

Breeding Cages



This fact sheet details the housing requirements for breeding birds, covering areas such as breeding cage sizes, equipment and cleaning.

BUDGERIGARS

Cage Sizes

If you want to breed budgerigars you will need a breeding cage. This can be made quite cheaply from plywood and a wire cage front bought from a pet shop. Although some breeders use slightly smaller cages, an ideal size is 76cm long, 46cm high and 38cm from front to back (2'-6" x 1'-6" x 1'-3"). Even better is a 'double breeder'. This is a cage fitted with two cage fronts with a small gap between them. A slide can be put in to divide the cage into two, so that two pairs can breed in the same cage. Or one pair can be breeding and other budgerigars – say their first lot of chicks – can be separated. A double-breeder should be at least 122cm long (4'-0") but 152cm (5'-0") would be better.

Attention needs to be paid to perches in a breeding cage. Budgerigars mate on the perch and if a perch is not fixed firmly it can be the cause of infertile eggs. The hen needs to be able to grip the perch during mating and so at least one of the perches should be square in section. A length of wood, 15mm, with sharp corners removed, serves very well.

Equipment

The equipment you need for your cage consists mainly of feeding utensils. You can use dishes and bowls, not made specially for budgerigars, but it is better to use drinkers and feeders which have been specially designed.

If you give water in an open dish it will soon become full of seed husks and droppings, and will not be clean enough for your budgerigar to drink. The best utensil for giving water is a plastic water fountain. This clips on to the outside of the cage, will not fill up with seed husks or droppings and can be changed without opening the cage door.

A water fountain can be used in a breeding cage, but if you keep several pairs in a flight you need something which will hold more water. You can buy a galvanised base which holds a plastic lemonade bottle. This is a standard animal drinker.

An open dish is better for seed than for water but still has the problems that droppings can get in with the seed. A larger version of the water fountain can be bought, with the same advantages. When using with seed you should read the instructions carefully. There is a gap in the plastic tube which needs to be lined up with the feeding outlet so that the seed can flow freely. In breeding cages and flights you may need something larger. There are many types of seed hopper on the market. One which works well with budgerigars has a plastic base on which you can stand a glass jar. It is best to buy a clip to hold a piece of cuttle fish bone which budgerigars like to eat. This stops the bone getting dirty by lying around on the cage floor.

Budgerigars love to take a bath. Specially designed baths can be bought from pet shops which fit over the cage door opening. The advantage of these is that you can decide the best time for your budgerigars to bathe and the rest of the cage does not get wet.

Budgerigars in flights will find plenty to do, particularly if you have used fruit tree branches as perches. But they will still like to play on a swing.

Cleaning

In breeding cages, wood shavings are often used to cover the cage floor. If you decide to use wood shavings, buy them from a pet shop. Shavings bought from a wood yard could make your bird ill. Another possible covering is sand. The cheapest of all cage floor coverings is a piece of newspaper.

About once a month you should disinfect the cages and equipment. Use a mild disinfectant and rinse feeders and water containers well in clean water before refilling them. Disinfectant should be used more often if a budgerigar has a stomach upset and its droppings are green instead of the normal black and white. Perches need special attention when cleaning out. They can become very dirty with the birds own droppings which, if left, get hard and could damage a budgerigar's feet. Perches should be scrubbed with disinfectant, rinsed and dried before being put back in the cage.

ZEBRA FINCHES

Cages and Fittings

Cages may be 'built-in' or freestanding blocks. To start with, cages may be made at home using any old spare timber. Cage fronts can be bought at quite reasonable prices, the most widely used cage fronts are Foreign Finch Fronts. These may be purchased at the local pet shop. They can even be made from a wooden frame with wire mesh attached.

The average size cage for breeding Zebra Finches is 24" x 16" x 12" deep. Stock cages for housing birds when not breeding may be double breeding cage size. Smaller cages may be used - but this depends on the space you have available.

Perches can be made from 3/8" doweling but natural twiggy perches are the best. There are several materials that can be used for cage floor coverings; coarse sawdust, fine dry sand or even newspaper are all popular floor covering materials.

Food and Water Containers

For those starting up keeping Zebra Finches you will soon find out that sundry

items such as food and water containers can prove very expensive items if you decide to purchase at the local pet shop. However, with a little imagination there are many product containers that will suit your requirements. For example, coffee jar lids or flower pot trays make ideal seed containers. Empty fish paste pots are another cheap item that can be used as grit pots or rearing food containers.

If you wish to purchase seed and water containers, 'Flowmatic' clip-on tubes are very popular. Plastic containers that hold a jam jar of seed are widely used too, but the conventional china products are also very useful. The round bowl types that sit on the cage floor are the best buy.

LOVEBIRDS

As with most birds the general rule is the larger the better. An acceptable size would be 60cm long x 45cm high by x 45cm deep (24" x 18" x 18") , however , as lovebirds are short-tailed you could get by with something less deep and not as tall down to 60cm long x 30cm high by x 30cm deep (24" x 12" x 12") .

In the UK the norm is to use box cages enclosed on all sides with a wire front, which give the birds a feeling of security and protection from draughts, however some breeders do use all wire cages, which give more opportunity for the birds to climb around on the wire, deter mites and make cleaning easier.

PARROTS

Most species of parrots should not be bred in cages. Parrots are, in the main, large birds which require a large aviary to breed in as this is the only way that they can remain fit over a long time span. However, species such as Lineolated Parakeets, Celestials, Hanging Parrots, Brotogeris and Mountain Parakeets can be bred in cages. A cage 3' long x 2' high x 18" deep would be acceptable for these and other small parakeets.

CANARIES

The passing of time has seen a progression of different breeding cages evolve. From the all wire breeding cage to the timber breeding cage and now to the plastic version.

There are some terrific cage manufactures in Europe, and some types of canaries would be suitable for the various size of cage. It is important to allow the bird within the cage to be able to completely open its wings when going from perch to perch. Different bird keepers will have a version of their own favourite but it is essential that they bear in mind the demands of the inmate.

Wooden perches have been used for many years, but as well as the cages, plastic perches are now available. They should be placed in the cage so that the bird does not foul food below them, and they should also be placed far enough away from the edge of the cage so that tails are not damaged.

Canaries are heavy drinkers, and the drink pot should be in a position that is readily accessible to the birds. If purchasing a new bird to a stud, observation must be made to ensure that the new inmate has found the drink pot. The same applies to food pots, although a canary will last longer without food than water.

Floor covering is another debatable subject, with most exhibitors using either sawdust or wood shavings. Sand and newspaper are other options.

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