Bimbimbi Birds Today

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Yellow-collared Macaw pair

Bimbimbi Birds, established and run by Graham and Glenys Matthews and family is, I believe, one of the leading bird breeding facilities in Australian aviculture today. I introduced the beginnings of Bimbimbi Birds in *The Evolution of Bimbimbi Birds* in *Volume 22 Issue 7*. When visiting Bimbimbi Birds I have been so distracted by the beauty of the birds that I have neglected to closely examine the structure and technology which underlies the actual aviaries. Graham's talk at *Parrots 2008* motivated me to take more notice—I really wanted to know how someone living in inner suburbia, like me, could apply some of these principles to my own set-up.

The first thing that strikes you as you enter the driveway of this facility is how unobtrusive the aviaries really are. Bimbimbi Birds has around 200 aviaries plus a state-of-the-art incubation and handrearing facility. The aviaries are so inconspicuous that you wouldn't believe this at first—it isn't apparent until you start venturing. I love Graham's quote that, 'very little is impossible if you're prepared to work for it—and have a good bank manager!' How true this is!

Graham first began dreaming of, and then designing, the breeding complex back in 2000. In 2004 the new bird kitchen, incubation, handrearing and weaning rooms were completed as was the small-medium parrot complex. The large macaw complex was completed in 2006. A number of elements needed to be considered during the planning stages of such a complex. Security, climate change, the physical housing of the species, potential innovations and special requirements for the purpose-built bird rooms, not to mention planning for the present and future, were all aspects which needed to be taken into consideration. After finally dragging my eyes (and camera) away from the birds, I was able to see exactly how well Graham had taken all these elements into account.

Conventional aviaries housing macaws

Let me take you for a journey through the aviary complexes at Bimbimbi Birds.

Starting at the large macaw complex, I stood in one of the aviaries happily photographing a pair of Blue and Gold Macaws, until they decided to fly straight towards me! Although neither bird actually connected with me—they flew past me instead—I had been waiting for the impact. At 2.4 metres wide, however, these aviaries certainly provide plenty of space for them to spread their wings. There are nine conventional aviaries in the first row of the large macaw complex, all with solid side walls, each measuring 6 metres long x 2.4 metres wide x 3 metres high. Five other aviaries in the complex also have solid sides, each measuring 6.3 metres long x 1.5 metres wide x 3 metres high. There are two large holding aviaries each measuring 9 metres square x 3 metres high. Three metre high safety flights are built between the blocks of aviaries.

Nestboxes are all mounted externally and constructed of a wooden internal box with insulation and metal outside and a hardwood face plate inside the aviary. There is an abundance of wood supplied for chewing and enrichment. Gardens have been planted in the front of the aviaries to provide some stimulation and are surrounded by paving—creating an attractive environment. In each aviary the size appropriate perches are held in place with V-shaped perch holders. These conventional type aviaries housing large macaws are surprisingly clean.

The small-medium parrot complex is another sight to behold. This complex consists of three sheds each measuring 33 metres long. The two external sheds are 7.5 metres wide and contain 34 suspended aviaries each measuring 2.4 metres long x 0.9 metres wide x 1.2 metres high. The centre shed is 9 metres wide and contains 25 suspended aviaries each measuring 3 metres long x 1.2 metres wide x 1.2 metres high. These three individual sheds, with door access between each of them, combine to make one complex.

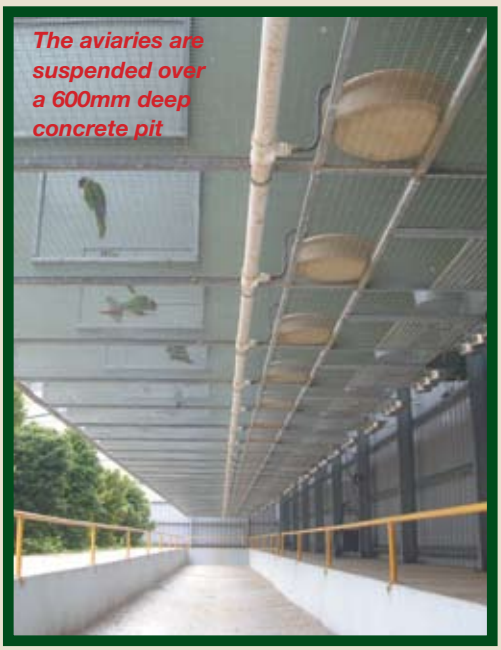
The aviaries all face plantings of trellised passionfruit and fruit trees interplanted with lilly pillies. Species are able to interact between the individual aviaries through double-wired mesh windows that can be blocked off if necessary. All birds are supplied with fresh eucalyptus branches to provide stimulation. Birds are incredibly intelligent and >

The three sheds contain 93 suspended aviaries housing small to medium-sized parrots

Suspended aviary housing Severe's Macaws

their psychological welfare must be taken into account to maintain optimum health and wellbeing.

A small portion of the sheds is covered, but the majority is open with protection provided by plastic woven netting. Graham strongly believes that birds must have access to natural rainfall and sunlight. The external nestboxes are constructed entirely from wood and softwood face plates are used inside the aviary. White Colorbond® is placed over the inspection holes and nesting information can be recorded on this with a whiteboard marker. Each aviary is permanently numbered.



The aviaries are suspended over a 600mm deep concrete pit

The aviaries are suspended above concrete floors with a 600mm deep pit that drains to a central point and collects from all three sheds then flows to an external storage tank outside the complex. The waste water collected here is used for watering gardens. As Graham is quite tall, the pits have been constructed to a depth that allows him to comfortably stand while undertaking the regular cleaning routine.

A number of innovations have been incorporated into the design of the complexes. Filtered, equalised water is supplied through computerised multi-station controllers that also control the overhead sprinklers used frequently during the summer heat—temperatures can rise to the mid 40°C—and for watering the gardens. The twelve water stations may be set to run for a pre-determined period at any time and the sprinklers are also able to be activated at a specific temperature.

All feeding stations feature drawers that slide out allowing access to, or changing of, the stainless steel bowls for different foods. This minimises interference from the bird keeper by reducing the need to enter the aviaries.

Two exhaust fans have been installed in each shed to assist air circulation as well as temperature control in the extreme summer heat, particularly when there is little or no air movement. When the overhead sprinklers and fans are run simultaneously, the system works much like an evaporative air conditioner. Trying to maintain a fine balance between control of the elements and the psychological/physical welfare of the birds is tricky. Storms and heat waves are unavoidable and can cause chaos, however Graham has tried to minimise the impact of these wherever possible.

The birds are all so bright, active and inquisitive and I had to have a giggle when meeting the father of my African Grey Parrot. I'm not sure what Graham said to him but as he turned his back Graham was told not so politely where to go by this gorgeous big boy. Perhaps I could blame *Arthur's* language on parentage rather than his current environment!

The final stop on this tour is the birdrooms which have been blended into the design of the main house—located approximately 4 metres from the complexes allowing easy access from both the aviaries and the house. The kitchen area is both time and space efficient. Bimbimbi's business registration certificate, mission statement and a few 'Graham quotes' are hung around the room. A laptop sits on a bench for up-to-date record keeping, along with a zip heater for continual hot water, two sinks and an industrial dishwasher plus a drying rack for the huge number of stainless steel feed bowls to be cleaned daily.

Down the corridor leads to the first stage room which houses the incubator, the hatcher and the first stage brooders—kept at 36°C and 33°C. A whiteboard hangs on the wall for quick record keeping that can then be transferred onto the laptop.

The supply of filtered water and other alarms is controlled by the computerised multi-station controllers

Exhaust fans are installed in each aviary complex

The next room houses the brooders—kept at 30ºC and 27ºC. Part of the design of this room is a purpose-built feeding station where all chicks are spoon-fed and a coffee mug warmer is used to maintain formula temperature. In both of these rooms the power supply is constantly monitored, as is all equipment—for maximum and minimum temperatures and power failure. Should there be a problem with either of these, or a security issue, a dialler is activated and an appropriate message forwarded to a mobile phone and/or landline.

Next is the weaning room, which is equipped with shelves to hold the chicks in containers at the early weaning stage and weaning cages for the older chicks—all constructed from heavy gauge mesh and powder-coated metal. Hygiene is a must in these rooms, therefore all walls are constructed of Ceramalite™ enamelled glass sheeting where necessary, floors are tiled and hot and cold water is readily available.

Security is evident in the form of lights, cameras and movement activated alarms. Signage at the front of the property clearly warns that there is surveillance equipment and that trespassers will be prosecuted. Inspection of the aviaries and birds is by appointment only. Welfare of the birds is of the utmost importance and elements such as safety flights, quarantine/isolation areas, and an uninterrupted power supply (UPS)—for those times when the power may be compromised—have all been installed.

Bimbimbi Birds is considered to be a 5-star bird breeding facility so I asked Graham how the establishment achieves this status. He outlined that:

- Birds and their wellbeing are the facility's priority
- The origins of the flock are assured
- The facility operates to ensure the future of aviculture
- The facility is family-based with values to match
- The operators have a diverse species knowledge.

So, can a person living in suburbia, like me, apply the designs and innovations used at Bimbimbi Birds to their own, much smaller, breeding set-up? According to Graham, this is possible, although it does require thought and the necessary finances. It really depends on how far one wishes to go:

- Are you a companion parrot breeder or are you breeding for other potential breeders?
- Is this a hobby or do you plan to make it into a business?

Do not be reckless. Educate yourself on what birds you're buying and the source from which you are acquiring them. If you plan to operate your aviaries as a business, consider the experience you have.

When living in suburbia your neighbours need to be considered, particularly in relation to where the aviaries are situated and what species you plan to keep (large macaws and noise sensitive neighbours are potentially an ugly mix). Happy neighbours may end up being one of your best security measures. Look at which species you wish to keep and research noise levels.

Slide-out feeding stations and externally-mounted nestboxes that can be marked with records all facilitate easy and efficient maintenance

Consider:

- Which species can be housed together or those that can be colony-bred versus those that need an individual aviary per pair
- Aviary design and sizes. Select either suspended aviaries (great for arboreal feeders and lorikeets) or conventional aviaries
- The best position for the aviaries in regards to sunlight during the day
- What stimulation and privacy needs to be provided for the birds
- Extra housing for holding juveniles and birds prior to selling
- Storage areas for food, breeding boxes, transport boxes and accessories
- Automatic systems for supply of drinking water and spray systems for use in the heat of summer
- Access to feeding stations by using doors or slide-out trays.

There are a wide variety of designs that will fit in with almost any size yard and environment. If you are considering a total makeover then be sure to incorporate both the physical layout and what may be needed in the future into your design plans.

Conclusion

Bimbimbi Birds is certainly a world class facility. The thought and hard work that has gone into the planning and development is amazing. What I really like is the fact that in spite of all the innovations and designs, your attention isn't diverted from the birds—they still remain the focus. The housing, innovations and security only serve to enhance the efficiency of the set-up and, ultimately, the welfare of the birds.

In closing, I would like to say a big thank you to Graham, Glenys and their daughters for allowing me to gain such an insight into the history of Bimbimbi Birds and its journey to the establishment it is today.

With the current economic climate and recent trends in aviculture, many of us have concerns that the keeping of exotic and native species will become a thing of the past. By the sharing of knowledge, working together and with careful planning for the future, I believe that people like Graham, Glenys and their girls will assist in steering the avicultural industry through the problems of today and perhaps even return it to what it was—or maybe even better!

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The birdroom area includes three separate rooms for incubation, brooding and weaning. Incubator room (left) and weaning room