



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales Inc. (ASNSW)

(Founded in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)

Challenges and Rewards from a Mixed Collection

(ASNSW Meeting – November 2017)

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(Edited transcription)

INTRODUCTION

Thanks very much for having me. As you are probably all aware I am Ian Brown. I am a past member of the New South Wales Avicultural Society (ASNSW). Graeme brought me along to my first meeting when I was about 19 because I rescued his lorikeets from a dirty big diamond python one day.

Graeme didn't know what to do with it. I grabbed it and put it in a fish tank and looked after his birds for a fortnight. Anyhow that's when I met Graeme.

I was with the ASNSW for quite a few years and remember the times when there was standing room only at Belmore. Back in the old days. Times have changed and obviously that is one of the challenges that we have these days; having a market for our birds and keeping people interested in aviculture. Getting young people into birds is one of the things that we are finding difficult. The internet and all that sort of stuff; the kids find something different to do.

As a result of being a member of the ASNSW back in the day, I gradually got an interest in a whole lot of different species of birds. I originally started off with parrots, just to train native parrots.

At Pheasants Nest where I grew up on the farm I had about 40 or 50 aviaries at one stage there, with quite a wide range of Australian native parrots. From cockatoos down to neophemas and I always had a lot of success. I moved up to Queensland about 20 to 21 years ago to totally different climatic conditions and all those sorts of things made it a real challenge. When you are keeping a mixed collection there's lots and lots of challenges, but I think the rewards outweigh the challenges by a long way when you consider what I have been able to keep and breed over the last 20 years up there.

One of the big challenges that I've had in Queensland is regarding the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Services and the limited number of softbill species you are allowed to keep. Softbills are really what interest me at the moment. In Queensland we are allowed to keep maybe 12 species of softbills as opposed to around the 60 to 70 species you are allowed to keep in NSW. In Queensland we can keep four species of wren, one species of honeyeater, a wattle bird, a magpie, and I think we can keep banded plovers. Oh yes, and spotted pardalotes have been added to the books. If you know anyone who has got them on their books I would love to have some. A few people have got striated pardalotes and what not; in South Australia they have striateds. It is not hard to get the husbandry for them. Anyway, that is what I've got at the moment and so as I move on we'll go through the challenges first and then at the end I will show you all the rewards of having all the species that I can have.

THE CHALLENGES

Obviously, the challenges are the types of aviaries that you have for these birds. I keep fruit pigeons, softbills, finches and parrots. Basically everything except for raptors. We are not allowed to have raptors in Queensland.

Housing

Planted Aviaries

I have quite a number of aviaries at the moment.





The main aviary that I have is a planted aviary that is 160 metres long and attached to it are five conventional parrot type aviaries. There are six smaller finch type breeding flights.

We have a big rat and carpet snake problem up in Queensland. All the iron right around the perimeter of the aviaries is buried in the ground up to 600 to 700mm and there is electric fencing running along that as well.



I have electric fence wires and then finally a nice bit of tap over the top of that so that if the power goes out and something does happen to run up there, they are going to have a bit of trouble getting up.



I could probably have that and have no issues because all the above ground and above wall netting is all nylon. I am finding that is really good, really cheap to use and it saves damaging birds like you wouldn't believe. I don't have any problems with birds hitting the netting and knocking themselves dead, because they just bounce off it like a trampoline.

(Graeme Phipps – what about outside birds trying to get in?)

Before I worked out how to stop the hawks from getting in, the hawks would bounce around on top and try and tear at it. Never ever had a hawk take a bird. I have lost a couple of finches through butcher birds being able to hit it but you are going to lose them in steel aviaries anyway unless you use ¼ inch mesh all the way around. Price wise running everything on ¼ inch mesh to keep the mice out, the snakes out and the butcher birds out is prohibiting considering the size of the aviaries that I have.

This is what I use now to deter the hawks – that's a 300 millimetre stainless steel gazing ball. You can see how reflective it is... you can see the roof in it. Hawks will fly in, see their own reflection, and think that's another hawk in their area (because they're all territorial); and a new hawk will just keep going.



I started off initially with one ball and for a while it worked. Then we got a couple of young sparrow hawks and a couple of young goshawks come in thinking that they would be able to mate up with the one bird that they saw, preferring it because it was their own reflection. They hung around for a bit and bounced around on the aviaries again for a while. I never really lost any birds but a few of the birds got a bit stressed. Then I thought well you know, if they can see one bird if I got two balls, one at each end of the aviary, they're going to think there are two hawks... *that's a pair, I'm getting out of here...* and that's exactly what they do. I haven't had a hawk land on my aviaries in 18 months since I've had two balls up.

Another good thing to have around is a few noisy minors (up to half a dozen maybe), because they tend to chase hawks around a lot and they let the other birds and my birds know when there is a raptor around. My birds will go to ground or hide in the bush; and there is plenty of bush in these aviaries at the moment.

So, if you want to get rid of hawks, the stainless-steel gazing balls are about \$98 a piece and you can buy them from a mob in Brisbane.



Obviously having a big aviary, you are going to need somewhere to catch the birds. There is no way I could wander around inside this aviary in particular (pictured above) and catch any birds out with a net. I've got that much bush and trees, they'd be ducking in corners and whatnot. So, a 3m x 3m aviary basically built inside the main aviary. That is also the only piece of shelter in the 160 sqm aviary, everything else lives out in the bush under the trees, under the leaves

whether it be pouring down rain or boiling hot – they do this out in the scrub – if they don't survive they are not strong enough and they are not going to be good breeders in the long run.

Everything gets fed in this aviary, the door is always open so that the birds can go in it at will whenever they want. If I wanted to catch something out I used to stand outside the aviary with a piece of string and watch and wait for them to go in, then pull the door shut. That worked for a few times until they realised that *if he stands there I am not going in that door because there's this big bang if I do... so I'll stay away from it.* I put the string inside the other walkway and that worked for a little while; but I got sick of waiting around for them to come in. I knew they had to come in at some time, so now either on the door or just above the door at the moment, there is a funnel trap.

So now I put a bowl of water in there, close the door in the morning and all the birds go in through the funnel trap. They can't get out because they don't know how to fly back in the end of the funnel. Then I just walk into the little 3m x 3m aviary and catch what I need. A piece of cake and I don't go chasing birds through the scrub and whatnot.



This aviary is highly planted and has natural perching. I don't like anything else. It's all got to be natural perching as much as I can get, plenty of growth, plenty of shrubbery, all sorts of different plants and grasses, grevilleas, bottlebrush, etc. The big thing at moment is the sandpaper fig tree (*Ficus coronata*); it's fruiting like crazy at the moment and so the wompoos are hoeing down the sandpaper figs and the silvereyes are also eating the figs that are ripening up. Also, the figs are dropping on the ground and bringing in a lot of vinegar fly type bugs and the wrens and other things are eating all this sort of stuff.



It is a nice really well planted aviary... and nylon netting... you hardly see it sometimes it's so invisible, because there's no structure. You might have seen from the first photo that all there was, was two posts. There is one in this aviary with a big round steel cap on the top just holding the netting up.

(Richard – so the netting is really tough?)

Yes, it's very tough. I've got some new aviaries that I am building, and I can walk across it and it's exactly the same. I wouldn't walk across this one now because some of this netting is probably 35 years old. The first aviary I built with nylon netting was down in the Bowral/Mittagong area and that is the same netting, so it's over 35 years old now.

(Graeme – that's twice the length of the life that they say for that.)

Exactly and I can still push on it and pull on it and the only thing that has been able to get through it is rats. You've got to know your enemy to control your enemy and finally over years and years of years of learning about rats and watching and finding out what they're getting into and how they are doing it, I have managed to do that now I think.

(Question – the Sulphur-crested cockatoo would chew threw that wouldn't it?)

We don't get them. We've had a few on the aviary and I've never noticed them pulling through or trying to chew it or anything. I've kept princesses and all the lorikeets and whatnot in that aviary at different times and never had anything chew through. The only thing I haven't put into the nylon net yet is fig parrots because they can chew. I am not game. I'd love to have them in the big aviaries but I'm just not game at the moment. We'll get to that later on.

Having a wide variety of plants helps, because you've got a wide variety of birds. The fruit pigeons, the wompoos and whatnot for instance eat grevillea flowers, which is something I didn't realise. They eat the soft tips off the lilly pillys and that sort of thing, so they are not actually eating fruit all the time, they are also eating vegetation.

I think that is one of the things that we have been finding with the fruit pigeons, is that people who keep them on a totally fruit diet are getting diarrhoea problems and that sort of thing; so dehydration because they're totally runny all the time. Since I've been watching them I have cut that down and I will talk about that when we get to the feeding side of things.



I have security cameras inside the aviaries for special species, obviously pointed at nests to work out what is going on. Particularly with the wompoos and I will go through some of those issues later. I've also got security cameras on the outside so that I can see what is happening at night time around the outside. That's how I found out where the rats were getting in. I had done everything I could to stop rats getting in where I thought and one night (the first night with cameras on the outside) I find them running up a star picket (which is about half a metre away from the aviary itself), running along the barbed wire and actually balancing on the barbed wire and jumping across onto the capping, then running up the netting up the top, getting under the roof (because there is a double roof) and because they are out of sight there they can take all the time they want to chew a hole in; and they'd do that every time. Fortunately, I have never lost any birds due to rats, unless you call the snakes following the rats in and taking the birds. That could be due to rats I suppose. But that's what had happened.

In the same night that I saw the rats jumping from the barbed wire onto the aviary and over, I caught a glimpse of carpet snake following the rats in about two hours later.



One of the second planted aviaries is the old aboveground swimming pool that we had on the place. We put that there when we first moved there 21 years ago. The liner lasted about 10 years. We decided to put a new in-ground pool in and I told my wife I was turning the old pool into a single garden. And it worked for a while until she saw the framework going up and said, '*what are you doing? It's quite all right... I'm just trying to keep the wild birds away from these plants*'. It's a nice... it's a lovely little aviary.



It's nearly 5 metres wide in the middle and it's probably about 3½ metres high and 9½ metres long. I just converted it. Just chopped it up and then chopped the end off and put a square end on it and framed it all up. Everything is second hand material and it's come up really nice.



It's really thickly vegetated at the moment. There are lilly pillys in the background, there's odd grevilleas in amongst them and grasses, bottlebrushes for the honeyeaters and it's a really nice very presentable aviary. I can sit on the step and just sit there and watch what's happening and it's really nice.



There's a walkway in the back end of it. Obviously once again I am not going to be able to go in there with a net and try and catch birds out. So I used feed stations, just with a drop door and similar things happened with the drop door as I did with pulling the door down in the aviaries down the back.

I'd sit there with a bit of fishing line, wait for the birds to go in (because they were used to me sitting there) until the thing goes bang all the time when you drop the cage front down and catch them. Then they are buzzing around. So, they wouldn't go in there when I was sitting in the walkway.

Then I drilled a hole in the door and stood outside with a bit of fishing line and the next-door neighbours would see me up against the wall, wondering what I am doing getting a sore eye looking in this tiny little hole.

Eventually I did the same thing as I did down the back in the cage front door. I just made up a funnel trap. The birds go in and obviously have trouble coming out the funnel again.



It's a nice aviary, planted and the odd rock in it for the spinifex pigeons to stand on and things like that. It just ended up being a really nice aviary and breeds quite well. The birds feel nice and at home.

Suspended Aviaries

I have also had a few suspended cages over the years as everybody does these days with parrots and whatnot.



Basically, I just attached them to the back of the old swimming pool aviary recently. They were down on the back of the fig parrot aviary originally and because I've got some development going on down behind that big aviary now, I moved these up here. If you can design a framework that will hold up the suspended aviaries you've got nothing going to the ground. So there's nowhere for rats to climb up anyway.

Once again there's an electric fence running around on the poles that are already in the ground and there's a cantilever inside the set up. Each of those cages will slide out if I wanted to, to replace them or just take them to out to get them out of the way I could do that.

There are a few different things in all those at the moment. Easy access.



There is a sort of temporary access at the front of these at the moment because the doors were actually in the walkway of the bigger aviary. You could go in and you wouldn't have any hassles.

At the moment I'm just a bit careful and bit wary of what might get out the doors, but I will eventually (at the end of this breeding season) have access through the walkway on the inside of the swimming pool aviary itself.



And these are just a few more of the suspended aviaries, just hanging around for odd birds and whatnot.



I didn't raise these for any breeding or anything, just for holding spare birds when I needed to.

Conventional Aviaries

These are the aviaries that are attached to the main 160 square metre aviary.

These are really a conventional 1.8m wide x 5m long x 2.4m high parrot aviary. And what do parrots like to do? Either just sit on a perch at that end and sit on the perch in the shelter end and you've got all that wasted space where there's nothing going on.

Even though I like parrots, to me parrots are just a picture hanging on the wall because that's all they do, they just sit there all day on the end of the perch and don't do much. They go to their feed bowl once in a while to have a feed and go back and sit on the perch and preen themselves and sit there and go to sleep.

Whereas your finches and your softbills, they are forever moving around feeding to keep themselves going. So, I had all the space and I wondered what to do with it?

How could I utilise that space without it being too much of detriment to what was going in there?



And of course, when you have got softbills and finches and whatnot you need brush and bush for them to hide in and hopefully some plants; and what's an eclectic going to do?

Tear to pieces whatever you put in there!

So I came up with a solution.

I meshed the bottom quarter of the aviary in with 2 inch square mesh and put plants inside and cylinders for brush and bred superb fairy wrens in there along with eclectic parrots. Crimson finches in the same aviary as the Superb wrens and I could have more species in that same space. That was one of them. Of the five aviaries I had I did it with all of them and it made life so easy.

Currently these are just full of grasses that are just overflowing the place and the crimson finches are breeding like crazy in them and the fairy wrens have been using them a lot. They are in and out all the time.

Fairy wrens don't stop. They just fly straight through that 2 inch stuff, but the eclectic, or the Gangs Gangs, or the Northern Rosellas or whatever, Princess parrots; they're not going to get through into that to destroy it.

It's a really good way of using extra space and doubling or tripling your aviary use in doing something along those lines.

Because they are in with big parrots, obviously you don't want them eating all your live food.

If you've got a pair of Gang Gangs in the aviary and fairy wrens eating meal worms and whatnot all day long, there's got to be something left for them.

The fairy wrens can get into the mesh feed area shown in the photo on the right, eat what they want and the Gang Gangs can't get in and eat it all.

I always give the Gang Gangs seed on the top and the fairy wrens can get in and get their soft foods and live foods and the mixes and all that sort of thing.



This old shed was the only other thing that was in the backyard when we bought this property. It was nearly an acre and the only thing in the backyard was that shed and about eight cocos palms around the dam that used to be down the

back. I got rid of the cocas palms and I filled in the dam and I'm building the aviaries on that. It was just your 3m x 6m Zincalume® shed.

I cut the end out of it, made up some aluminium tubing frame, ¼ inch mesh and once again the electric fences going right around it, a bit of shade over the top because it gets pretty warm and just framed it up inside. I put some doors in, piers, a bit of a walkway down along at the back and I've got myself a quick easy six flights for two pairs of finches per flight or a pair of turquoise parrots and pair of finches per flight.

You know something along those lines.

They're a metre wide and maybe 3 metres long out to the verandah off the end. So they get a bit of outside area and they've got some inside area. It works pretty well.



I put a plant in a big pot, automatic watering and a drain for the automatic watering. I have a hose running into it to keep it watered and the rest of the water runs outside. Everything stays pretty dry in here and just a little trickle comes out of the automatic watering every day to water the plants that are growing in there.

The big thing we have up in Queensland is palm trees and a really good perching median is the inflorescence which are the fronds that hold the fruit.

Once the fruit has all dropped out they dry up and they are really hard and hold their shape really well. I've got a lot of foxtail palms growing around and they are really good. Turn them up the other way and hang them in your aviaries and they're perfect nesting ports for finches. There are plenty of branches and plenty of room for their nests. I use other types like the Alexander palm inflorescence and there is plenty of space for the birds to put their nesting material in, etc.



Feeding

Obviously with a big mixed collection feeding is a real issue. My wife got sick and tired of me making up food and washing dishes in the kitchen and so I decided I had to build a bit of room in at the end of my garage.



I've got a double garage down the back - 3m by 4m. I built it in, timber framed it, and lined it. One of the daughter's boyfriends at the time was an electrician and he ended up getting me a second hand air-conditioner. The fruits are in the freezer and there's a microwave.



This is where I keep all my food and medications if I need them. All your fruits and frozen stuff as well, such as different peas, corn and carrots and all those sorts of mixes.

Times have changed, and I have gone through a few different methods of feeding out these days. I make up a lot of frozen tubs now. I'll mix up a month's worth of chopped up fruit and veggies and freeze them in individual Chinese food containers and I'll know one container goes in that aviary, one container goes in that aviary and however many I need on a particular day that gets fed out. I just put it out frozen. With the temperatures we get in Queensland it thaws out gradually during the day and that way it lasts a bit longer too. I've never known it to go soft and mushy like you'd think it would. I don't buy rubbishy fruit or get given rubbishy fruit from fruit shops and whatnot. I just buy what I eat myself. So if I wanted to I could take one of those mixes to work and eat it for lunch; and I've done that before. Having all this stuff handy in the one spot saves a lot of backwards and forwards up to the house and back; and having it all there ready you just pull it out of the fridge and start making it up as you want.

In the other side we have the fruit and vegie mixes, dried figs, the fresh fruits that I need, your finch mixes and your dried powder mixes, etc., frozen and fresh figs in there, nectar blocks and I'll show some of those as we get through, but bits and pieces of stuff that you need.



Stainless steel benching, dishwasher, hospital cages, etc. Everything you want to use is all there, so I am not bothering the wife up in the house; it doesn't happen anymore... but that's another story.

Live Food

Meal Worms:

Because I keep a lot of softbills, another one of my passions is growing live food. I grow my own mealworms these days.



Fly Boxes and Maggots:

I've got my fly boxes for growing maggots.



This is just an old timber bookshelf that I use with a flyscreen door I made up to go on the front of it. I put all my young maggots in it when they are starting to grow and I harvest from there.



I'll go through some of the things later.



I wait for them to start pupating and that way they are nice and white and have cleaned themselves out. There is nothing worse than giving half grown maggots to the birds when they are going to swallow a bit of crap that's still inside the maggots. We try and keep that out of them.

Crickets:

I breed a few crickets.



I haven't had much success because I've stopped using my old freezer. I gave it away a few years ago when I got rid of all my softbills and now I'm getting back into it I wish I hadn't given it away.



I am trying different methods now. Having your own live crickets and whatnot is a lot cheaper than going out and buying them every week.

Wood Roaches:

Wood roaches are another good source of protein if you have a lot of the softbills.



They are so easy to keep. Just a bit of pine shavings in a tub and so long as you have some of that white Teflon® paint to paint around the top of the inside of your containers, the cockroaches can't climb out of it. It is very slippery for some reason or another. You can have open tubs with cockroaches in them in your bird room and these guys can't climb out of it. I also use the same tubs when I am feeding them out in my aviaries. They can't escape and go everywhere and they're still contained in the area for feeding out.

White Ants:

It's getting really difficult up our way to actually go and find enough termites to feed your birds through the whole season and through the whole year and so I have been growing my own termites.



I'll go out and find the smallest termite mounds that I can find. Something that I can get out in a whole shovel full and stick it in a bucket of wood chip or mulch. Just the forest mulch that you get from the local tree loppers.

Put the whole nest in a bucket, put it in a tub of water so they don't go and raid your house, give it a couple of months and you'll be pulling out handfuls of mulch full of termites; and that just keeps cycling itself.

It works pretty well.

I've now got a setup in a couple of bathtubs.

Moth traps:

Obviously live moths are great for your birds.



I made a trap out of a ceiling fan and a couple of bits of stuff that I found and there's a black light above that. The nets are just the fly nets that are used over your hats when you go out in the bush, so you don't eat flies and you can drink your beer without getting flies in your gob.

The trap in the photo (above right) was actually available at Bunnings for a long time, so I bought a couple of those at one stage. They came with a little stainless steel wire basket that hung on the end and the whole idea is that insects would get in and the basket and would be so close to the fan that the fan would drive them out and kill the insects.

I didn't want dead insects and so I just got rid of that basket and hung the fly net on the end of it.

I pull that off every morning and go out and release it into the aviary. The birds are loving it. All the moths that you can see in the net are lawn grub moths, so all the neighbours around me are happy that I keep birds because they've got really nice lawns.



An external black light with a ceiling fan on the outside wall of the big aviary, it comes on with a thermionic device like a timer at night time. Insects get sucked into the ½ inch x 1/2 inch wire into a feed station area – automatic live food next morning.

Supplements:

Commercial Products:

For the wrens and the softbills I use a lot of supplements.



Obviously commercial products, because sometimes you might run out of live food. You want to make sure they are actually eating, and they've got something else that they can eat.



The wren mix I use is a mixture of Vetafarm Insecta Pro, Passwell Soft Finch Food mix and I grate a bit of cheese. I mix it all up into a nice moist but not wet pasty sort of a mixture and then I'll mix that with the maggots and some meal worms. All the softbills, all the parrots, and I have even seen the fruit pigeons having a go at this stuff too. There's a lot of good nutrition in it and obviously the birds are enjoying it and I'm going pretty well with what I've got.

Lorikeet Wet and Dry:

At one stage I had a lot of lorikeets and so I was feeding a lot of your normal lorikeet wet and dry mixes.



Seed:

The photo below is just some white millet, but we use a lot of the frozen French white millet that we can get up in Queensland these days and a good quality finch seed mix.



None of the bigger parrots gets sunflower at all, they all live on just the small finch mix. I couldn't be bothered buying 70 different seed mixes. Parrots eat little seeds in the wild and so they can eat little seeds here.

You don't naturally get sunflower out in the bush, so why would they get it from me?

Pellets:

Pellets are another good thing that I have transferred a lot of birds over too over the years, especially with the fruit pigeons.



Now I can go away for a weekend and I know the fruit pigeons will survive and live quite happily because they are eating a mixture of pellets.

The coloured pellets in the photo on the left being the Vetafarm Nutriblend pellets and the pellets in the photograph on the right being the Paradise Pellets.

I tend to use a mix of both nowadays, because sometimes you might not be able to get the Paradise Pellets, sometimes you might be able to get the Nutriblend Pellets. At least that way I know that the fruit pigeons are eating a bit of both and a lot of the parrots eat them too, which is what they are designed for. I tend to have most of the fruit pigeons on the pellets.

Honeyeater Mixtures:

I have bred a few scarlet honeyeaters. I've been pretty lucky with those. I would be the first person in Queensland to breed scarlet honeyeaters in captivity. I make up a mixture for them of the Wombaroo Lorikeet & Honeyeater mix and brown sugar; and depending on the time of the year, will depend on the ratio of Wombaroo to brown sugar.



In summertime the Wombaroo tends to get pretty sticky and tacky, so I will use less Wombaroo and more brown sugar in the mix. In winter when the honeyeaters are breeding, it's cooler, so it's not going to get sticky, so I can put more Wombaroo in the mix and there is more proteins and more nutrients in the Wombaroo to maintain the chicks that the honeyeaters are rearing.

I make up a 2 litre bottle of that so that's probably 500 grams at this time of the year – 200 grams of Wombaroo and 300 grams of brown sugar mixed in 2 litres of water and then freeze it in ice cube trays. Each day I pull out one ice cube per honeyeater. I could have six months' worth of nectar made up in the freezer if I wanted to and just put out enough each day.

My neighbour is looking after my birds while I am away on this trip. He has got a list of what he has to do and he'll just go to the freezer and put out 3 nectar blocks into that tray and 3 into that tray and those go in those aviaries; and I'll show you how I do that and for the neighbour as far as feeding out is concerned.

Fruit and Veggie Mixes:

The photo below is of one of the fruit and veggie mixes that I use. There are 17 or, 18 different types fruit and vegetables in that.



I make up \$60 or \$70 worth per month in one go and so that might be a 20 to 30 kg of fruit and veggies. Chop it up, dice it up, pack it up into Chinese food containers, put it in the freezer and I can pull one out a day and one goes in that tray, another one goes into that tray, another one goes into that tray which then go out into the aviaries. I just let it thaw out itself during the day. Because there are pellets in there for the fruit pigeons, they're supplementing themselves with that. So I don't go and use copious quantities of fruit mix because they don't really need it and it was only giving them diarrhoea originally. So a lot of trial and error and I have slowed down on a lot of things and its working at the moment.

Figs:

I've bred a few fig parrots, so obviously they are going to have figs.



I got onto a mob at one stage who used to provide dried figs for the bakery industry and I'd get a 10 kg box of diced figs which I think at the time cost \$25 or \$35. If I went and bought 10 of these I'd be up for \$200 or \$300. So what do you do? Fortunately, you don't have to go through too many of these.

I collect a lot of native figs for the fig parrots. I collect as many as I can when I see a tree that's loaded and freeze them and then just when I am feeding each day, or if I make up a few weeks' worth of containers for the fig parrots, I'll just put a handful of native figs in that and they thaw out during the day and they go well.

Frozen Green Seed:

The photo below is frozen green seed (which is a French white millet) that we get.



There's a couple out at Lowood that actually sow a whole paddock and harvest it for us and they freeze it as well. They put it into tubs, freeze it up and once a year I'll bring in two or three pallet loads into Brisbane and all the Queensland Finch Society members will come and buy what they want for the year and take it home and freeze it. I know the Hunter club generally get 1.5 pallets of this stuff sent down to them as well. I don't know if there are any more. Do you guys get it too?

(Comment – they come down to Sydney too.)

It is 400 times more nutritious than dried white millet because it is green, and it's still got all the nutrition of it growing. Once it's dried out all that nutrition has been sucked back into the plant, back into the ground and that's when it falls on the ground and all that's harvested is dry seed. While it is green and growing all the nutrients and all the energy and all the proteins and whatnot are still in the seed; and once you freeze it, it doesn't go anywhere, it's still there. They have done a lot of testing on it and they believe it to be over 400 times more nutritious than the dried fresh white millet.

I use it sparingly, I'd probably go through 30 or 40 tubs of this a year and maybe one a week. I mix it up with greens and grains and Tonic Mix Bird Seed and some soft food mixes. I make up a couple of 10 to 15 kilos at a time and put it back into containers and freeze it. I've got few freezers running and it's the reason my electricity bills are what they are.

Feeding Procedures

At Home

I just bucket it out and cart it round the individual aviaries. I think there's about 26 feed stations at the moment. It doesn't take me long to do it.



One thing I have noticed over the last couple of years is that birds love live flies, especially the finches and softbills.

I would go in there and I'd take a tray of live flies and let them out and they would fly up and you'd watch them fly outside the aviary before the birds had a chance to eat them all. So I had to try and come up with an idea of how to keep them in the aviary so the birds could still get them.

As shown in the photo (below) these are just a really fine diamond wire mesh covered drawer. You build them yourself. You can buy them at Bunnings as shelving kits. You can buy all the drawers separately at whatever depth drawer you want for whatever slide; and for whatever frame that you are building to put them in. People use them as their sock drawers and their undies drawers and whatnot in their wardrobes.



What I'll do is I'll just put a piece of Corflute® on the top of it to seal it and I glue and screw it there. I put a couple of hooks on it and I can just go and hang them in the aviary. I cut a hole in the bottom in the corner for access that is as far away from where the sunlight comes in as possible; because what are the flies going to do? As soon as they come out of their tray they are going to want to head to the light which is away from the door. The birds have to be able to get in and get them. The birds hang about outside, land on the access perch, go inside, jump up, catch all the flies they need and come back out again.

I have noticed these days that the first birds to go in when I put the flies in are the black-throated finches and the crimson finches and then the scarlet honeyeaters will go in there and the silvereyes will go in and chuck down what they need. At least the flies are not getting outside and going outside the nets. They will stay in there longer. The birds will get to choose when they want them, and I've got no issues.

To get the flies in there, I'll just get one of those Chinese food containers or ice cream containers with a brew that we use to grow the maggots in it, because that is what the flies blow in. I'll have the lid on it and just a cut a lip or a flap slot with a Stanley knife in the top of it, so you can flick it up, slide it into the fly box and leave it there for a couple of minutes. The flies will go in to try and lay their eggs in it and you just put your hand in and push that little flap down. Then you can pull the whole tray out, walk in the aviary with the container full of live flies and they are not going anywhere because they're enclosed in the ice cream or Chinese food container. Slide them in the hole, push them up one end, flick the lid off, take the lid back and do the next lot to go to the next aviary. That way the flies will fly out when they want to, into the fly box and the birds have a chance to get every fly that basically goes into the aviaries and I don't have flies buzzing around the house and annoying the barbeque and all that sort of stuff.

I came up with this idea because I can remember sitting on the lounge out underneath the pergola while watching the birds and forever flicking flies off. *'Where are all these flies coming from? I don't know darling... no idea.... no idea....'* and it's all stopped now. I can sit back and have a beer now and not worry about having to flick flies all the time... because the flies aren't escaping from the aviary.

When I'm Away

When I was going to go away I was having issues with how my neighbour would feed the birds. I've got a really great neighbour. He doesn't know a thing about birds. He is an old bushie, grew up on a banana plantation and all that, retired now in town on his block next door to me. He has always shown an interest in birds but didn't know anything about them. Anyway, I said to him..., *'any chance you could feed my birds while I go away, because I have got to go away for a couple of days?'* *'Oh, I'd love to do that, that would be great.'* So, I had to come up with an idea of how he could feed the birds how I feed the birds.



I got some sheets of A4 paper laminated with circles printed on them. Each circle represents a bowl and there is a list of what everything is. WM is wren mix, VM is veggie mix, FM was fruit mix, LW is lorry wet; and there is a couple of other bits and pieces as you go along. I just go along and with a whiteboard marker and draw how much I wanted to be in each bowl. Then he would come in the morning and he would put the bowls out where it says there is a bowl to go.

As you can see in the photo (above) there are 2 bowls there, 2 bowls there, 2 bowls there and they are not being used at the moment. There is only one big bowl here for the big aviary and we've got an empty bowl here, so we don't need that bowl, it doesn't have anything in it.

So, he will come along, and he'll sort the bowls out like that and then he'll look at it and say *'there's half a tub of lorry wet goes in that bowl there, what have we got here... 3 honeyeater (that's HM) so that's the honeyeater mix, so there's 3 ice blocks go in that one. What have we got down here? We've got 2 spoons of veggie mix, a fig...'*; and those sort of things. So he knows what's got to go in each bowl and each bowl lines up with an aviary – No. 11, No. 10, No. 9, No. 8, etc.; and anybody that doesn't know anything about birds can come into my place, read the ledger, know where it is in the freezer or the fridge and put it in the bowls and put it in that aviary.

I went on a four week trip up Cape York, I lost one Gouldian. And we were breeding. We had all the fairy wrens that I'd achieved, I had honeyeaters, I had all the fruit pigeons, all that sort of stuff and lost one Gouldian finch in four weeks. I probably would have lost more than that if I was home because I might have forgotten to do something. But because he had that list of what to do he didn't forget because it was all written there in front of him and he knew exactly what had to go in where. So it made it really easy. I then went and fitted a nine week trip in out at the Kimberly and I don't think we lost anything in nine weeks. I came back and there were aviaries full of babies because we went in the middle of October and he managed to feed everything just right and didn't lose a single bird in nine weeks. That's what I would have wanted to do myself if I was home and it was really good and a simple and easy way of doing it. If you've got somebody that needs to look after your birds, do something like this. It gives them a bit assurance and a reassurance that they can do it.

THE REWARDS

Then you get the rewards.

All the challenges, all the different things you do allows you to keep so many different birds; and so many different species and have so much of a good time with some of the birds.

I have had a number of parrots in the past.

Foreign and Native Lorikeets

Black-capped Lory (*Lorius lory*)

I had quite a good collection of foreign lorries. I bred quite a few black-capped lorries. Vicious bastards. The only bird that would ever fly out of one of those small doors into the walkway and all he wanted to do is tear my nose off and he drew blood! ARGH!!!!



I remember one night I could hear this commotion going on down in the aviaries. I had night lights in the walkways and it was about 9:00 o'clock at night. I could hear these lorries, these guys, going off their nut!!! And I thought I better go down and check it out.

I went down, opened the door. They had opened their nest box and they were out in the walkway, flying around having a good old time.

Yellow-bibbed Lory (*Lorius lory*)

I had some yellow bibs for a while.



Goldie's Lorikeet (*Psitteuteles goldiei*)

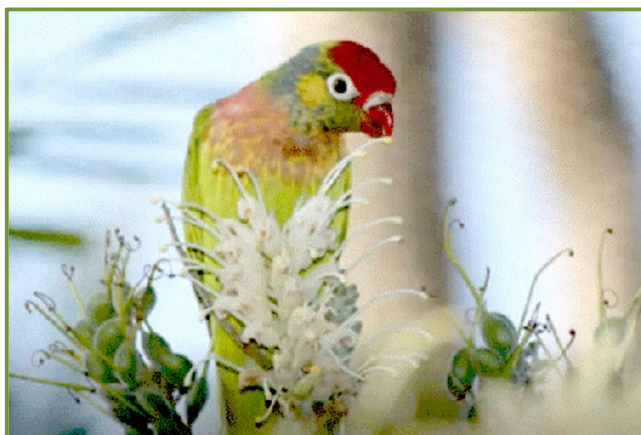
Goldie's lorikeets, I love these birds but there isn't many of them left if any now. I think they are just about all gone.



The unfortunate thing about having all these foreign species is that we are not going to get new genetic material. So, we have to be really careful and we've got to work together to breed these species otherwise they are going to be lost forever. Even down to the little brown finches that people don't want, we've got to keep them otherwise we will never have them one day.

Varied Lorikeets (*Psitteuteles versicolor*)

Varied lorikeets were lovely birds that I had in the big planted aviary. It was just magnificent to watch them flying around in the planted aviary with all the grevilleas growing in there and they bred really well in it.



They constantly bred three or four chicks in a nest and had two or three clutches in a season. They had access to all this crude grain and extra food on top of what I was giving them, native food, their natural food, and it just made so much of a difference to the birds themselves. I bred quite a few.



Parrots

Coxen's fig parrot (*Cyclopsitta diophthalma coxeni*)

Probably my favourite bird at the moment is the red-bellied fig parrots. I started off with two pairs probably eight or nine years ago. I paid a fortune for them. I had a few issues at the start, I think I bred 40 of them. I did really well. I went away for a nine week trip and before I went away they were getting ready to breed. I knew that my neighbour was worrying about them, so I gave a pair to a mate down in Sydney and sent a pair up the coast. I think they bred a couple while I was away so that was good.



I've now got a couple of pairs back and they are both sitting at the moment. They are the most glorious little birds. If you haven't seen in them in the flesh, they are one of the best little parrots that you could ever have. But I will tell you what, that beak would destroy you. They are the toughest bastards around.

Chicks in the nest a couple of days old...



...and at about 24 days old.



After they have fledged...





The only big issue with these that I've found so far is because of their fig and fruity diet. Their droppings are really sticky and can attach to their owner. They can build up and form a ball and they are in the nest and picking up all these droppings and it's building up, building up. So, you have really got to pull them out, check your birds every couple of days and just squeeze hard enough and you'll break it off and it will just slide off their toenails and then put them back again. I haven't been able to get away from that. It is the diet obviously and they excrete a lot in the nest. They are not like softbills where the parents will take the faecal sac away.

Eclectus parrots (*Eclectus roratus*)

The pair in the photograph below were the last pair I had. I've given them to some friends now. I had them for about 15 years up in Queensland. I got them after I moved up to Queensland because I wasn't allowed to take my own Eclectus from New South Wales up into Queensland. National Parks wouldn't let you do it. So I had to palm them off to friends down here. I managed to find some up in Queensland and so I bought some.



One pair raised seven chicks. In the 15 years I had them they only managed 45 to 48 chicks. I hand raised every one of them.

Who hand rears Eclectus parrots?

How dark are they when they fledge? You know still pretty dark and brown and whatnot.



This pair in the photo above, this was the day they fledged and there's two chicks there and look how good they are; and yet the parents would have frozen them in the nest. In that same aviary I've had superb blue wrens breeding and crimson finches and I've got some photos on the computer of baby fairy wrens sitting in between the Eclectus parrots... it's amazing you know.

Gang Gang Cockatoos (*Callocephalon fimbriatum*)



I was really lucky with this pair of Gang Gangs I had in Queensland. I had them for a few years and they bred every year for me. In the same aviary I was breeding splendid fairy wrens and pictorella finches and they were beautiful.



The photo below was taken the first day they fledged. Look at that... I mean hand raised Gang Gang chicks... absolutely spectacular. This is the result.



The brush in at the back was the result of previous experiences with them. They would come out of the nest and they'd just go bang, hit that wire and go down. It is lucky I didn't lose any. So all the brush up the back there is just above the caged in section, the bottom where the splendid fairy wrens were nesting and I didn't have any damage issues with fledging.

Swift Parrots (*Lathamus discolor*)

I've had a few Swift parrots over the years and they're a really nice bird too. If you haven't seen Swifts, they're so underrated and yet they are so endangered in Tasmania. I know guys that are breeding hundreds of these at the moment in captivity.



(Graeme Phipps – And they've been breeding in Queensland?)

Yes, just once, which is really frustrating. They were in the big aviary and I had three pairs in it because you colony breed them. One pair went to nest and I got three chicks out of the one pair. A mate around the corner in a 2m long by 900m x 900m suspended with three pairs of swifts in it bred 30 odd birds during that same season. That's frustrating. Jammed in a tiny little cage and here they are in the big aviary with their own natural forest. So sometimes it works with some birds, sometimes it doesn't. It is what you learn over the years. It might have just been these pairs of birds weren't that crazy on it.

I want to get them back again. I don't have them at the moment. I've got my feelers out for some pairs from Tasmania and I'll have them again next season.

Turquoise Parrot (*Neophema pulchella*)

One thing that I am passionate about is pure normal Neophemas. I've only got turks at the moment because I don't have enough room to have any other species. I've probably got 60 other species at the moment at home.



All pure normal birds. I've got one strain of pure normal birds that have orange bellies and people think that all pure normal turks are like the bird in the photograph above – pure yellow – but there is a colony in central New South Wales that have been around for about 80 years that carry a bit of red in their belly; and I was fortunate enough to get some of those. I currently have eight separate genetic lines of pure normal turks and I'm breeding them pretty well. I've got six chicks out of one clutch just fledged this week. I've never seen six turks in a nest and I didn't think they would all last.

So obviously, turks are pretty much of a favourite.

Crimson Wings (northern subspecies)



I had a pair of northern subspecies of Crimson Wings for a while. They are a lot smaller than the species you would probably get out west in New South Wales, over the ranges.



They are lovely little birds, a bit different in colour than the ones you get down here as well.

Red-capped Parrots (*Purpureicephalus spurius*)

Red-caps are one of the most underrated birds in Australia. They are just stunning coloured birds. They were really good parents too... really good parents.



Softbills

Superb Fairy Wren (*Malurus cyaneus*)

I've have all the finches, all the wrens just about, except for variegated fairywrens –. and then there's the superbs!



The hen bird has bred 30 or 40 in the five or six years that I have had them.



Splendid Wren (*Malurus splendens*)

This is the Western Australian splendid wren. Notice it doesn't have any black on its back.



I've now got splendid wrens again and I was under the impression that they were the Western Australian species. Now I think they are black backs not yet coloured up. But that's alright, black back hens are easier to get. I haven't been able to get the Western Australian Splendid wrens in the last 12 months that I've been looking for them.

I have probably bred 20 odd of these over the years that I had them. They are a little bit harder to breed than the Superb wrens, but still beautiful birds.



This is the nest of the hen in the photograph below. All emu feathers and cotton wool in the brush.



You can see their different coloured eggs inside the nest.



White-winged Fairy Wren (*Malurus leucopterus*)

Probably my favourite of the wrens is the white-winged fairy wren. Only because I've bred 60 or 70 of these in a few years.



I had one pair breed 31 in one season and then with all the pairs that I had in that aviary I ran out of room to take their young ones out. I left the young ones in with them thinking that if the dad kills a couple of young boys, it probably won't be so much of a problem. But no totally the opposite. The parents would mate, she'd lay and hatch the eggs, move on and start building another nest. All the young from the previous nest would feed these young ones and these young chicks grew so fast they were out of the nest in two weeks because they had four or five foster parents; their previous nest siblings feeding them.

I got to a stage in that swimming pool aviary where I had 20 odd white-winged fairy wrens and one coloured bird, and all the rest were uncoloured, even the males, none of the males coloured up.

Eventually, the hen unfortunately burnt herself out after some 31 chicks and she passed on. The cock bird never took another hen. I had unrelated pairs and tried pairing them up and he'd bash them, and he never took another hen; and not one of his sons coloured up while he was in that aviary. As soon as I moved him out (because one bird started to colour up and you could see them starting to bicker) the young cocks started to colour up, but they never fought with each other. I think because they knew they were brothers I suppose.

I had two or three other pairs too and so I was able to farm out unrelated pairs; and do you think I can get any now? I cannot find a white-winged wren for sale or anybody with them except for me. I've put maybe 30 or 40 pairs on the market up until about three or four years ago and yet nobody seems to be able to do anything with them.



I don't know what it is, why I could do something with them? Maybe it might have been just my birds that I had, unless it was my husbandry; and I'm proud of it if it was my husbandry, because I have done pretty well with them. They are the bluest of blue things you have ever seen, absolutely black and blue.

The hen was an angry bird. She used to stare at you when went into the aviary especially when she had young ones. You can see in the photograph below that the tail is bent.



But the cock birds are doting parents, they are really cool.



They won't let anything else near them. Especially anything blue. So I wouldn't have tricoloured parrot finches or anything with blue on it, cordon bleus, or anything like that in with them. These guys would kill anything blue within seconds. But they got on with anything else that wasn't blue. Except young gouldians. If a young gouldian came within 2 metres of their nest, that young gouldian would be dead. I had quite a few issues with those. But I would still rather have them.

They made their nest totally and wholly inside of 100% cotton wool or kapok. The never put any grass or anything into their nest, I don't know why, mainly because that's what they like or maybe the brush was nice and fine enough for them to be able to do that.



A couple of day old or two day old chicks, whatever they be. They grow up so fast. Two weeks and they are out flying around.



Silvereyes (*Zosterops lateralis*)

I have had silvereyes a few times and I've got them back again now.



Scarlet Honeyeaters (*Myzomela sanguinolenta*)

A little bird, they're just cracking birds.

The very first chick that I bred (that's about eight years ago now) they nested in a Grenadier weaver's nest. They filled the hole from the bottom all the way up with coconut fibre. It was really good.



As I said earlier I was probably the first person in Queensland to breed them in captivity.



And this was the fledgling as it came out of the nest.



Pigeons and Doves

Green-winged Pigeon (*Chalcophaps indica*)

Seed eating pigeons like the green-wings and Spinifex.



Spinifex Pigeon (*Geophaps plumifera*)

They are a really lovely little bird and mine all have normal crests on them because I've got nylon netted aviaries and they don't bash their heads on steel netting.



Superb or Purple Crown Fruit Dove (*Ptilinopus superbus*)

I've bred a lot of purple crown fruit pigeons. If they didn't nest in a tree they nested on the ground and I've got pairs that constantly nest on the ground nowadays for some reason.



The photo below is a chick first day fledged; 14 days from hatching and it's out, fully developed wings, fully developed flight feathers and can fly with the rest of them. Absolutely incredible. It can land on a perch when it wants to, and it

has little to nothing on the rest of its body. It will take another three weeks to get as big as its parents – they grow so fast.



Rose-crowned fruit pigeons (*Ptilinopus regina*)

Rose-crowned fruit doves are not as prolific as the superb (or the purple crowned fruit doves), nevertheless I've still bred quite a few of these. I think I have bred 60 or 70 maybe.



Wompoo Pigeon (*Ptilinopus magnificus*)

Wompoos are probably the best bird that I've ever had I reckon.



They are probably the rarest and the dearest bird I've ever had. I've been lucky enough so far to get seven birds on the perch. They are a huge bird - huge! Not as heavy as the big top knot pigeon but head to tail probably a little bit longer than the top knot. Pretty special to have them.

And I've been lucky enough to breed them. I had cameras on all my nests because I needed to know what was going having lost so many. There isn't enough husbandry notes out there about these birds. I've been trying to keep records of how I breed mine.

- How I've bred them;
- when I've bred them;
- what I have done wrong the next time when I've lost chicks;
- and all that sort of thing.

One day I will put it down on paper. A lot of it is in my head unfortunately.

The following photographs are of one of the chicks that the parents raised. Top left to right, one day old and then probably three or four days. Bottom left to right, six days and then eight to nine days old.



And 17 days old and off the nest.



Pretty happy with that. Spectacular big birds.

Weavers

Grenadier Weaver (*Euplectes orix orix*)

I have had some pretty good success with Grenadiers in the past.



Finches

Red-faced Parrot Finch (*Erythura psittacea*)



Pictorella Mannikins (*Heteromunia pectoralis*)



Masked Finch (*Poephila personata*)

Normal masked finches.



Crimson Finch (*Neochmia phaeton*)

I've done really well with these this year - they are probably rearing young ones at the moment.



Diamond Firetail Finch (*Stagonopleura guttata*)

When they are in planted aviaries you can take some really nice photos when you want to.



Red-browed Finch (*Neochmia temporalis minor*)

The northern Queensland subspecies.



Gouldian Finch (*Erythrura gouldiae*)

Fortunately, I've got a good colony of pure normal black headed gouldians with a couple of red heads in amongst them and the yellow head.



These were all the gouldians I had in my main collection of pure normals. My grandson eight years old came to a finch sale with me one day and said, '*could I have a pair of birds?*'. I said your mum gave you the money, you can do what you want with it and so he bought a pair of yellow-headed gouldians. The guy that he brought them off assured me they were pure normal yellow-headed gouldians. There is a white-breasted yellow-headed gouldian in the aviary at the moment!

Black-Throated Grass Finch (Parson Finch) (*Pheophila cincta*)



Double-barred Finch (*Taeniopygia bichenovii*)

Black-browed double-bars from up in the Northern Territory in the Kimberley region.



Red-eared Firetail Finch (*Stagonopleura oculata*)

From Western Australia.



And that's the end for now until I started building again.



I've got six more flights underway down the back. Each one is 12m long x 2.8m wide x 2.8m high and it's coming along. Corrugated iron buried 600 to 700mm in the ground, ¼ inch wire mesh for the earth (basically for the electric fence that is going to be running around it eventually), nice white cap to stop the rats if they do get up that far and over the top and the whole of the rest of it is covered in new nylon netting, – the hail netting. I could actually probably walk across the top of that hail netting it is so strong. It will sag a bit for a while, but I reckon I could walk across and within a couple of days it would be back up to normal again. Good stuff, if you can keep rats and other vermin off it. It is the best stuff for your birds except for the big parrots of course. Any of the lorikeets, any of your neophemas, I mean they'll fly into it and just bounce back off.



One thing I will have issues with (as you can see in the photograph above) is the bush down the back. Look how easy you can see it. When I release birds into there I am going to have to brush it up a bit because I am going to have birds go smash and bounce off it for sure.

These are just the flights. There will be a solid roof across to the existing aviary and obviously it will be divided up. It will be filled with decomposed granite to allow for a lot more drainage, a lot more dryness, because with the finches and the softbills, etc., it's good to have a bit a dry stuff.

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