



# The United Bird Societies of South Australia Inc.

The South Australian affiliate of The Avicultural Federation of Australia Inc.

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Patron: His Excellency, Sir Eric Neal AC CVO, Governor of South Australia.

## Fact Sheet No. 4: Aviaries in gardens.

Aviaries can add both interest and beauty to a garden. They can be purchased ready-to-assemble in standard shapes and sizes, or a handyperson can easily construct one suitable for a particular situation. There are a number of basic requirements to consider when planning to buy or construct an aviary, such as:

**The wellbeing of the birds** - It is important that an aviary is constructed and positioned with due thought given to the health and comfort of the birds to be housed. These two points should over-ride all other considerations.

**Position** - The aviary should be situated in such a way as to cause neither annoyance nor distraction to neighbours. ( It is unwise to keep very noisy species in a built up area. ) Ideally it should face north through to east and should be protected from the prevailing weather with solid sides on the west and south, it should have protection at ground level from vermin entry ( rats & mice ), and should have a well drained floor. Parrot species are best housed on a concrete floor covered lightly with coarse river sand or shellgrit, while finches are best on a natural earth floor. An aviary can add interest and distinction to an otherwise dull spot, and it can be used to mask unsightly areas.

**Design** - The structure can be planned to your own design and situation, providing the wellbeing of the birds is always paramount. If small ( up to three metres in length ) it is best to have the greater part of the roof solid, the sides solid for the rear half and the remainder covered with wire. The front should be all wire. To minimise vermin entry it is wise to have at least forty-five centimetres ( 18" ) of flat iron around the base of the wire portion of the sides and front. Ideally this should also extend at least thirty centimetres ( 12" ) into the ground as well. If the aviary is large it is usual to have the shelter portion deep enough to prevent any weather being able to fully wet the floor area. In large aviaries the sides and top extending from the shelter area are usually all wire. It is wise to keep the door low to minimise escapes, or better still to construct a safety door system where one enters one door, closes it and then opens another door into the aviary itself ( this system works like an air-lock ). Aviaries built on the lines of a gazebo, if adequately protected are distinctive and useful.

**Comfort** - As well as needing protection from draughts ( very important ), cold winds and rain, insulation fixed to the underside of the roof will provide some respite during the hot weather, a misting sprinkler system is also useful during the extreme heat of summer.

**Security** - Aviary doors should always be padlocked, and it may be necessary to take precautions to protect the birds from larger predators, such as cats and stray dogs. Various methods can be used to overcome this problem including double-wiring of the roof and extension of the flat iron around the base of the walls ( refer to **Design** ).

**Landscaping** - If parrot species are housed in the aviary it will not be possible to grow any plants in the aviary as the birds will quickly destroy them. However, it is possible to plant the area behind the aviary in such a manner as to make it appear that the birds are in fairly natural surroundings. If finches or other non-chewing species are kept, plants can either be grown direct in the aviary or in pots that are rotated in the aviary. In this manner it is possible to achieve a pleasant blend of garden and birds. A pond adjacent to the aviary will add to the picture. Some suitable plants for the aviary are native shrubs such as Bottlebrush, various Melaleuca species and flowering annuals. Honeysuckle or Clematis can be grown on a trellis to disguise the solid walls of the shelter. Nasturtiums will add colour and attract insects to the benefit of the birds.

**Furniture** - Seed containers ( dishes, hoppers, etc. ) and easily cleaned water vessels are essential. Seed containers should be placed well out of the weather ( damp seed is dangerous ) and in such a manner as to minimise fouling by the birds. Care should also be taken to ensure rodents cannot easily reach the seed supply. Hanging the container from the centre of the roof is one method of achieving this. Water vessels must be protected from direct sun and should be placed where there is no possibility of fouling from droppings. Clean water must be available at all times.

**Perches** - The type and size will depend on the type of birds kept, but generally are best placed around the walls. Care should be taken to ensure the aviary is not over cluttered with perches, birds should have plenty of room for flight. Part trees erected in the aviary are not a good idea as they can impede flight and can become soiled from droppings, especially on the lower branches and twigs. Natural materials such as fruit tree pruning of varying thicknesses are preferable to uniform size dowel as they are softer on the feet and provide varying grips for exercise and comfort. **Do not place perches above food or water containers.**

**Varieties of bird to keep** - This is a matter of personal choice, but care must be exercised to ensure only compatible species are kept together. As a general rule parrot species cannot safely be housed with finches or other small birds. Most parrot species are very territorial when in breeding condition, and cannot be kept as a mixed collection, serious injury or death can easily result from the housing of incompatible species in the one aviary. Seek experienced advice before deciding what species to mix.

The United Bird Societies of South Australia will be pleased to advise of clubs to cater for your needs - contact the Executive Officer on ( 08 ) 8445 6567.

