

## Outdoor Fun For Small Birds

### Lovebird enthusiast Frank Horan tells us how to bring out small-bird fun in an aviary setting

We asked Frank Horan, a show judge for the African Lovebird Society whose peach-faced lovebirds spend summer outdoors, for tips on adding enrichment opportunities for birds housed in outdoor aviaries.

**Q:** What unique enrichment opportunities can you create in an aviary environment that you can't do in a home environment?

**A:** My outdoor flight for the peach face is a free-standing, double-wired structure that is 3- by 8- by 6 feet. All my birds are placed in the flight at the same time. It is open on all sides but covered on top to prevent wild birds' droppings from getting in the cage. The fact that the birds are exposed to fresh air, sunshine and rain, I feel, enhances their lives.

**Q:** How do you add play and enrichment opportunities for birds housed in an aviary?

**A:** Most of the flight space is for free flight, but they do have a few swings and hanging toys. Perches are natural branches, and they receive new branches with leaves on a regular basis -- which they strip bare pretty quickly.

**Q:** Do your birds play differently in an aviary setting versus in a home cage setup?

**A:** I think their favorite outdoor game is to tease the neighborhood cats. The cage is elevated, and cats can go underneath. When there is a cat around, the birds sit on the bottom of the cage and watch it. Being in a double-wired cage, they are safe. As a cat(s) walk up and down the length of the cage, a group of peach-faced lovebirds shadow each move it makes. Also, the temperament of my birds change when they are [in the outdoor flight]. The hens that are very territorial in their cages become passive and friendly, landing on my shoulder or head when I am in the flight for cleaning or changing branches.

**Q:** What toys/play opportunities do your aviary birds seem to especially enjoy?

**A:** When outdoors, the flock does not need as much artificial toy stimulation. They seem to enjoy just being outdoors sunning themselves -- it takes up a large part of their day.

**Q:** How often do you rotate aviary toys/ change the environment to add variety and prevent boredom?

**A:** I change their perches every 10 days or so, but the hanging toys and swings remain the same for the 3-month period that they are outdoors. I provide them with whole fresh vegetables during this period. When indoors, they receive cut-up fruit and vegetables. But when outdoors, I try and give them unprocessed food like big bunches of broccoli and corn on the cob (whole with some husk and the silk still attached.) A quarter head of cabbage is something else they enjoy. Everything gets devoured. Sometimes the corn cob disappears, too.

**Q:** How do you monitor toy safety in the aviary?

**A:** Not an issue. I have found that if a bird is hurt (like a cut toe, which is the worst injury I have experienced), it will come up to me and let me see. It sounds farfetched, but it has happened on more than one occasion.

**Q:** Do you notice any health/behavioral benefits to this added outdoor enrichment?

**A:** I believe that my birds benefit greatly from the change of environment. The health benefits are visual. Musculature, color, activity are all greatly enhanced, and when you know your birds you can tell if they are well and happy. You can see it in the sparkle in their eyes and how they interact with you. You can look at them and see that there is a thinking creature in front of you. This state is only evident when my birds are happy.