



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)

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

PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia

Palm Grass **(*Setaria palmifolia*)**

(ASNSW Meeting - August 2013)

By Graeme Phipps

Graeme exhibited pots of Palm Grass including some in seed. Palm Grass is valuable for finch breeders who would be focussed on the seeds, and also for pheasant breeders because it can give some much appreciated cover for pheasants kept in relatively small aviaries.

Perhaps 50 years ago I visited Jack Finlayson's pheasantry at High's Road, Pennant Hills. I think it was from Jack that I obtained my trio of [Edward's Pheasants \(*Lophura edwardsii*\)](#). Anyhow, he had a clump of Palm Grass growing in the middle of most of his sandy pheasant runs, which were quite small, and it worked well especially as cover for females so that they were able to get away from the ever present attention of males in the breeding season - but also, many species of pheasants are quite shy and don't like humans being so much within their FFF space.

(FFF is Fright Flight Fight). The 'Fright' distance is that where the animal is aware of your presence, might be slightly edgy but doesn't really do anything; 'Flight' is where you have come too close and the animal seeks to leave; and of course 'Fight' is where you are in a capture situation or way too close and the animal responds accordingly. These measureable distances are critical in captive animal management because ideally you should build enclosures such that their dimensions are maybe a pace towards the 'Fright' distance away from the 'Flight' distance – otherwise animals can be always on edge, and this can be auto-pilot – something fixed for that species. Of course you can design things so that this distance is not compromised. One of the aspects of maintaining Noegel Cages which are identical in most ways to Suspended Cages is that they are managed to consider the psychology of the captive. Anyway, sight barriers and retreats such as afforded by Palm Grass can make all the difference to the birds. Great for environmental enrichment and so easy!

The Palm Grass I have has been in constant cultivation from stock given by Jack.

The plant is hardy. Likes it a bit shaded- so is great for aviaries; also likes a bit of water too. The only thing is that they are great harbours for rodents – especially mice. Rats you can exclude from an aviary, but I have always found mice a challenge. An article by Doug Hill and Marcus Pollard about Finch Grasses has an interesting and maybe obvious solution for this. Grow grasses (including Palm Grass) in a pot, and you can submerge the pot in a 44 gallon drum of water (or your fishpond say) and drown any rodents that have accessed the pot either by the holes in the base or from the top. The plant won't mind at all.

Setaria palmifolia is an Asian grass, and is an environmental weed in parts of Australia. It is a fairly elegant plant as the image shows.



Palm Grass (*Setaria palmifolia*)
Courtesy of [Wikipedia](#)

Extra comments as printed in the ASNSW Review August/September 2013

Palm grass is an evergreen tall tropical grass, (it is not a palm) native to most of Asia, with wide leaves. The leaves are 50-100mm wide and can grow up to 1.5m in length. Although in Sydney I have not seen them grow so long. When in seed the seed heads could reach 1.8m in height. In much of Asia it is a weed and even in southern Australia it can get out of control so it must not be allowed to escape into the native environment.

It can be cultivated by division or seed. In Sydney it seeds in the warmer months from October – March. The seeds are edible and are favoured by most finches. The leaves are also used by weaver finches to construct their nest.

It is a very versatile plant and can be grown in a variety of conditions ranging from full sun to semi shade. It prefers moist condition, especially in full sun, such as around ponds but will also tolerate semi dry conditions for limited times duration. It is relatively drought tolerant once established.

It can be grown in the ground or in pots. I grow mine in pots and rotate them into aviaries. When I remove one pot I submerge it in tub or pond of water and allow it to become drenched. It is then allowed to dry out before resting after a week or so it is replaced in the aviary. Using this method several pots are required. It is an important cover grass for pheasants and other ground dwelling birds. It can be untidy after birds have chewed upon it but this gives the birds an activity to fill in their time.

I like an untidy aviary and so do the birds. Plants in an aviary create an activity for the birds.



The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW): <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org>
Membership Secretary: PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia
E-mail: aviculturalsocietynsw@yahoo.com.au <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org/contactUs.php>
Join us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/AviculturalSocietyNSW>
Follow us on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/#!/AvicultureNSW>

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in the Avicultural Review and/or on this website do not necessarily represent those of the Avicultural Society of NSW. No responsibility is accepted by the Society, the Editor, the author/s, Webmaster and/or Administrator/s for the statements, opinions and advice contained herein. Readers should rely upon their own inquiries in making any decisions relating to their own interests.