



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

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

## **Softbills in a Mixed Collection**

**Softbills, Pigeons, Waterfowl and lots more!**

**Presented by John Stafford**

Thank you everybody for having me here this evening. What I would like to do tonight is talk to you a little bit about my collection and what we are doing down in Taralga. More specifically I would like to talk to you about what it's like to manage a big collection essentially on your own and the issues that are associated with that.

We moved to Taralga some years ago now. We were living in Bowral and I was doing the usual 9:00am to 5:00pm plus hours. When we retired I had a very big bird collection at Bowral in my backyard. We had about an acre and I think we had 70 aviaries screened into that one acre and 70 aviaries that were built like you do when you build something over 20 years on a limited budget. Everything was an extension of an extension of an extension.

We wanted to move and we had a bit of a liking for Taralga which is about 1/2 hour's drive along the Taralga and Oberon Road from Goulburn. It is a totally different world, a little village of about 300 people. So we moved to Taralga and started building the aviaries.

We had some animals there, some miniature ponies and some Llamas. I was still working at the time and we still had the house at Bowral. I was finding that I was spending more and more time down at Taralga and still spending time at Bowral. I would get up in the morning and feed for two hours and drive for 1 1/2 hours and feed at the other end and then come back home again. It was just madness but that is what we do when we've got birds. It's all a bit insane from time to time and the madness continues. So I don't drive anymore I just have too much to do. We have also cut back on what we had a little bit of late, for all those reasons. We had probably I think about 180 different species of birds and animals up until a few months ago. We're back to about 150 at the moment and for a variety of reasons which I'll elaborate on as we go on, we'll probably try and cut back a little bit more.

As I said before, what I would like to do tonight is talk about

*what it means when you've got Softbills, pigeons, parrots, water fowl and lots of animals;  
what it means personally; and  
what it might mean to you.*

I will talk about the four **Cs**

**Compatibility** – *which is quite an issue and I know we all take that a little bit for granted but it is an issue;*

**Costs** – *we run on a budget and we haven't got \$1m to throw at it; and*

**Constant Care** – *I am sure that everybody here knows about constant care for their birds and animals. I don't have to explain that to you.*

Years ago when we just had small parrots, a finch collection and a couple of Softbills; if we said we wanted to go away for the weekend we'd just feed up for two days or we'd have someone drop in. That just doesn't happen anymore. You can't do that when you have a complex and involved collection.

The following photo shows some of my aviaries.



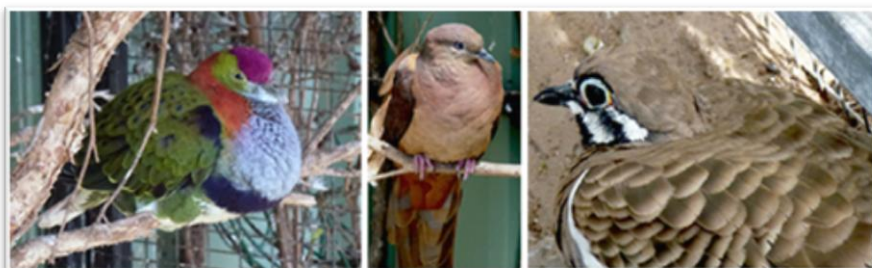
We bought some aviaries from Stephen Hale at Schofields and relocated them as we did with quite a lot of our aviaries. They basically house Softbills and finches. Each one is 6m x 3m and there is a group of five with smaller aviaries that are on the wing.

We are 950m above sea level so managing the collection has its moments. It doesn't snow a lot but when it snows it tends to cause some issues.

There is a lot of interest in people using netting these days and it is fantastic and has some wonderful uses. However it is not fantastic in the snow when you get a heavy load on it.



Some of the birds we have include the Purple-crowned Fruit doves, Brown doves and Spinifex and Squatter pigeons.



The following photo is a Flock pigeon's nest. They like to hide away down in the bottom of the aviary.



We find that pigeons are good birds to have in a mixed collection. I used to run a lot of pigeons together in an aviary. I might have a pair of Brown doves, a pair of Flock pigeons, a pair of Green-winged doves, etc., but I have found that they do a lot better if we just have the one pair of pigeons per aviary. There are some exceptions. I find that a mix works better for me and we will put ground dwellers on the bottom and in our 6m x 3m aviaries and we mix it up a bit with the White-browed Wood swallows and robins and different birds like that. We also have Diamond Firetails in with them.

The Topnot pigeon is probably my favourite pigeon.

It's a beautiful bird.

We are currently redoing one of our aviaries in an attempt to create a rainforest type aviary, but a rainforest aviary in Taralga is somewhat difficult. When the frosts came last year there went my rainforest. I will try some more shade cloth this year and a few other different things that might help us to achieve this.



Inland Dotterels are not that common these days and you don't see them around very much. They are a fantastic little bird and I love them to death. They have a lovely nature; they are really placid and very quiet. If you go into the aviary they will come and take mealworms from you. I feed these guys mainly just a meat mix and that's what they for all intensive purposes live on, but at the end of the day they love their little top up of mealworms.

We have been quite with the White-browed Woodswallows. They breed fairly continuously for us in a colony system at this point in time. I did have them as single pairs. I guess I gravitated to the colony system mainly because of what I have seen at [Featherdale Wildlife Park](#). I really liked the look of it and the way they're displayed and they make a great collection in the aviary. However, I think they looked a bit better when they were single pairs to be frank with you.





Hooded robin (*Melanodryas cucullata*)

One of the interesting things when we talk about compatibility is that compatibility for me doesn't just get down to what's aggressive or not aggressive, or what dominates over the other one. It gets down to things like what we are feeding and the costs of feeding it. For instance we've got Hooded robins and they're not a great bird to mix because they are quite aggressive. We feed a fair degree of live food to the Hooded robins. If I were to mix them with the Woodswallows who would essentially eat a meat mix, I'd be broke in a week. It's that cost and compatibility thing where you have just got to try and control what you are feeding out all the time so you don't have to throw in a dish of mealworms that are gone in two seconds flat and the birds that really rely on them don't get them.

The Hooded robin is probably my favourite bird of the small birds that we have in our collection. We have pretty much dedicated one of our 6m x 3m aviaries to just the Hooded Robins. The Dotterels are on the floor and I have a pair of Common Bronze-wings in there as well. But the Hooded Robins are so aggressive. I've put finches in with them of one kind or another but they just kept taking everything out. This season I had Elegant parrots in with them and they were even hounding the Elegants. Not hurting them, but driving them.

We have had some success this year with the Hooded robins and we've bred them a couple of times now. We bred them a couple of seasons ago and they were going quite well and then this year we only got the one young one up and then they went to nest a second time and we had a really nice young one on the floor. We don't get many rat problems but we got a rat in and it took out my cock bird and the young one. It's like a lot of these things, you struggle to get numbers off but it can sometimes be a hard road to get them up and running.

The Yellow-tufted honeyeater is another bird that can be really aggressive. I love Yellow-tufted honeyeaters. They just display so well and they are beautiful and active birds in the aviary. We have them in one of our 6m x 3m aviaries.

We have a pair of Whip birds and a pair of Little Wattlebirds in with Yellow-tufted honeyeaters and there are some Squatter pigeons on the floor. You would certainly think that the Little Wattlebirds would be aggressive with them but they seem to be getting along just fine at this point in time.



Yellow-tufted honeyeater (*Lichenostomus melanops*)



Pied Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

Pied I've never bred the Pied Stilt unfortunately. I have had numbers of them over the years. They are a terrific bird; a lovely bird to have on the floor of the aviary and the Bustard is another really cool bird.

The Eastern Yellow Robins can be a bit touch and go. They are not as aggressive as the Hooded Robins; certainly I haven't found it to be so in my aviaries. However they are still a bird that you've got to watch and think about what you mix with them.



Yellow robin (*Eopsaltria australis*)

The photo on the right is an Elegant Parrot. We don't keep a lot of mutations now. I have basically fazed them out.

One of the interesting things about feeding birds in a mixed aviary is what comes down to eat what. I talked about when they come down and monopolise the mealworms and that's the down side. The upside is that the birds learn to eat everything.

In our aviaries we might have mixed vegetables, apples and other fruits, and a meat mix. The Little Lorikeets are the first birds down to eat the meat mix. It's just one in all in and there's virtually nothing in those aviaries that the birds don't consume. It's hard to get some of the birds onto some things and we find it takes just a little while.

I've got honeyeaters in an aviary on their own and I put in all that food and they just don't touch it. It is just getting them used to what's going on with the other birds I think.



Elegant Parrot

The aviary in the photo (below) is the least attractive aviary we have in terms of aesthetics.



My wife hates it; she refers to it as the "ugly aviary". When we have to feed something she's says *"oh, he wants the 'ugly aviary' fed"*. Again it gets down to what works and I've bred more birds in that aviary than any other aviary. It's really well sheltered, it's lined more than the others and it's in a good position out of the wind (although all my aviaries are in a good position – we have had the opportunity to position everything the right way). It is just a basic structure which is about 7m x 5m and it just works a treat.



Frost on the "ugly aviary"

We get big frosts in Taralga with the temperatures down to about minus 7° Celsius quite regularly.

We have the opportunity to mix half a dozen birds in an aviary with half a dozen different kinds. However, one of the things that we are doing more and more, because of time constraints and cost, etc., is that we are tending to keep all the fruit eaters together if we can. We also have a lot of birds that are meat eaters and we've got them altogether in another bank of aviaries. We have approximately 70 aviaries and enclosures now that we have to deal with on a daily basis and it's just me and my wife and more often than not, just myself.



Green Catbird  
(*Ailuroedus crassirostris*)

I have never bred a Green Catbird but I've had them nest this year. I don't know if any of you have seen a Catbird's nest but they make the most fantastic nest. It's like a woven basket, a terrific thing to look at.

Some of you may know Peter Kennedy from Orange. He bred one this year. He's been trying for years and years and so I asked him *"what was the difference, did you throw a lot more live food at them?"* He said *"I took your advice and put more chook pellets in for them, but I'm not sure if that made a difference or not."*

I don't believe the chook pellets actually were the go. I can't see them feeding the young ones chook pellets. It could be that with the pellets they were getting a higher level of protein in their diet. It might have just helped the birds to be more consistent. We've found that with the

Bowerbirds and Catbirds that if we put more chook pellets in these days it seems to work a treat.

This following photo shows another one of our mixed aviaries as it was at that time.



When I talk about mixed aviaries, that one is about 11m x 3m. That aviary housed Gang Gangs and Catbirds and a couple of Lorikeets. I was fiddling with the idea of how I could come up with a combination of birds which were typically forest dwelling birds. Unfortunately it just didn't display well in an aviary like that. At the end of the day you've still got a bare aviary.



One of the things that the Gang Gangs love is meat. They just love dog rocks. We had one cock that was a particular classic. He would get up on the perches and if any cockatoos pursued it, he'd just share it with the hen bird. He'd hold it out for her and she'd have a nibble and he'd have a bit of nibble. We've got a couple of honeyeaters that do that.

We've got a Brown honeyeater that when I go in with the mealworms (and he's not supposed to get them because he's not part of the mealworm regime as such); but he will come and take one from me out of the container. Every time without fail he takes the mealworm and goes and feeds it to the hen bird and then comes back and gets one for himself. My wife thinks he's the perfect husband.



channel-billed cuckoo (*Scythrops novaehollandiae*)

The Channel-billed cuckoos are a really interesting bird. For a lot of people they are not a very colourful bird, but they are just so striking and gauntly in appearance. They are another bird that is pretty much omnivorous. We use a meat mix for them, mixed vegetables and a bit of fruit. They are a very easy bird to keep. Quite a striking bird and whenever people come around they are taken by them.

They are a migratory bird that migrates to the warmer climates of Northern Australia and New Guinea during winter. Obviously they are not able to do this in a captive situation but I have never found them to be bothered by it. One of them I would have had for 10 years now. It's been with me at Bowral and at Taralga. It was hand reared and it is in an aviary at the moment that is a very long one and very open. It never seems troubled and quite often it will just sleep outside.

I haven't bred the Channel-bills but it would be nice to think that it might be possible to breed them. They are a cuckoo and cuckoos as you know lay in the nests of other birds. The Channel-bill prefers to lay their eggs in the nests of magpies or currawongs. I know people where they have laid and they hope to collect the eggs. They've not done it as yet but perhaps that's the way to go with them in the long term. But they are great birds, just fantastic birds. Particularly the one that was hand reared.

When we moved to Taralga we had plans, or rather I had plans (my wife tends to go along with my plans either willing or unwillingly) to perhaps open to the public one day and so everything that we've done we've tried to do within the expectation of the Department in terms of the Wild Life Licensing position on it.



Regulation 6ft chain mesh fence with overhang

So we've put up a 6ft fence with an overhang, a chain mesh fence, and that rings most of the property. When I say most of the property, we've got 25 acres and we've got about seven that we would like to enclose. So the fence runs around about 3/4 of that and I've got a 6ft fence at the back of that. The 6ft fence was quite effective for many years in keeping foxes out. However, all of a sudden out of the blue they worked that one out and they were over it.

I guess most people who have anything to do with the Department in terms of their expectations and it doesn't matter if you are John Stafford with a couple of aviaries in your backyard or you are Featherdale or you are Taronga Zoo, the standards are the standards are the standards, which is fair enough. If you've got any native animals you need to have something that is equivalent for that species and at times you sort of go, "*oh man, they're doing my head in*", you know. However, then you look at it and see how effective that 6ft chain wire fence with the overhang has been for us and the 6ft fence that we thought we could get away with; you don't get away with it. It is quite costly, but we intend to continue on with that.

We have a big dam on the property and a lot of water fowl. We keep Black swans which breed there regularly every year.



We've got some Grass Whistling ducks that have bred there for us and the young ones free fly which is pretty cool. They fly around like pigeons and come back again. We have Chestnut Teal and Blue-billed ducks and a few different things there, and that's pretty good, we like that. We had very successful breeding up until two years ago but now we've got those White-headed coots on the dam and they are just taking everything out. As best we can see as soon as something has a young one the coots are onto them. So yes the coots have got to go. I've got a wonderful great big trap set up and there is a beautiful lake at Mittagong that has lots of coots on it. I think they will like the company down there. That's where I think they need to migrate to.

The photo on the right is a Pied Mandarin duck. It is a hen but it begs the question as to whether or not it's a true pied or a little bit like me, it's got a little bit grey as it got older! I suspect that it is that.

It came from Melbourne Zoo. The guys down there didn't want it because it was a mutation and they essentially don't want mutations there. I quickly gathered it up and it is a nice talking point and people like it.



Pied Mandarin duck (*Aix galericulata*)

Young Black Swans on the edge of the dam under one of our overhanging Willow trees.

We've got willows growing on the dam and they grow along all our creeks. We've actually got a grant to remove a lot of them which is great, but we are leaving a lot of them right on the edge because to get that sort of growth and get it going again would take forever and I won't live long enough to see it. We get a lot of native birds nesting in the willows over the dam. This year we had a pair of White-necked herons nest there which is fairly cool. We are getting a lot of birds come through. We get Chestnut teals and a lot of water fowl will just come in. Some of them don't stay very long.



Young Black Swans on the edge of the dam under one of our overhanging Willow trees

It is quite funny in the winter time when we get very heavy frosts. We'll come down to the dam in the morning and we'll see the Black swans with white backs just floating around on the dam. The frost just settles on them.



Brush Turkey Enclosure (Insert - Brush Turkey affectionately known as Stuart)

We use a lot of netting which has been really, really good and quite effective. The only problem with it is the bars that sit across the top which we used to try to give it some sort of shape and hold it up. When the wind blows it was rubbing on the netting and causing it to fray. It's one of the issues that people constantly talk about with netting, what to use and what not to use. There is all sorts of netting that you can use and you can use a bowl at the top which people have suggested reduces that sort of friction. However, we get incredibly high winds where we are; I mean they basically built a wind farm on my doorstep. I walk out the front door and go "swoosh, swoosh, swoosh," and there's a reason for it.

We've tried different things to try and stop the netting rubbing. The best thing we've found so far is to actually get shade cloth and wrap it around the top of the bars and that stops it. So we are doing that on some of them at the moment and we just tie them off at the edge with cable ties.

We do have a problem with rats chewing the netting sometimes because they want to get in. Not such an issue when you have got standard chook mesh because they can pass through but where you have got half inch wire say in a typical finch situation and you've got that netting on top, that's an issue. You should always be aware that you will need to electrify it all or do something that will stop them coming through.

Our Cape Barons breed fairly regularly for us. We've got a few different kinds of geese; Canadian geese, Egyptian geese and Magpie geese.



Cape Barren goose (*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*) and our White Swan (*family Anatidae*)

We have one White swan. They are a fantastic bird and they are so beautiful, a simply wonderful bird. I've had huge issues with our White swan because he has been on his own for quite a lot of years now and I'm not quite sure if I'll ever successfully introduce a female.

A wild Black swan landed on the pond with him one day and it was like I was seeing one of those wild life documentaries where killer animals go head to tail. They were wrapping their neck around the other one and flipping it in the water. It was quite amazing. I'd heard about them being aggressive but I hadn't quite seen it like that.

Magpie geese can be aggressive but not like that. We have one male and my wife was only saying this morning "*he got me again!*" People come along and chat and go up against the wire and they say "*how cute*" and he gets them through the wire. But they are not really that dangerous.



Magpie goose  
(*Anseranas semipalmata*)

On our block we're quite fortunate that there's a creek that runs through it and into the dam. The creek runs down through the aviaries pictured below and back out again across the side of the block.

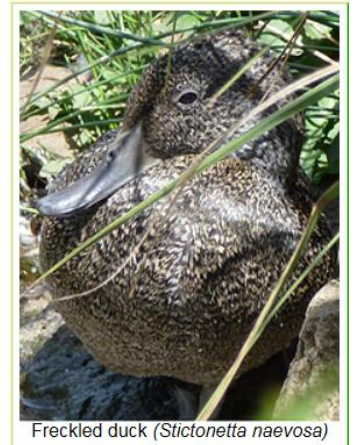


When we bought the property it was in the middle of a drought. I spoke to a couple of people at the time because Council has a stipulation that you can't build close to a watercourse. I spoke to one person at the Lands Department in Moss Vale who said "no there's no watercourses there or anything". I don't know where he got his information from because when we put our Development Application in to do what we wanted to do on the property Council said "oh you've got a dedicated watercourse down there". We subsequently found this out and probably on average for about 8-9 months of the year the creek is flowing. In fact when it floods it absolutely just rampages through there. It's like rapids coming down over those rocks and it will spill right out. We've got our Freckle ducks in there so we're hoping that this year with the amount of foliage that we've got in there now and the way that we've got it set up, that once it floods again the Freckle ducks might successfully breed for us.

We've got a colony of Freckled ducks. There's around about 16-20 of them and as most people would know they are fairly rare. There's not a lot of Freckled ducks around these days and certainly not in private collections. There are a couple of institutions (one in Victoria and one in NSW) where they are doing okay with them.

Currently there are a couple of little ponds that the Freckled ducks use and we have an adjoining aviary which is sort of like an "L" shaped pen. We are going to open that up into one large pen for them. It will be quite a substantial area and we'll see how we go this season.

The Pink-eared duck in the photo on the left is wild one that landed on the dam. It sat there for hours. It was fantastic. Then the Mountain ducks drove them away. It all comes down to that compatibility issue again. The Mountain ducks are a shocking bird sometimes to have in a mixed collection. So I took the Mountain ducks and put them in a pen of their own. We put a pair of Burdekin ducks on the dam which are not nearly so aggressive. I don't quite like it as much because everything else I had on the dam was native and peculiar to our area. Now I've got this Queenslander in there and it doesn't quite fit!



Freckled duck (*Stictonetta naevosa*)



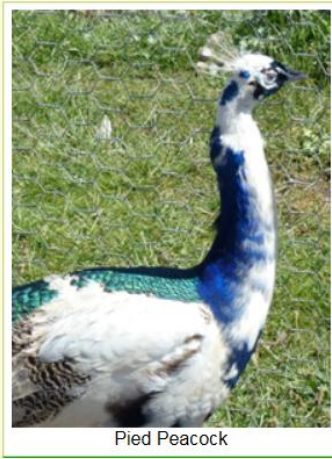
Pink-eared duck (*Malacorhynchus membranaceus*)

Glossy ibis in the snow is a bit different for them but they do really well.



Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) in the snow

At the moment we've got the White-faced herons in with the Glossy ibis. We've also got some Shovelers in there and a couple of other things as well. If the Shovelers were to breed the herons would eat the young so within the next couple of days we are going to change them around. We are just going to keep the Mountain ducks in there and of course the ibis and we think that will be a better fit. We don't think the Glossies will prey on the young ones. We will watch them but I think they will be okay.



Pied Peacock

The Pied peacock is a stunning bird. From an exhibition point of view there is just nothing like them. I have been to Featherdale so many times; I am the strange guy that people used to see wandering around in a suit at lunch time when everybody else was there with their kids. I remember the Pied peacock and how impressive he was. I remember seeing a group of people gathered around while one of the keepers was doing a presentation with the flying foxes. The Pied peacock started displaying and it was the end of presentation.

We are setting up a row of pheasant aviaries with each kind of pheasant on one side and the Green peafowl will be on the other. It isn't roofed at the moment in spite of the climate down there being like it is but there is a lot of the foliage growing. The pheasants have wintered there and they just get in underneath it with few dramas.

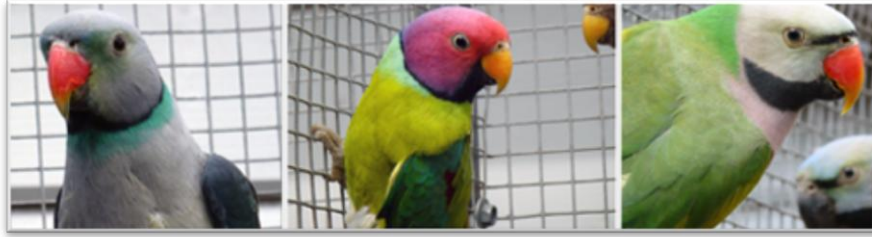


Lady Amherst pheasant  
(*Chrysolophus amherstiae*) displaying

In terms of compatibility and presentation we'd like to set up a row of pheasant aviaries with just a pair in each aviary. We are going to roof the aviary with wire and put some sheeting on it. I've just got to be careful I don't kill the plants underneath it. We will put things like Bleeding heart pigeons, New Guinea fowl, Brown doves and perhaps some lorikeets in there as well. We would like to keep a sort of Asian theme about it although we are taking a bit of licence there on that. We think it will make a much more attractive exhibit when you've got something you can see up in the air and something on the ground. The pheasants may be a bit boring displayed on their own.

We have a few suspended aviaries.





Parrot enthusiasts will instantly recognise the birds in a few of the photos (above) that I picked out for tonight's presentation.

We use a lot of John Galea's PVC cylinder nest boxes. Initially when I put some up I wasn't getting any response from my birds to them and I thought I'd blown it. I bought a lot of them and I'd blown a lot of money; but now I find they are really good.

They are so easy to keep clean and I also find that where you've got numbers of them in an aviary they can look quite good. You haven't got that issue of how to hang them and where to put them and all those sorts of issues. Up against the bare iron they work okay.

We keep a few mutations of one kind or another. As I said earlier we're getting out of those and keeping more of our native birds like Diamond doves, etc.



Cylinder Nest Box

Last year I bred my first Common Bronzewing in the fawn; a really stunning bird with all the shining wing feathers. So in spite of the fact that I talk about getting out of mutations, like anybody when you've got something that nobody else has got, I'm going to hang onto it.

We've put them through the aviaries and even though it can be difficult to establish a mutation I'll keep working on them until we do it.



Fawn Common Bronzewing mutation

You would think sometimes that a simple bird like the Common Bronzewing is probably the easiest birds to breed but I haven't bred a similar one now for about six months. Sometimes you think I've got it all happening; I've got lots of splits, I've got lots of birds, and then you sort of hit a bit of a brick wall sometimes. We'll see how we go next year.

Butcherbirds – I love these guys, I think they're such a neat, cool looking bird. They are nice in the aviary and a great sound. We got these on licence. We weren't able to get the common Butcherbird on licence but I picked up some just recently and National Parks and Wildlife have added them to the books. So if any of you that are excited about Butcherbirds and want to add them to your aviaries, feel free. They're just not that compatible, that's all, just bear that in mind. I mix the common Butcherbirds in with the cuckoos and a couple of Blue-winged Kookaburras.



Butcherbirds

The Tawny Frogmouths are another of my favourites. I love those guys. I talked about the Black and White Hooded Robins, I love them. I love the Tawny Frogmouths, I love Curlews. It's one of these issues when it comes to opening to the public or not. *"John what you need to keep in mind"* my wife keeps saying, *"is that not everyone in the world likes grey and dark green birds."* Everyone loves Tawny Frogmouths though. I haven't bred them but I believe I have a pair now which is something that I haven't had before. There's another issue with that too, how do you display a Tawny Frogmouth so that people can view them in an aviary but at the same time give them enough room and enough privacy to breed?



Tawny Frogmouth (pair)



More suspended aviaries



A few different Lorikeets

Perhaps for people that know a lot about lorikeets this would not be news to them. When you talk about the pure Kimberley Lorikeet you are talking about a bird with a pure red collar. A lot of people keep talking about them being hybridised or crossed or whatever, and most people would assume that the bird with the red collar in the photograph (above left) with the strong red colour is a fairly good example of a wild Kimberley Lorikeet, and it may well be. However, the bird in the photo that is so much paler is actually a wild caught Kimberly red collar. It's interesting the difference.



We have Blue-faced honeyeaters in with the parrots because they are another bird that's just a shocker in terms of being aggressive. They can be terrible but with bigger birds it isn't an issue. However, it is very unlikely that you are going to breed them in that situation.

We feed the Kookaburras and our owls on day old chickens. I am getting the Kookaburras onto meat now because it helps us a lot and I think it is better for the birds if you can vary the diet a little bit. It also means that you don't get stuck with the problem of the availability of day old chickens all the time. We tried a couple of other things with different meat mixes. It worked okay with the Kookaburras but it certainly didn't work with the Tawny Frogmouths. We had a lot of difficulty getting them to eat anything but day olds chickens and mice, but mice are expensive.

Getting out of the birds now but it gives you an idea of the diversity of things we've got.



We have landscaped a lizard pit which houses common Blue-tongues, Cunningham skinks and shingle backs. We were breeding them quite successfully until a Goshawk came down and raided them. My wife likes the lizards and she was there one day feeding the lizards and the Goshawk was actually in the log on the floor and he came out in the space after he'd been feeding on the young ones. Goshawks are a real problem down there.



That's our Dingo's – Whitey and Red. I'm not really imaginative on names as you can see, but it works.



We've only got three Guanacos and they are the last three guanacos in Australia unfortunately. We've got a desexed male, a male and a female. They are all quite old with the exception of the male. He has cross bred with a Llama but not for me. Guanacos are a bigger animal, carrying a little bit more fibre. We've got Llamas and Alpacas. The Guanacos are much more highly strung, a different temperament altogether, but they are seriously cool. It will be a shame to see them go.



We have donkeys and ponies. We also have some fallow deer, some hog deer and I've got some chital deer coming tomorrow.



The photo above is Eric our fallow deer which I took only two weeks ago. He was just standing up on the hill and it came out particularly well I thought. Every time I try to move him or yard him he jumps a 6ft fence and at the moment he is wandering the paddocks somewhere. He comes back in and goes antler to antler with the other guys but I haven't been able to catch him again.



Hugo is a family pet. We would like a South American aviary. We have seen a couple that are set up particularly well.

Up at the Hunter Valley Zoo Jason Pearson has a fantastic looking aviary where is has got a couple of Macaws, some Blue-fronted Amazons and some Sun conures in the one aviary and it just looks a treat and works well. That's one place that I can recommend if you are interested in birds. It's a zoo but Jason has always had a bit of interest in birds and he's got some really interesting exhibits that you probably won't see in other places. Outside of Featherdale he is probably one of the few people who still have a fair commitment to keeping and displaying birds. But

like all zoo owners he'll start on a bird aviary and then if he gets a chance to get a Fennec fox or a wolf or something else, zip goes the bird aviary because it's a better display and it works better as far as the budget is concerned.

We're hoping that our little attraction (should it ever gets off the ground) be a home for some unusual and different kinds of birds. We can't ever hope (for a variety of reasons, not the least of which I'm not getting any younger) to start a zoo right now and come up with all sorts of dramatic things. However we can come up with what I guess you would call a passive attraction that feels good, looks good, with nice aviaries and with some native animals that are relatively easy to keep and will cater for an audience that is happy with that. It's not a high tourism area; we're not going to get busloads of tourists coming through or anything like that. The business we would get we would go out and chase ourselves and we'd have to work at it, but we hope that we can just come up with a point of difference; it is what will work for us. That is the plan as we go forward.

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