbills are constructed using wooden frames covered with 1" x ½" wire. If your budget allows consider using ½" x ½" wire as this will help once again to keep the small mice out of the aviary. Some breeders like to paint the galvanised wire with either black or bitumen paint. The theory being that the birds can easily be seen through the wire.

Heating

Many softbills will need to have heat provided during the winter months. The tubular heaters are relatively cheap to purchase and run. They are also easy to install. Many people also consider the oil filled mobile heaters, these are again quite cheap and can be set to turn themselves off when they get up to temperature. When considering any forms of heating or lighting unless you are capable of installing the systems properly and safely, do not attempt to do it on your own – contact a professional to install them. Do not allow the birds to perch directly upon whichever system you choose. The last problem you need is a bird with scorched toes and feet.

Lighting

Fluorescent tubes are normally used to provide light within the interior quarters. Tubes are easy to install and cheap to run for long periods. During the winter months, lights will need to be on to provide extended daylight for the birds to feed. In addition to the main lighting it is a good idea to also install a nightlight. There are many versions available, the plug-in baby nightlights provide the best spectrum of light for the birds to see at night. Provided that they are not switch off they can provide light for many months, sometimes even years. They are also cheap to run at approximately 2p per week.

Feeding stations

The number of feeding stations that are provided within the flight, obviously depends upon the dimensions of the flights and the numbers of pairs of birds within the aviary. The best place to feed the birds would obviously be within the interior quarters. Some birds will protect their feeding station from other birds, sometimes even their mate. So when feeding your birds try to ensure that one bird is not able to claim all the food provided. Sunbirds for example, may become very protective over a single nectar feeding tube, so the best method is to provide more than one tube. During the summer months, tubes could be provided both inside and outside in the flight. However, during the winter months the nectar would freeze, so ensure that the two tubes are still provided but are as far apart as possible.

Baths

The same comment could be made of bathing facilities. Once again some birds could become protective about their bath. Not all birds like to bathe on the floor; some like their bowl to be raised up off the floor. Other softbills like to leaf bathe. This means that when the foliage within the aviary becomes wet the birds will bathe amongst the leaves, rolling to absorb the moisture from the leaves.

Safety Porch

When planning your flight, always ensure that a safety porch is provided. The safety porch is sometimes described as an "air-lock", used to allow you access to the flight, but ensuring that birds will not be able to escape past you. Some bird keepers like to use temporary safety porch, ones that can be attached to the flights when needed and then stored as a flat pack when not in use.

Mice/Rats

Vermin normally move into aviaries when condition allow – always ensure that you keep the flights and interior quarters clean and sweep up any food if it is not eaten. Prevention is better than trying to get rid of mice or rats from your shed. Many traps and poisons are available over the counter of your local

hardware shops. Ensure that these traps and poisons are nowhere near your birds. If you need to put a trap in to the flight ensure it is safely covered and pegged down with a wire mesh cover, allowing the mouse to enter the mesh, but keeping birds away from the trap. If the aviary is insulated, ensure that no small holes are left. Mice can soon move into the cavity wall and establish a small colony quite quickly.

Planting the flight

As previously mentioned, a softbill flight will often become an extension of the garden. As well as making the aviary ecstatically pleasing to the eye, many plants especially climbers can provide dense foliage that act like a windbreak, as well as providing nesting sites for the birds. Some plants will attract much needed insects into the flight – some breeders like to grow runner beans that attract green fly and black fly during the summer months. An additional fact sheet is available giving lists of plants to use and those to avoid.

Perches

Properly fixed within the aviary, perches should be spaced to ensure the birds have enough space to use the full extent of the flight available to exercise within. Perches should be placed at either end of the flight. Never clutter the flight. To ensure that your bird feet are kept well and free from such diseases as "bumble foot", leave some perches nice and springy. This will make the bird grab the perch as it lands, exercising the claws and toes regularly. Some perches should also be firmly fixed to ensure that when the birds' mate they are able to do so successfully. Perches should be cleaned regularly and replaced at least once a year.

The last comment is probably the wisest words you will read – ALWAYS PLAN FOR EXPANSION – you WILL need it!

This fact sheet has been produced for:
The NCA —Spring Gardens, Northampton NN1 1DR
www.nca.uk.net