



## The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

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

### Aviculturist of the Month

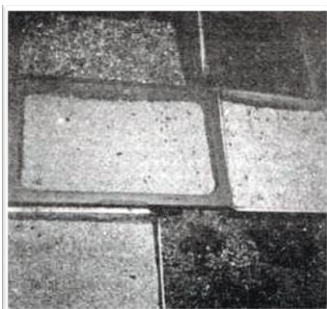
### Harry Carr

(The Avicultural Review July 1985 Vol. 7 No. 7)

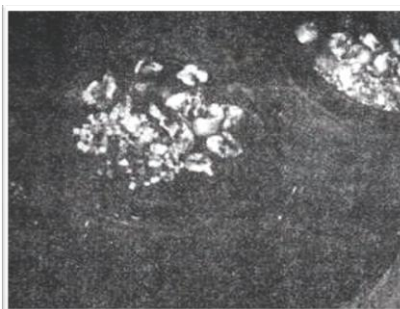
Interviewed by Joelle Dunbar



Harry's large bank of aviaries constructed over what used to be a series of ponds for his Koi Carp



Harry puts all his seed into plastic containers for the birds to have easier access. By using a separate container for each mixture he can monitor how much of each is being consumed.



This is an example of how Harry mixes the diced and dried fruit, then places it upon the lid of a large plastic drum so that it is off the floor.



Harry Carr standing amongst the foliage in his heavily Planted large aviary

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Harry, how long have you been involved in aviculture?**

Harry Carr            Approximately twenty-eight years. In fact, this aviary we are sitting in now has been here twenty-three years.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What are your special interests?**

Harry Carr            Mainly Australian pigeons. I started off with pigeons and softbills. At present I have twenty-two varieties of pigeon. All of them native to Australia. I have [Purple-crowned](#), [Rose-crowned](#), [Baldies](#), [Topknots](#), [Bronzewings](#), [Bar-shouldered](#)s, [Forest Bronzewing](#), [Pheasant-tailed](#), [Wonga](#), [Flock](#), [Squatters](#), [Partridge](#); and all the small pigeons such as the [Peaceful](#) doves. The only ones I have not had are the [White-quilled Rock](#) pigeon and the [Black-banded](#) from the Atherton Tablelands, and the [Nutmeg Rock](#) pigeon (I can't think of its correct name).

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What first attracted you to pigeons?**

Harry Carr            They are extremely quiet. They don't require as much time as the parrots I have had in the past.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Could you describe this aviary we are sitting in?**

Harry Carr            It was the first I built. It's 78' long, 25' wide and 18' high. It is heavily planted. In fact the [Lantana](#) needs to be cut back. The roof is nearly worn out and I intend to replace it with an arched roof. I have had up to 150 birds in here. At the moment there are Baldy pigeons, Topknots, [Lewin's honeyeaters](#), [Spiny-cheeked honeyeaters](#), [Ringneck doves](#) (these act as foster parents), [English Blackbirds](#), [Mandarin ducks](#), [Noisy Pittas](#), [Princess parrots](#), [Green-wing pigeons](#) and so on.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Is there one type of pigeon that is difficult to breed?**

Harry Carr      The Topknot is the hardest to get going. They tend to take a long time to settle into a new aviary. I have only had the Purple-crowned for a couple of years and only had one young from them so I can't talk much about them..

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What is the life span of the pigeons?**

Harry Carr      I have never kept particular records of that, but I have had some up to 10 and 12 years. Particularly the Baldies and the Wongas. The Baldies are quite prone to [canker](#) when stressed.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What about the breeding of the pigeons, are they early breeders?**

Harry Carr      In captivity they will usually breed two or three times a year. They usually lay only one egg at a time. The occasional nest will have two eggs. This is what makes it difficult to breed them up to large numbers. With some of them, particularly the fruit pigeons, I take the egg away and foster it under the Green-winged pigeon. I have about six Green-wings around for this purpose as they will breed quite readily.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What diet do you feed them?**

Harry Carr      The Rose-crowns, Purple-crowns, Baldies, [Torres Straits](#) and other soft food types are given just about any fruit that is in season. I just dice it up finely. As well as the mixed dried fruit my wife uses for her fruit cakes. This is mixed up with the freshly diced fruit. The other pigeons are grain eaters. I supply quite a wide variety of grains and what one does not eat the others will.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Do any of them eat live food?**

Harry Carr      Yes, most of the ground pigeons will take a [mealworm](#). The fruit pigeons seem only to take the occasional mealworm. I feel that they must eat the odd grub in the native fruit they eat so I put the occasional mealworm into their fruit mix. The [Spinifex](#) and Brush Bronzewing and the other ground pigeons really like the live food.

In this aviary I bring down some raw mince each day for the [Whipbirds](#) and the pigeons will come and take some as well.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Do you need to use different nesting materials for the different pigeons?**

Harry Carr      Most of the ground pigeons make a small dish in soft sand. The Spinifex like to get in behind a cluster of rocks. I only put in a few handfuls of pine needles; otherwise they get what they need from their surroundings. With the Bronzewings I put in a handful of straw as they like to use this as it is quite dry. Other than that I will give them some [Ti-tree](#) branches that I have broken up as well as some [Jacaranda](#) branches. I don't find the need to put up boxes as 90% will build their nest in the shrubs and trees.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Is there one species that has been a real challenge to breed?**

Harry Carr      Yes, the little Rose-crowns. I've had two young from them, but I would have liked to have had a dozen by now.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Can you colony breed the separate species?**

Harry Carr      I've never had enough of the Rose-crowned or the Purple-crowned. In the wild they fly in flocks of 12 or so and they will have nests only 10' to 15' apart. So I imagine it should be possible. The Baldies don't seem to worry about others and will nest within 3' or 4' of one another. Other than that they don't seem to breed in colonies.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **Is there a growing interest in pigeons?**

Harry Carr      Since some of the overseas trips, there has been a general upsurge in interest in all softbills. I never sell any of my birds but prefer to swap them with others who have a similar interest. I have never had a problem getting rid of any surplus. People are becoming interested in the beauty and variety in the softbills. As well as the challenge of the different types of food required.

The [Bowerbirds](#) have bred in here several times. Each time they have nested in a clump of [Raphis palms](#). Last year they had three young and I thought I would do the right thing and put rings on them. Each morning I would come down and the rings would be off. I didn't realise that the hen was objecting to the silver colour. Maybe I should have painted them black. I just kept putting them back on. Finally I came down one morning and found the three young dead on the floor. The hen couldn't get the rings off so she threw them out of the nest.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **The [Regent bowerbird](#) has a reputation for the hen being aggressive? Have you found this a problem?**

Harry Carr      This seems to be a problem in the wild, particularly after they have bred. It is thought this is because the cocks are so noticeable in the flock. In the bush you tend to only see the coloured birds around the breeding season.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **How early do you think you can sex the bowerbirds?**

Harry Carr      I think you can when they are about a year old. The hen's head is much bigger than the cock bird. It takes about 4 to 5 years before they get their distinct yellow and black colours. This is time consuming if you are trying to pair them off.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **What diet do you feed the bowerbirds?**

Harry Carr      They will live on chook pellets alone if you let them. I don't cater especially for them except when they are building a bower I provide plenty of live food. Young mice or rats are good. Crickets, grasshoppers and mealworms or anything that moves they will eat. I rear most of this myself. With all the softbills I have this is starting to get out of hand. I can go through 1,000 mealworms in a week without any effort.

**Joelle Dunbar**      **In such a large aviary it must be a problem to catch the birds?**

Harry Carr      No, not really. I have a net with an 8' handle and I have someone chase them out from the other end and I scoop them as they go past.

**Joelle Dunbar** I notice that you have a pond in the corner of this large aviary. Does it cause a problem for the birds or become contaminated with droppings?

Harry Carr I have a filtration system through 5 1/2 ton of blue metal in one corner. The water is pumped up and through this filter and then runs back down through a creek over the natural rock back into the main pool where the ducks swim. This keeps the water crystal clear. The birds enjoy drinking the water as it runs down in the creek. The [National Parks and Wildlife Service \(NPWS\)](#) have a regulation that requires three square metres of water for each waterfowl you have in captivity, so unless you have a large setup it is difficult to have these types of birds. I think it is a must to have enough water for them to swim on.

I originally had two large ponds in here, but I when I got rid of most of the water fowl I removed one. I had [Chestnut Teal](#) and [Grey Teal](#), [Burdekin ducks](#) and so on. I found that you just couldn't keep them all in one aviary as their droppings kill everything.

**Joelle Dunbar** We are now standing in front of a bank of aviaries. Could you please describe them?

Harry Carr They are similar to your standard box aviary with a covered nesting area and an open flight at the front. Originally it was a row of breeding aquaria that I converted. It holds [Painted Quail](#) that are breeding in a colony of about 20 or so in the first aviary. I wanted to go into some of the smaller softbills so I have been putting some of them into the other aviaries. I have [Grey Singers](#) and [Yellow Robins](#). Then there are the [Bleeding-heart Pigeons](#).

I feed these small softbills a nectar mixture made from meatmeal, [Sustagen](#), baby food, a couple of drops of [Penta-vite](#) and a little honey. As well I use [Madeira cake](#).

As well there are Spinifex pigeons, [Button quail](#) and White-fronted Plumed pigeons, [Red-chested Button quail](#), [New Holland honeyeaters](#), [Black-breasted quail](#), [Red-faced Parrot finches](#), [Blood finches](#) and some more of the Fruit Pigeons are spread through the rest of the aviaries. I would like to get some more varieties of wrens. At the moment I only have the [Blue wrens](#). I have had them for the past three years and they breed well for me.

**Joelle Dunbar** How many hours would you put in each week for your aviaries?

Harry Carr About 1 1/2 to 2 hours each day to feed them. Cutting up the fruit takes at least 1/2 an hour by itself.

**Joelle Dunbar** Harry, thank you very much for giving your time and information to make this a most interesting interview.

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