

NATIONAL FINCH AND SOFTBILL SOCIETY

Journal Volume 25, No. 4 July/Aug 2008





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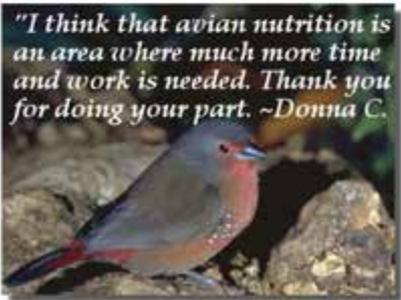
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The National Finch & Softbill Society is dedicated to the introduction of the enjoyment of keeping and breeding Finches and Softbills to all interested parties, enhance the knowledge of our members in keeping and care of these birds, encourage breeding programs, and cooperate with organizations for the preservation of aviculture in this country.

Journal of the National Finch & Softbill Society

Publisher: The National Finch & Softbill Society - <http://www.nfss.org> Editor: Katy Dodd
NFSS Principal Address: 918 Georgia Avenue Etowah, TN 37331

Editorial Policy/Disclaimer: The Journal of the National Finch & Softbill Society is published bi-monthly by NFSS. The following deadlines normally apply to all aspects of the journal:

Deadline for Submissions: 15th day of Dec, Feb, Apr, Jun, Aug, & Oct - NFSS members are encouraged to submit articles, drawings, and photographs. NFSS reserves the right to edit and/or reject all editorial, photographic, and advertising materials submitted for publication to the Journal of the National Finch & Softbill Society.

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Cover Images: The cover image is of a Gold-breasted Starling copyright John Paul Kilmer. Make sure to read his article about Superb Starlings on page 10.

Advertising Rates

Inside Covers (color) \$45.00/Issue or \$225.00/Year; Full Page (B&W) 30.00/Issue or \$153.00/Year; Half-Page (B&W) \$20.00/Issue or \$102.00/Year; Quarter-Page (B&W) \$10.00/Issue or \$51.00/Year. Gwynne Willison, - 430 Coventry Court Folsom, CA 92630 or Email: gwillison@aol.com

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NFSS President's Message

July/August 2008

A Unique Opportunity

In 2006 I had the unique opportunity to work with a Canadian canary club that was planning to import birds from Europe. If I could find a breeder in Europe that was willing to locate the birds I was interested in, I could have them shipped with the birds heading for Canada. I knew of a breeder in Holland and contacted him to see if he would be willing to assist. Not only was he willing to assist but also asked if he could send birds along for other breeders in the United States that he had become friends with. Because the cost of the import would be spread out amongst all those receiving birds equally, the Canadian canary club was willing to let us bring in a fair number of birds, enough to make it well worth the effort.

Our friend in Holland, who cannot be thanked enough, contacted some of the top breeders in Holland and Germany to find the specific birds that we were looking for. These were primarily zebra finches of some of the newer mutations and other more established mutations of top European show quality. After months of collecting birds and holding them until they were ready to ship, the birds were

finally cleared from quarantine and left for Canada. This was by no means a risk free endeavor. All the fees, expenses, and cost of the birds had to be paid in advance. And since each bird was banded and destined for a specific person, that person would lose his investment if the bird did not clear quarantine in Europe or Canada. Thanks to the care and effort of the members in the Canadian canary club the birds did very well in quarantine. All the proper documents were filed with the authorities in Canada and the U.S. and the birds were delivered across the border to me in Michigan. I was then able to ship the birds to the other designated breeders in other parts of the country. Of the nearly 80 birds imported I kept 3 pair for myself and the rest were spread out amongst other breeders.

After two breeding seasons I am happy to say I have enough quality birds to start selling or trading with other breeders that would also like to establish lines to perpetuate the gene pool that we were able to import.

During one of the recent African imports I was lucky enough to buy two pair of

Lemon Breasted Canaries. I have learned that the chances of this species being imported again in the near future are remote. One of the pair I have successfully raised their own young and once again I plan to share offspring with others that have this species to try to preserve this species in American Aviculture.

If you have birds that are rare in aviculture I ask you to consider joining the NFSS Finch and Softbill Save Program. For more information you can go to www.NFSS.org under "Conservation" or contact Vonda Zwick the VP of Finch and Softbill Save at:

611 Hingham Lane
Schaumburg, IL 60193
Email: VondaFSS@finchaviary.com

Best of Luck with your breeding and keeping of your Finches and Softbills and consider sharing your experiences with others through the NFSS journal or husbandry Forum at
NFSS@yahoo.com.

Respectfully,

Bob Peers - President

Volunteer Opportunities!!!

Interested in volunteering to help your NFSS?

NFSS has no paid staff, and we can always use the skills and efforts of our members to accomplish the goals of the Society.

If you have some time to give for anything from stuffing envelopes to computer programming, we want to hear from you!

Please contact NFSS Volunteer Program coordinator,
Tom Keegan at 617-653-0664
(Eastern daytime only please)
or thomkeegan@aol.com for more information.

Why not find out how you can pitch in today?!



Breeding the African Quailfinch

Text and Illustrations by Howard Robinson



The African Quailfinch *Ortygospiza atricollis* is a popular aviary bird in southern Africa and, therefore, observations of nest building, egg laying, incubation and nestling periods have been well documented by both ornithologists and aviculturists.

In the nominate subspecies *O. atricollis*, the cock's forehead, front of face and throat are black except for a small white patch under the lower mandible. The rest of the upperparts are earth-brown or dark grey. The front of the breast is very dark brownish grey, tinged with chestnut and narrowly barred with white. The flanks are

also barred but more broadly. The irises are brownish yellow to light brown, the bill is red and the legs and feet are pinkish brown to flesh-colored. Choosing a true pair is easy as the hen has no black on her face or throat. The juveniles resemble the hen but are paler and have very faintly barred under parts.

The races *Digressa*, *Pallida* and *Bradfieldi* all have a large white chin spot and a white eye ring. The northern races, *Ansongei* and *Ugandae* are plain or un-streaked, the black on the face being more extensive.

Quailfinches in aviculture, in the UK at

least, tended to be offered as one of two types—the ‘West African’ being the birds with the black faces and the ‘East or South African’ being the subspecies sporting white eye rings. Both are now seldom if ever seen.

There are two other species of quailfinch—the Black-chinned or Red-billed Quailfinch *O. Gabonensis* and the Locust Finch *O. locustella*—which are seldom if ever seen in aviculture. A study of the behavioral patterns of quailfinches has suggested that their nearest relatives are almost certainly the avadavats and the Orange-breasted Waxbill.

Quailfinches are indigenous to the highlands of Ethiopia, southern Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, central Tanzania, northern Malawi, north-eastern Zambia, Zimbabwe, central Mozambique, north-eastern Namibia, Botswana and South Africa.

They frequent open grasslands, disused airfields, cultivation and the margins of swamps and dams, but are seldom seen. Breeding birds fly silently from their nests when flushed, vocalizing only when some distance away. Non-breeding birds, in contrast, vocalize immediately on being flushed. This consists of a bell-like ‘tir-rilink, trillink’. The song is a rapid rattling and rambling ‘klik klak, kloik klik kluk klek’. Quailfinches are usually found in small flocks of up to 20 birds or more, except when breeding when they can be

found in pairs. They are completely terrestrial and require low-growing cover in which to breed.

Their nests are formed with dry grass blades and stems—usually well concealed with a porch or a short entrance tube built on the ground under a grass tuft—and thickly lined with soft grass and feathers. A small patch of bare ground usually occurs in front of the entrance.

A clutch of 4–6 white eggs is usually laid with an incubation period of 14 days. It is apparently only the hen who feeds the young although both sexes incubate and roost together in the nest at night. Fledging takes place at about 17–21 days.

A ground-dwelling species, this Estrilidid may be different from anything else that you may have kept. For this reason, you need to adapt your husbandry methods to accommodate some of their natural instincts and behavior.

First and foremost, at least in the UK climate, they are susceptible to cold and damp and must, at all costs, be kept in dry, heated accommodation. When disturbed, they also have the habit of rising vertically, taking off with a soaring, swift and erratic flight. If kept in a birdroom with other species, this behavior can create pandemonium. Many aviculturists are, therefore, not interested in keeping them, which is a shame because, under the right

conditions, quailfinches can prove to be extremely interesting subjects that, once settled, can be willing to go to nest.

To alleviate this problem, contrary to what is generally published, I find that quailfinches are best kept in a long flight cage in a birdroom. The cage should be a minimum of 1.8 meters long x approximately 45cm deep x 76cm high—the longer the cage the better. Sand or sawdust can be used as a floor covering and a number of large stones or logs placed in various areas. Large tufts of grass should also be placed in the corners of the cage in an effort to mimic a miniature natural terrain—a simple approach but one which worked well.

At first, because the birds were rather nervous, I placed lots of cover throughout the cages thinking that they could weave their way through the grasses, making them feel more secure. When disturbed, they have a habit of crouching down, head low and tail upright (as shown in the black-and-white illustration). I soon observed that they always came to a clear area to do this and never actually made use of the cover offered, which simply just reduced the cage area available to them. Removing the cover and simply placing grass tufts in the four corners suited them so much better.

In the wild, quailfinches feed on seeds, insects and spiders. Captive birds, there-

fore, require a similar diet. Large yellow and white millet, panicum, Japanese millet, canary seed and safflower should be provided both dry and soaked. Millet sprays are a great favorite and fresh wild seeding grasses will be eagerly picked over. Livefood should consist of soft, white mini-mealworms, wax worms, white worms and fruit-fly larvae. Egg-food mixed with soaked seed should also be provided daily about a month prior to, and then throughout the breeding season. Water should be provided in shallow dishes until the birds learn to use a hanging bath attached to the cage front. If they are housed with other species they can quickly learn to use drinkers. Once this is achieved, the water dishes can be removed, thus raising the level of hygiene in the cage.

When the cock is coming into breeding condition he sings for most of each day and this, in turn, stimulates the hen. The courtship dance consists of the cock approaching the hen from the rear, head stretched up high and tail angled towards her. He then moves around from one side to the other, all the while singing.

Dried grass and coconut fibres are excellent nesting materials and once the ground nest is completed, all being well, an average clutch of four eggs will ensue. They are very tolerant of both their own kind and other species and only a small area around the nest, up to a radius of 15cm, is defended. This tolerance does

not extend to the bird keeper and even the slightest indication that you had discovered the nest would result in eggs or chicks being ejected. This seemed at odds with the fact that every single nest was always built in a front corner of a cage between a grass tuft and the cage front. I found myself having to resist even just looking in the direction of the nest but trying to sneak a peek from the corner of my eye as I went about my feeding routine.



Both cock and hen take turns to incubate for about 14 days. Soaked seed and live-food are essential at this point, as the youngsters will be fed on these items. When the nestlings are 13 days of age the dark tails are coming through and the wing quills are around 2.5cm long. Their begging calls are not unlike those of nestling Gouldian Finches.

At 17 days of age the youngsters' tails have

a white edge, their undersides are golden-brown, stripes are clearly visible on their chests, their heads have black pin-feathers, the gape marks are still visible and they have black bills. Although they may leave the nest at this stage, it can sometimes take up to another four days. Young cocks start to sing from as early as six weeks of age. Within two days of leaving the nest the young are fairly competent fliers. They soon settle down and, like their parents, are very unlikely to go crashing up into the roof of the cage.

Nearly everything that I have read recommends these birds being housed in tall, outside aviaries. However, I find that in this type of housing the birds remain very erratic and nervous and unlikely to breed. Caged birds become a lot more confident and settle down more easily. I was able to breed the South African subspecies to five generations in this way. However, I found the West African subspecies to be somewhat lethargic in comparison and much less intelligent and was only able to achieve one breeding success with them over a two-year period.

About the Author

The first finches Howard Robinson bred starting back in 1991, *Ortygospiza atricollis fuscacrista muelleri* were in fact a first captive breeding for the species. Please view his website which sells bone china

plates with his bird art on them.

<http://www.users.zetnet.co.uk/gwi-associates/finches.html>

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The Estrildian Forum is an ornithological journal produced for the purpose of relating the most up to date information on all species belonging to the family Estrididae, both in the wild and captivity.

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articles and scientific papers for publication. Similar species, where a demand of information exists, are also covered. Design and Illustrations by Howard Robinson.

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A Superb Miracle

By John Kilmer

It was an odd pairing from the beginning: Stanley, the African Superb Starling, and his aged, one-legged wife Isabella.

You see, Stanley is disturbed. I raised him from a hatchling, and yes, I will admit I created a bit of a monster. He's been known to peck at the eyeballs of my house guests, poop on fine dress shirts after church, and attack eyeglasses—and their owners—with a vengeance. Yet Stanley loves attention from me. He will shriek with delight from my shoulder while I play the piano, preen himself busily on my arm as I type on my laptop, and beg for mealworms from his perch in the bird room. He's learned to wolf whistle indiscriminately at pretty girls and old men alike, mimic the beeps of my microwave and toaster, and reproduce a canary song with amazing accuracy.

But Stanley has an identity crisis. He doesn't know if he's bird or human. And true to starling form, he's got that all-out, type-A personality. Strangely enough, he's learned to take his intensity out on himself. I've watched him hammer his own foot like there's no tomorrow, viciously attacking the thing as if it was an intruder attached to his own body. See, I told you he was disturbed!

His wife Isabella, on the other hand, is a calm, demure thing—even for a starling. She's an original from the wild-caught pairs I bought at a bird show in Oregon several years ago. One day, when housed in a flight cage in my barn, Isabella mysteriously lost her right leg. I came home to discover fresh blood smeared liberally on the perches, and a confused Isabella, flapping wildly to keep her balance. Perhaps the missing leg had something to do with the predatory jays housed in the next aviary over; I'll never know.

Stanley and Isabella have lived together for years—more out of cage space necessity than anything else. Isabella, after all, is past her prime. Her legs are scaly, defining the morphology of an old bird. She sits around a lot on her calloused breast and simply does nothing.

I've been convinced from the beginning that Stanley's identity crisis precluded any breeding possibilities. He's ignored and attacked Isabella by turn—certainly not acting the part of a supportive husband. At times I've nearly separated them during his tantrums, but then life returns to normal. I was certain he didn't have a clue how to perform the sexual act. Besides, Isabella's haphazard, one-legged stance on the perch made fertilization nearly impossible, even if he did get into gear. I doubted she even had any eggs lurking in her wizened body. "You ought to try to breed them," a bird buddy encouraged, and with that suggestion I laughed.



Stanley - Photo©John Kilmer

“There is no chance anything would happen, even though Stanley constantly wants to build a nest. He picks up anything he can in his beak and hops wildly around with it. But I know it’s impossible. Maybe I’ll just let him build a nest to keep him occupied.” If anything else, I decided he might stop the endless focus of pecking that offending foot.

And so I moved Stanley and Isabella to a spacious flight cage, complete with piles of straw on the floor, and a roomy nest box. Stanley immediately took interest, and flew in and out of the box, fairly yelling with glee. Within days he was carrying long pieces of grass into the nest box, and was soon joined by Isabella. She’d just completed a molt, and somehow looked

less elderly in her new plumage. Was it my imagination, or did Stanley choose to attack her less? Once or twice I actually caught them sitting amiably side by side on a perch.

I got distracted by work, and let the nest building continue for a couple weeks without monitoring. Stanley was pleased as peach pie, guarding his house zealously and attacking canaries left and right through the tops of their cages when I allowed him to fly free in the bird room. One day while cleaning up after him, I decided to check the nest box. Sure enough, a complete nest. And surprise! One perfect blue egg nestled in the far left corner. Isabella looked proud of herself. The next day I found a second egg, and



Stanley guarding his nest Photo©John Kilmer

before long, 4 eggs carefully arranged themselves among the strands of straw. Certain they were not fertile, I allowed Isabella to begin her dutiful brooding. At least she'd have something to do after all the work of laying.

But something went terribly wrong. Stanley freaked out at sight of the eggs. He shrieked at them from the next box opening, angry that four foreign objects had

usurped his nest. I came home from work one day to find all the eggs pierced through and flung to the floor. Now it was Stanley's turn to look pleased. He had chased away the intruders! Isabella sulked about the flight, a forlorn look in her eyes.

Yet it didn't take long for her to set up housekeeping anew—3 eggs this time. What was I to do? Pull the nest box? Let



Stanley repeat his destructive performance? I knew the eggs weren't fertile, but I hated to see them destroyed again. Then I got an idea. I rigged a smaller cage next to the nest box in the bird flight. Much to his consternation, Stanley found this to be his new home. He could chirp to Isabella, but he couldn't reach the nest box, and brooding commenced immediately. Isabella seemed joyful to be rid of his interference, but Stanley resented the confinement, pacing back and forth on his perch with fierce yellow eyes.

A week into the brooding process I candled an egg—just for the fun of it. I was intrigued not to find the normal, opaque blankness of an infertile egg, but instead, dark strands of substance. Then, wonder of wonders: a tiny, beating heart! I stared, open mouthed. It was incredible. Stanley

had successfully bred with Isabella.

Within another week or two, three eager yellow mouths emerged from those satiny blue shells, and Isabella began her sharp-eyed quest for meal-worms. Raising soft-bill chicks in captivity is always tricky business. Often, the parents wish to feed nothing but live food to their young. Yet commercial live food is limited. The most available food, meal worms, are not exceptionally nutritious unless gut loaded, and present the problem of intestinal impaction in very young birds due to chitin build-up. Wax worms are a viable alternative, but not often commercially available in the pet shops with fresh supplies every few days. Isabella readily fed hard-boiled egg to the chicks, yet not with the same enthusiasm as live food. The first few days of life are critical to a softbill chick's survival. Sadly, two of the young chicks succumbed. Yet one fat, round fellow seemed to be thriving.

"It's like the story of Abraham and Sarah," said my mother when I relayed the amazing story of a confused Stanley and aged Isabella. And so, the chick's name came to be Isaac, which means laughter. For it says in the Bible, "And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me... I have born him a son in his old age.'" (Genesis 21: 6, 7b)

With no siblings to compete for food, Isaac grew and grew. Isabella's trips between the

food tray and nest box become more frequent. And Stanley began to go crazy. Screeching his consternation at not being set free to perform his fatherly duty, he hopped back and forth in the cage, beak crammed full of hard-boiled egg, dry food morsels, pellets, and just about everything else he could collect. The instinct to feed a chick had definitely kicked in, but I still didn't trust him with his offspring. Given his unpredictability, I was certain Stanley would attack and kill his own baby.

The day arrived when Isaac at last fledged, and Stanley first set eyes on his son. The feeding behavior continued, and one day I glimpsed the endearing site of Stanley attempting to feed the yellow-mouthed Isaac through his cage wires. It was time to release Stanley from his confinement. I watched nervously that first day as he dug into his paternal duties with ardor. He didn't quite know how to act at first, holding large beak-fulls of food high above the screeching youngster, only to jab them almost violently into the waiting throat. I feared a perforation, but Isaac held his own, and Stanley's attempts at feeding became less and less awkward. Isabella looked on with soft-eyed support, and began repairing the nest, ready for round three.

Sure enough, while Stanley proudly fed his baby, Isabella went back to laying eggs. I was amazed that her dried-up body could continue the production, but it was so. Certain that Stanley had at last learned

where babies come from, I left him at large in the flight to tend to the screeching Isaac while Isabella began to brood.

Another quick check in the bird room one day revealed a tragedy. Stanley once again had done his naughty deed, piercing eggs and strewing the shells all about on the cage floor. Bad boy, Stanley!

It's now been over 8 weeks since Isaac hatched. He still begs for food from Stanley on occasion, but he's learned to eat on his own. He's sassy and well-adjusted, though I can't say the same for his father. Stanley hasn't yet learned not to destroy his own eggs. I have removed the nest box to give Isabella a break, though she shows every sign of wanting to continue her factory-like production. I've noticed one thing: that Stanley pecks his own foot a lot less when he has a child to attend to. He's more apt to simply sit and sing—in a word, to look content. I think fatherhood is growing on him, even though he's still disturbed. Maybe a trip to the bird shrink is in order. Know of any good ones?

About the Author

John Kilmer writes from Spokane, Washington. He'd like to start a network of African starling enthusiasts. Visit his website at:

www.easysite.com/superbstarlings

Contact him at

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The Dangers of Antibiotic Use

By Terry Martin BVSC

Originally printed in the 'Southeast Queensland Zebra Finch Society' Zebra Times, 2008 May Edition

I am prompted to write this article by something I witnessed at the club's November sale; One member was telling another how good a 'medication' was that was offered for sale on the QFS sale stand. On face value, the advice was well meaning and the product, containing oxytetracycline, is described as a 'broad spectrum' antibiotic which makes it sound ideal. The fact that it can be readily purchased 'over the counter' from many non veterinary sources means that it is inexpensive, but perhaps this should cause the first warning bells to sound?

Before discussing oxytetracycline in detail, I will digress for a moment to explain a very important problem in modern society – antibiotic resistance. Logically, antibiotic resistance develops through the use of an antibiotic, which kills the susceptible organisms and leaves the resistant ones behind to produce future generations. When resistance develops to one antibiotic we simply choose another antibiotic and move on. With so many different antibiotics available nowadays, why is resistance a problem in bacteria you might wonder? Well, the answer is very small and it's called a plasmid!

Bacteria, like all other organisms have genetic material in their nucleus, although in their case it is known as RNA rather than the DNA of animals. When a bacteria develops resistance to an antibiotic, it is through mutation of genes in its RNA, similar to how we obtain new colours in birds (random luck). But whereas birds can only pass on this genetic change to their offspring, bacteria have small pieces of RNA called plasmids that are available for transfer between 'adult' bacteria. What is more, these plasmids can even be transferred between different species of bacteria! And to the great benefit of bacteria, but unfortunately for us, the genes for most antibiotic resistances are carried on plasmids!!

What does this mean in simple terms? Bacteria that develop resistance to an antibiotic can pass it on not just to their own offspring, but to all their neighbours and even to bacteria that are completely different. Through the use of antibiotics, a harmless bacteria that is meant to live in our bowel might develop resistance and then pass it on to a disease causing bacteria months or years later. Every single use of antibiotics in the world contributes in small degrees to the overall level of resist-

ance bacteria in the world. Which means that when we use antibiotics, it is essential we kill all bacteria present and not leave behind a few bacteria which might produce resistance. This translates into 'use antibiotics as directed and for the full prescription'.

Of course this implies that the antibiotic has been prescribed by a doctor for ourselves or in the case of our animals a veterinarian, for they will choose the most appropriate antibiotic for the specific situation and give the correct instructions in their use.

But wait a minute, products containing oxytetracycline are available over the counter without a veterinary prescription, why is that? Basically, it is because this drug and a few others like certain sulphur based antibiotics, date back to around the time of WWII. This predates much of the current careful laws regarding antibiotic use. They have been widely used for over 60 years and as such, bacterial resistance to oxytetracycline is almost universal and quite simply, the governmental departments of health no longer care about the use of this drug. Unfortunately, its use in our birds is worse than useless because of its effects on bacterial resistance.

Why is oxytetracycline described as a 'broad spectrum' antibiotic? This terminology means that its mode of action allows it to have effects on a wide range of

different bacteria species and also related organisms. It does not imply that it will be effective across that entire range. When it was first discovered it was a 'miracle drug' and this family of antibiotics still have some uses today for certain classes of organisms such as Chlamydia and Mycoplasma among others. But the common pathogens (disease causing bacteria) have been exposed to the drug for so long that they all have resistance built in. The situation is even worse in aviculture because of the widespread misuse of the drug since it is available 'over the counter' in pet shops and produce stores. Its regular misuse by breeders continually reinforces the levels of bacterial resistance to this antibiotic.

But the problem with using this drug does not stop there. Since antimicrobial resistance is carried on plasmids, selecting for resistance to one antibiotic will also select for any other bacterial resistances that are present in the gene pool of the bacteria exposed to the medication. By using one ineffective antibiotic, the breeder might be inadvertently promoting resistance to dozens of other drugs. And this is exactly what we see in aviculture again and again. In fact, when avian bacteria are cultured and their antibiotic sensitivity determined in the laboratory, it is rare to find more than one or two antibiotics that will still do the job and often those are only the antibiotics that are toxic in birds!

Yet the evils of oxytetracycline do not stop

there. This drug is not absorbed from the intestinal tract of birds, which means that virtually none reaches areas of the body that are affected by disease and instead the antibiotic is concentrated in the bowel where it merely kills off the 'good' bacteria. It is very common for candida yeast and avian gastric yeast to overgrow in the bowel of a bird treated with oxytetracycline.

So why do many breeders believe that oxytetracycline 'saved' their bird? Quite simply the bird was going to survive anyway. I would confidently say that this drug has not saved a single avian life in the past two or three decades! But has contributed to the death of thousands.

Let's face the real reason why so many bird keepers use this drug in one of its many generic forms. They do not feel the bird being treated is worth the cost of taking it to the vet. To that I reply: the cost of using this drug (and any other drug incorrectly) might one day be your own health, when bacterial resistance in your environment means that you develop an incurable disease. A veterinary consult will not seem so expensive at that time. If the bird is not worth enough to take it to the vet, then euthanase it humanly rather than contribute to the growing problem of antimicrobial resistance in bacteria.

Addendum regarding Antiseptics:

Generally speaking, antiseptics are not as

much of an issue as antibiotic use; however resistance can develop to those as well and would then pass the same way. In older human hospitals this becomes an issue where the bacteria are resistant to many things. Use of Apple Cider Vinegar in water is a good alternative to antibiotic use but it will only act on and within the gastro-intestinal tract. It is not going to successfully treat a bird with a systemic bacterial infection. Chlorhexidine can also be used in drinking water to reduce bacterial and algal growth in water supplies.

About the Author

Terry Martin BVSc biological

Terry began keeping birds with a pair of Zebra Finches in 1975, and they have been a continuous part of his life ever since. His interest in mutations and genetics was fostered in those early years by the myriad colours in Zebra finches and over the past two decades has expanded into many other species as well. Terry graduated from the University of Queensland in 1988 with a degree in Veterinary Science.

Since 2002 he has authored or co-authored three books published by Australian Birdkeeper Publications – A guide to Colour Mutations and Genetics in Parrots, A Guide to Gouldian Finches and their Colour mutations, A guide to Cockatiels and their colour mutations. Terry has spoken at two Australian AFA conferences and numerous other events. He also regularly contributes articles to

club magazines and writes for ABK magazine as well as moderating a number of internet discussion groups on avian mutations and genetics.

Terry exhibits Zebra Finches, breeds a range of different parrots and their mutations and also breeds and exhibits poultry.



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Bird Photography - Is the Switch to Digital Worth it?

By Gerhard Hofman - All Rights Reserved

There are only few things which have changed the life of common people as dramatically as the invention of the PC/Mac. At first, only a tool for professionals and office people, they are now common in most houses. The Internet is no longer the medium for scientists but is a source for information and entertainment for millions of people. Long gone is the LP, it was pushed aside by the more convenient CD which, meanwhile, is yes-

terday itself – the MP3 has been its killer. There was one thing in life which didn't change as fast; good old film was still around when music jumped on the digital train. Okay, there were a couple of journalists who had already switched to digital, but the cameras were horribly expensive, and the results could in no way compete with film but, and this is a big but, they were fast. They shot the picture and, just a couple of minutes later, it could be distributed all over the world - time is money in the news business. And even the professionals liked what had already made Polaroid a success; you could see the results immediately. The technology revolution was on its way. The



Shot of a Beautiful Firetail adult male. The grain in the photo shows it is a scan from a slide. I love would to shoot this picture again on Digital. The image-quality would be so much better. *Copyright: © Gerhard Hofmann & Claudia Mettke-Hofmann - All Rights Reserved*

first point and shoot cameras, despite being expensive and having a low resolution, were already fascinating cameras and opened the window to the future of photography. From this time on, the digital train was on its way and there was no way that it would not leave the film-train behind.

Nowadays film looks like an ancient relic, digital is actually so successful that the big players like Nikon no longer develop new camera-bodies for film, some have already stopped their production entirely. The companies which didn't jump on the digital train fast enough are history; they got kicked out of the market.

Believing the advertisements shown in fancy magazines on glossy paper, one could think paradise for photographers is already reality. We no longer have to care about wasted film when the shot isn't per-



Painted Firetails are among my favorite finches and this bird was housed in a large aviary and always liked to sit on this wonderful perch. It was again just a matter of patience to wait until it would return to its favorite spot. 180mm Macro, flash slightly above the bird and another one for the background.

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fect – just delete it and try again. No waste of money any more. The cameras, of course, are perfect tools; autofocus (AF) is lightning fast, under-or overexposures are virtually impossible, and of course, the colors perfectly match reality. Do you

believe it? I guess you don't and neither do I. There is no free lunch not even in the digital world.

The cameras and accessories are still pretty expensive and new models pop up every month. What to choose;

Point & Shoot or Single Lens Reflex (SLR)? How many megapixels? What about digiscoping? Which accessories are necessary? In case of an SLR, can I still use my old lenses? Do I really need a PC? Choices, choices – welcome to the land of digital photography. Let's try to answer the most important questions.

In the old days, it was easy for a wildlife photographer to decide between getting an SLR or a Point & Shoot. There was simply no Point & Shoot camera that was suitable for our needs; the focal length of all of them was way too short. It seems time has changed things, but honestly, if you don't go the way of digiscoping, it didn't change that much. Despite the enormous zoom range of the modern compact-cameras, the SLR is still the best tool for bird photography. The zoom range of the small cameras looks promising, but and this is a big but, the AF is not even close to a SLR. The other snag is the bad performance at high light sensitivities

KEEPING TRACK OF TERMS

- **AF** - Autofocus
- **DIGISCOPING** - taking photos through a telescope or binoculars
- **ISO** - number indicating a digital camera's sensitivity to light. Higher ISO numbers allow for better photos in low or poor lighting
- **MP** - Megapixel (notes the image quality of the camera)
- **IS** - Image Stabilizer
- **MACRO** - Magnification lens for fine details of objects up close

(ISO). ISO is the number indicating a digital camera sensor's sensitivity to light. The higher the sensitivity, the less light is needed to make an exposure. With an SLR it is no problem to shoot at 800 ISO. With a megazoom com-

compact-camera, 100 ISO is about as high as you want to go for decent quality. In very few compact cameras, 200 ISO looks okay, but the loss of detail is pretty obvious, whereas the 800 ISO or even 1600 ISO with the newest generation of SLR is good enough for a cover page in a high end magazine. Another snag of Point & Shoot cameras, there is still the shutter delay; it is no longer as bad as in the early times, but it still too long for most bird-photography. Due to the small sensor format, compact-cameras have an enormous depth of field that is often a disadvantage for serious bird photography, because it is nearly impossible to get a smooth and homogenous background. It is a killer for taking pictures through the wire mesh in the zoo. In the latter case, you want a very shallow depth of field so that the wire mesh is invisible in the picture. Of course, decent results are possible with the small, all in one computers, but they are harder to achieve and the usage is limited.

Okay, we go for an SLR but which one? How much of an SLR does a newbie need? Is only the latest professional camera with 12-21 MegaPixel good enough for the job or is entry-level SLR enough to do the job?

The question about the MP is easy to answer; all but very few SLRs offer the 8-10MP which is more than enough for what we want the camera to do. In fact, it is probably even enough to be printed as a cover page on a renowned journal. If your pockets are deep enough you can, of course, go for a camera in the 12-16MP range which offers a bit higher resolution and more possibilities to crop the image.

What else has to be considered? Currently, Canon and Nikon are the leader of the pack. Fuji (which is basically a Nikon camera using a Fuji sensor but Nikon lenses), Pentax/Samsung, Sony (former Minolta), Olympus

and newbie Panasonic all offer pretty good cameras for our needs. But it is no secret that Canon and Nikon are most popular among nature and bird photographers. The reason is the systems behind the camera-body. With both companies,



Indigo Bunting are stunning birds but if you want to capture the true color don't use flash as I did with this picture. It will lead to a dark face and kind of light greenish blue color on the rest of the plumage. Blue (structural) colors often react totally different to flash than we would expect. With digital we can at least check whether we like it or not and reshoot the the scenery without flash.
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My 500mm lens plus the 2 time converter where mounted on my canon 20D. It equals 1600mm on a 35mm film camera; an enormous focal length. Without image stabilization this picture would be not nearly as sharp as it is. IS, or VR how Nikon calls it, is great for bird photographers; especially if you work with long lenses and wild birds. It doesn't matter so much if you mainly work with captive birds where you anyway use flash most of the time.
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you have the choice of as many different lenses as you can imagine, and there is nearly no photographic problem that isn't covered by their systems.

If you start from scratch, always remember you don't buy a camera you buy into a system.

1. Ask yourself which company offers the most choices in terms of suitable lenses?
2. Which camera fits my hands best?
3. Which company offers helpful features like image stabilization, fast AF with manual override?
4. Which company will still be in the market in the near future?
5. And, if you own already a film-SLR, can

I use the lenses I already have?

Just five questions but only Canon and Nikon will pass all five. No wonder we see them most among the top professionals all over the world.

Let's look into the details. Canon and Nikon offer by far the most attractive line of lenses for bird photography; both companies offer 70/80-200mm lenses with image stabilizer/ vibration reduction (IS/VR), several 70/100mm – 300mm with IS/VR, 80/100mm-400mm also with IS, and they offer the big bazookas like 2,8/300mm or my favorite bird lens, the 4,0/500mm and 4.0/600mm lenses. Canon offers more lenses with IS than

Nikon, and their very fast and accurate ultrasonic AF allows manual override without fiddling for a tiny switch on the camera or lens. Nikon is trying to catch up but still has some lenses like 80-400mm without ultrasonic AF or some lenses like the 4.0/300mm without IS. Pentax, Sony and Olympus have much fewer choices although they offer the IS feature in the camera body so that every lens attached becomes, in principal, an IS lens. But it is a compromise and often doesn't work as effectively as the in-lens IS technology. The big disadvantage is they still don't have the variety of different lenses for us bird nuts and, if you want to start from scratch, I would either go with Canon or Nikon. Things look different if one already owns a couple of lenses. You can use your Minolta-AF lenses on the new Sony bodies, so you just have to buy the camera body to step into the digital world. The same is true for Pentax AF lenses. Olympus and Panasonic are both totally new systems; your old Olympus lenses won't work on their bodies.

Canon currently offers about seven camera bodies which suit our needs starting at \$600.00 and, for those with deep pockets, up to \$7000.00. Three camera bodies, the EOS 5D and the EOS 1 D Marks IIs and IIIs are so called "full frame bodies", which means that the sensor in these cameras has the same size as the good old slide 24x36mm. The 1 D Mark II/, MarkIIIn, or the brand new 1D Mark III have smaller sensors called APS-H size. They are smaller by the factor of 1.3.

The most popular Canon cameras, the EOS 20/30/40D and all the Rebels, like the XT or XSI, are equipped with APS-C sensors which are 1.6 times smaller than the good old film. We will explain later what is hidden behind these sizes.

Until recently, Nikon only offered camera bodies with APS-C sensors which are 1.5 times smaller than film. Their entry level cameras are the D40/D40x/D60, the medium class is covered by the D80 and D200/D300, and they just started to market their full-frame versions, the D700 and D3. Both Pentax and Sony use APS-C sensors but currently don't offer high end camera-bodies. Olympus and Panasonic /Leica use 4/3 sensors which are 2 times smaller than film. Their relatively small sensors still have trouble with digital noise when used at higher ISO settings (>400 ISO).

What is the difference between an APS-C and a so called full-frame sensor, other than that cameras using the latter one are twice as expensive than cameras using APS-C sensors? In principle it is just a size difference. The full-frame sensor has the same dimensions as the good old slide (36mm x 24mm), whereas APS-C is considerably smaller (25.7mm x 15.7mm for most brands, the Canon uses 22.5mm x 15.0mm) as is the case for the even smaller $\frac{3}{4}$ sensors from Olympus, Panasonic and Leica (17.3mm x 13.0mm). Well, this is sure nice to know but it doesn't help us really with the decision of which camera to choose. There



I was visiting a friend who has a large planted aviary in his living room. A 70-300mm and two f looking light for this little fellow. To the left you would see half-ripe spray millet a delicacy we k it to. *Copyright: © Gerhard Hofmann & Claudia Mettke-Hofmann - All Rights Reserved*



lashes (one on each side and both about one 30cm above of the bird) helped to get natural
now the bird couldn't resist. It was only a matter of minutes until it perched where we wanted

are benefits and tradeoffs for all sensor sizes. The biggest benefit for the full-frame sensor is, because of the size of the sensor, the single light sensitive pixels are bigger and therefore these sensors show less noise whereas the $\frac{3}{4}$ sensors which are 2 times smaller than full-frame show the highest amount of digital noise. Full-frame cameras deliver the highest image-quality, especially with high ISO settings like 1600 ISO up to 3200 ISO. APS-C cameras are not far behind in terms of image-quality and can mostly be used up to ISO 1000 without suffering from too much noise; $\frac{3}{4}$ cameras fall behind with ISO 400 and higher.

Despite the higher amount of noise with APS-C, there is a huge benefit for bird-photographers - the so called crop factor. In principle these sensors act like one is using a longer lens. The APS-C a 100 mm acts like a 150 mm (Canon 160 mm) lens, a 300 mm acts like 450 mm (Canon 480 mm) lens; the same lenses mounted on a camera with a $\frac{3}{4}$ sensor would act like a 200 mm and the 300 mm like a 600 mm lens. Things change when you use your wide angle lens. A 16 mm lens acts like a 24 mm on an APS-C camera and as a 32 mm lens on a $\frac{3}{4}$ camera body.

Choices – which way to go? Well, if one is not really into wide angle shots or in desperate need for a 20 or more megapixel full frame camera, the APS-C cameras are the way to go. Currently they offer the most bang for the buck and are the best

compromise in terms of image quality and sensor size.

As already mentioned every company offers suitable camera bodies but only the two big players, Canon and Nikon, offer the bells and whistles which make life easier for bird photographers. It doesn't matter so much whether your camera has 10, 12 or 14 MP, it is way more important how comfortable you feel with the camera. How is the handling, is it easy to grab, does the autofocus do what you want, what about the viewfinder -- is it bright and big enough? The list goes on and on. All modern cameras deliver an image-quality which is good enough for cover shots in glossy magazines. It is really more important how well the camera body handles. My favorite cameras are the Canon the 40D, Rebel XSI, the Nikon the D300 and the D60. The latter ones are the budget models which are less robust, have fewer bells and whistles, but nonetheless, are a hell lot of camera and image quality that is more than enough for our needs.

Sadly, we are not done when we go home with our brand new digital camera. We still need storage cards which come in different brands, capacities, and formats. Common cards for amateur cameras are the small SD cards and, for the more professional cameras, the CF cards. I never was a friend of very-large capacity cards, let's say 16GB. Sure they hold a lot of pictures, but if they get lost or are defective, it means also a lot of pictures are gone.

Four GB cards are a pretty good compromise for cameras in the 8-14MP range. They hold enough pictures (about 150-220 RAW pictures and even more if you shoot JPGs) and are currently really cheap. I went with Sandisk and never had a card which failed. Actually one got into the washing machine and I could still retrieve all pictures, another was still in the camera when I dropped it into the Mississippi. The camera was no longer working, the flash card did. I am sure other brands, like Lexar, are as reliable. I just would avoid the very cheap cards from unknown sources offered on eBay.



How many cards you need depends on how many pictures you shoot and whether you have the possibility to download the pictures to your PC regularly. Long hiking trips or expeditions to remote areas usually don't allow this comfort; either you bring your own laptop or a portable photo storage device like the JOBO Giga Vu or the Epson Photoviewer. Don't go the cheap way, choose a storage device with a big enough hard-drive (>80GB). In any case, I strongly recommend backing up the downloaded pictures regularly to external hard-drives like the "Western Digital My Passport Essentials." The

For real close-ups like these mouth markings of a juvenile Star-finch I just love my 100mm Macro lens. It is kind of a Swiss-Army knife for photographers working with captive birds there are only few situations you can't cover with this lens. When I am working with birds in cages or fledglings (they are mostly pretty tame) this is the lens which is mounted on my 40D.

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320GB Version currently runs for around \$125.00. Believe me, backup is essential! It is not a matter of whether your hard-drive in the PC/notebook or portable photo storage device fails, it is a matter of when it will fail – sadly all hard-drives will fail at one point. Call me paranoid but I always backup my pictures twice, coming from an IT background I saw too many

disasters.

Let's come to the lens. Mostly you will buy your camera with a kit lens like an 18-55mm. I strongly recommend choosing a lens with image stabilization (called VR with Nikon). They are a bit more expensive but they will increase the number of sharp pictures you shoot dramatically. Nikon offers an 18-200mm with this technology which is kind of comparable to a Swiss-Army knife; it nearly does everything but isn't perfect. Zooms with such a huge range are usually not stellar performers at the long end which, sadly, is the one we will use most. I would recommend going with the kit lens which is

roughly \$100 more than the camera alone. The kit lens usually is a fine lens for the occasional family parties or landscapes it is just not of outstanding quality but, for birds, we won't use this range very often.

The world looks differently when we look at the macro lenses. For our own captive birds, the 100mm or 180/200mm often is the best lens to use. Luckily nearly all macro lenses are of high quality and are great performers. You can't go wrong when you go with a lens of your camera manufacturer, but I would look for a lens with the possibility to instantly manually override the autofocus without switching



Black-chinned Yuhinas are pretty small and very active and not really tame so I had to switch to my 180mm Macro lens. Again the possibility to fine tune AF with my hands was essential to get a sharp well composed shot. Sigma and Canon offer this feature on their macros.

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back to manual focus. More often than not, this is exactly the fraction of a second which makes the difference between getting the shot or capturing an empty perch. Canon calls these lenses USM, Nikon Silent Wave and Sigma HSM. Sigma, by the way, offers bargain 150mm and 180mm macro lenses of very high quality with exactly this technology; they are the only non Canon lenses in my camera bag. Another advantage of the ultrasonic driven autofocus is that they are nearly silent whereas the other technologies create quite a bit of noise which most birds don't really appreciate.



Of course we also need a long lens. I am a big fan of zoom lenses in the range of 100-400mm (they should have some sort of image stabilization). They are perfect for large aviaries and, of course bird

parks and zoos, but they also do a pretty good job with tamer birds at the feeder or herons, pelicans, etc. I went with the Canon 100-400mm/IS and frankly, it is one of my most used lenses. Nikon offers a similar 80-400mm/VR but sadly the AF

I like reflections, they are not only pleasing, emotional images but they also help to get nice shots when you can't get close enough for a frame filling shot. This picture was shot on a freezing cold day in Mississippi, I had to stand in cold water up to my belly for hours. I felt miserable cold and my toes were already numb as the bird suddenly perched where it was sitting nearly every morning. At this time of day the sun only illuminated the background, therefore I had to use two flashes to light the bird.

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is not the fastest, Sigma offers a 120-400mm/OS and a 50-500mm/OS but they are just hitting the market so nobody knows how they perform in the long run. An alternative is to go with a 300mm/4.0. Canon and Nikon offer these options.

Both are absolutely stellar performers in terms of image-quality, even better than the mentioned zooms. Both lenses work perfectly together with dedicated 1.4 time converters which make a 420mm/5.6. Unfortunately, only the Canon lens offers image stabilization and fast ultrasonic AF, whereas the Nikon lens only offers the fast silent-wave autofocus but no stabilization system.

When you are hopelessly infected with the bird-photography virus, sooner or later the wish comes to own one of the real big lenses like a 300mm/2.8 or the most favorite lens among many bird-photographers, a 500mm/4.0 not to speak of the 600mm/4.0. These are all amazing tools. They all work perfectly together with the dedicated 1.4 and 2.0 converters. But, and this is a big but, even the smallish 300mm/2.8 costs around \$3000 and the 500mm and 600mm are nearly twice as much. And of course you need a solid tripod and tripod head for these monsters which adds another \$1000. Working with one of these lenses is a lot of fun but carrying them around isn't. Already my basic long lens setup is about 10kg (22 lbs), add another couple of lenses and a backup camera body and you end up with 20-25kg (44 – 55 lbs), at least you don't need to exercise when you come home from a long hike.

I strongly recommend getting a 1.4 times converter; it really doesn't eat up a lot of space but is one of the most versatile items in your camera bag. Added to your

200 macro you have a 280mm macro, added to the 300mm lens you get a 420mm lens. If I can't get close enough I sometimes even use it together with my 100-400mm zoom which makes it a 140mm-560mm. However, in this case the AF is no longer working and image quality suffers quite a bit. Kenko, Tamron and Sigma offer relatively cheap alternatives to the one the camera manufacturers offer. In many cases, these original converters only fit to dedicated lenses whereas the Kenkos, Tamrons and Sigmas work together with nearly every lens.

A flash is a "must have" for the photographer working with captive birds, it is the only way you get good colors and sharp pictures in indoor aviaries or cages. If the budget allows it, go for the big flash-guns of your camera manufacturer, for example, the 580EXII when you work with Canon. They recycle faster, offer the possibility to connect to special high-voltage batteries, and they are simply more powerful so you can use slower ASA settings or/and use smaller apertures. If you want to document breeding success of certain birds, nestlings, mouth-markings or even fledglings nothing beats a macro flash like Canon's MR 14 EX ring-flash or the even more versatile Twin flash MT-24EX. Nikon offers a fantastic Macro flash-system: The R-1 wireless closeup Speedlight system is currently state of the art and covers everything but cooking coffee for the photographer.

A tripod is an essential help for nearly all kind of photography and I would invest in a tripod you can use for years to come. If the budget allows it, go for a carbon version like the Bogen 190CX3, add a good ball-head from Kirk-Enterprise BH-1 and you are set and done. Don't expect to get a quality tripod or ball-head for cheap; with these items you get what you pay for. The ones I mentioned are not cheap but offer a good compromise between costs and quality.

Finally one should have the right software to handle the pictures. I do most of my editing with Adobe Lightroom which handles nearly every kind of picture file and is also a wonderful tool for organizing your pictures. It is certainly worth it to download the test version from Adobe's web-site. All manufacturers bundle their camera with dedicated raw-converter software. They work pretty well and the image quality they deliver is fine but, if you compare it to Lightroom or Phase One, to name another popular software, they are very cumbersome to use. At the end, you will need five to ten times longer for the same job as you would with Lightroom or Phase One. That was enough reason for me to invest in these tools. Whether one really needs Photoshop CS3 or Photoshop

Elements depends on the user. Elements has gotten pretty good over the years and is fine for all but the toughest tasks. On the other hand, if you would like to go professional the standard is still Photoshop CS3 or probably CS4 in the near future.

It is easy to spend thousands of dollars with this hobby and to forget the main thing, namely taking pictures. Good places to start are in your own backyard. Set up a feeder where you have sufficient light from the right direction, watch the background so you don't catch the neighbor's fence or power lines. Attach a couple of nice perches to the feeder or the pole and you are ready to go.

If you construct a new cage or indoor aviary, plan for additional openings for flash and lens. Moth flash can be triggered wireless so you can even leave them in place. An empty beverage can is the perfect dummy for the lens when the camera is not in place, so the birds get used to this shiny long object. There are tons of possibilities to document our lovely birds, I wish you good luck with your new hobby and if you need any help don't hesitate to shoot me an e-mail at Gerhard@hofmann-photography.de.

Did you know that 20 years of past issues of the NFSS journal are available on line at www.nfss.org ?

Don't miss a single issue after you move.
Be sure to send your new address to the Membership Director.

How to Take Your Own Fantastic Bird Photos - Tips for the Amateur Photographer

Photos provided by Richard Renshaw

The biggest problem faced by Finch and Softbill owners who want to photograph their birds is the fact that they their subject's don't sit still! You can have the best camera in the world, but it won't take a good photograph if the bird isn't even in the frame. The key to this is patience, and a controlled environment.

THE PHOTO BOX

There are several ways to make a Photo Box, but due to the need to enclose and

protect the subject in bird photography, most options are either unsuitable, or fairly expensive to build. However, perhaps the easiest and cheapest way to create a bird photo box is to recycle and modify an old breeder cage.

From the point of focus (where you want the bird to be when you take the photo) to where the camera lens is should be at least 12 - 14 inches (but more distance allows for greater focal range and depth



Photobox made from a recycled old cage with camera setup and background in place.

Photo ©Richard Renshaw

of field). So place one or two perches towards the center back of the photo cage and align them according to how you want the bird to sit in the photo. I.E. If you want a front or back view of the bird, put the perch perpendicular to the shooting line. If you want a profile, then put a short perch with the end pointing towards the camera like a show cage.

You've now defined your point of focus. With luck, your bird will choose to utilize this perch rather than the floor or walls of the cage. To help the bird feel at ease, put a visual barrier between yourself and the bird. Block all but the opening for the camera lens to keep the bird from seeing you. The camera opening should also have a door that can close automatically to prevent escapes when the camera not in place. Behind the perch, a piece of cardstock or pressboard will serve as a basis for removable backgrounds. On the roof and sides of the cage around the perch, block the wire with Tracing paper, Vellum, or a white sheet to prevent the bird from jumping on the wire. If you want to go with something longer lasting, pieces of ceiling light panels or white translucent plastic on top of the cage will also work. These will act as a visual barrier against distractions and, more importantly, as light diffusers to prevent dark shadows in your photo.



Strong light causes shadows like the ones on the back wall here. *Photo ©Richard Renshaw*



A diffuser such as the patio plastic prevents dark shadows. *Photo ©Richard Renshaw*

YOU'VE BUILT THE PHOTO BOX, WHAT NOW?

1. Unless you know what you're doing, don't bother with artificial lighting, shooting indoors, and flash photography. It is easier (and cheaper) to shoot outside, preferably on a cloudy or overcast day.

You can shoot on sunny days, but will have to deal with the heavy shadows the intense light creates.

2. Learn to focus your camera. The bird will move a lot even within the Photo Box. Don't try to track it because your photos will only come out blurry. Focus on the spot that you want the picture to be. Most 'Point and Shoot' cameras auto focus and lock on a target by depressing the shutter button about half way. Find your focus point and hold the shutter button until the finch jumps back into view and/or poses the way you want it to. Then press the shutter the rest of the way to take the picture.

3. Your background should not distract from the subject being photographed so

keep it simple. A solid color or simple picture can be taped to your background, but physical objects such as plants can make focusing on the bird more difficult. When choosing a background, darker tones for light birds or lighter tones for dark birds will make them stand out more. The blurred backgrounds with subjects of a photo in sharp focus are known as 'Bokeh' in photography and take some fairly advanced photography skills to achieve. But this look can be simulated by taping a pre-blurred image to the background of your cage. To make a 'Bokeh background' open the picture you want to use in Photoshop or another image editor and find the "Gaussian Blur" tool. Blur your image to the level you want it to be, then print and tape it in place.



Examples of backgrounds which have been manipulated in Photoshop with the Gaussian Blur filter. The tree on the left is not even oriented properly, but this is not noticeable, when used as a background. *Photos ©Richard Renshaw*

4. Expect to take a lot of photos in order to get a few good ones. With an uncontrollable subject, you will still end up with photos that just do not come out. Patience is the key. With a digital camera you can take as many shots as is needed until you get the one you want. If in the end you get only a handful of really good shots out of a photo-shoot, you are doing well.

If you're still having trouble, here are a few more tips and tricks:

- When the bird is where you want it, try to focus on its head or eye. This will put its key feature in focus. Even if the rest of the bird is a bit blurry, the photo should look good.

- There is no need to zoom all the way in. This can cause focus problems, and you can always crop and scale a raw image to center and compose a good picture later on in your image editing software. Don't forget if you're sharing the images online, resizing to a smaller file size is a good idea.

- If the bird will not get off the floor, try putting something textured down on the cage bottom. Pet bedding or large leafy plants like Ivy which will block its vision if it sits on the ground might help. Using a piece of dowel or a chop



Intense light casting shadows on the back wall and on the CFW Fawn hen. *Photo © Richard Renshaw*



Moderate sunlight and diffusers prevent shadows from being cast on Zebra fledgelings. *Photo © Richard Renshaw*

stick to coach the bird onto the perch also works as well.

- Let the bird get use to the cage for a half hour or so before starting your shoot.

This gives it time to calm down after being moved into the cage, and potentially to preen any mussed feathers back in place.

- Always use some form of platform or camera mount (tripod) to steady the camera. The finch will give you enough focusing challenge without camera move-

ment from hand held camera movement.

- Don't forget to have fun. A frustrated photographer will not get good photos.

Thanks go to Richard Renshaw and Roy Beckham for many of the ideas provided in this article.



There is no need to zoom all the way in when taking digital photos. A dotted line shows roughly where this picture will be cropped in the final image.

Photo © Richard Renshaw

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NFSS AFFILIATED CLUBS/EVENTS

Liaison Officer - Club Delegates/Show Dates — Mr. Robert Mehl
 11108 Hollowbrook Road Owings Mills, Maryland 21117
 RobertMehl@aol.com

Fill out the Affiliation Agreement on the NFSS website
<http://www.nfss.org/Clubs/Affil-FM.html>

Note: Events may be held in states other than the home state of the club. Regional affiliates are those with no steady location, but should be checked for events near you.

ALABAMA

Central Alabama Avicultural Society

Delegate: Jorge & Carmela Juez
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the Month
 Location: Montgomery Zoo/Quality Inn and Suites
 Info Contact: tedsexton@bellsouth.net

CALIFORNIA

Central California Cage Bird Club

Delegate: Chryse Seeman
 Club website: www.mycCBC.org
 Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the Month
 Location: Manchini Hall, Modesto, CA
 Show/Expo: 55th Annual Finch & Canary Show October 25th, 2008
 Location: SOS Club, 819 Sunset Ave. Modesto, CA
 Info contact: Chryse Seeman
chryse95320@yahoo.com

Finch Society of San Diego

Delegate: Sally Huntington
 Club website:
www.sandiegofinchsociety.com
 Meeting Schedule: Sundays 7/27, 8/24, 9/28, 10/26, 11/23
 Location: Elks Lodge 13219 Poway Rd. Poway, CA 92064
 Info contact: Sally Huntington
sallych@san.rr.com

Herbert Ibarra Elementary Bird Club

Delegate: Scott Golden - teacher
 Club Email: scottgoldensd@hotmail.com
 Meeting Schedule: Open
 Location: Herbert Ibarra Elementary

Santa Clara Valley Canary & Exotic Bird Club

Delegate: Shanna Dollarhide
 Club Email: scvcebc@yahoo.com
 Club website: www.santaclarabirdclub.org
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the Month
 Location: Santa Clara, CA
 Show/Expo: Annual Show Dec. 6, 2007
 Location: TBA
 Info contact: Shanna Dollarhide,
Shanna@coloronthewing.com

West Coast Zebra & Society Finch Show

Delegate: Chryse Seeman
 Show/Expo: Show July 26 2008, sales and speakers on July 25 and 27th, 2008
 Location: La Quinta Downtown, Sacramento, CA 916 448-8100
 (ask for BIRD SHOWRATE)
 Judge: Garrie Landry
 Info contact: Chryse Seeman, manager
chryse95320@yahoo.com

COLORADO

Rocky Mountain Society of Aviculture, Inc

Delegate: Lisa McManus
 Club website: www.rmsa-birds.org
 Show/Expo: Fall Show, Nov 8-9th 2008

Location: National Western Complex,
Denver, CO
Judge: Al Decoteau & Conrad Meinert

441 Paul Russell Rd, Tallahassee
Info contact: Barry Laster,
BarryL7523@comcast.net

FLORIDA

Cage Bird Club of Charlotte County

Delegate: Sue Pacheco
Club Email: pmhill@comcast.net
Club website: www.caged-bird-club.com
Meeting Schedule: 1st Friday of the Month
Location: 20271 Tappen Zee Drive Port
Charlotte, FL
Show/Expo: Bird Expo Mar. 30, 2008
Location: Charlotte Fair Grounds

Suncoast Avian Society

Delegate: Mari Howard
Club website:
www.suncoastaviansociety.org
Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the Month
Location: Mocassin Lake Park,
Clearwater FL
Show/Expo: Show Aug. 2, 2008
Location: St Petersburg Coliseum, 535
4th Ave N., St Petersburg, FL 34695
Information contact: Mari Howard,
whoward7@tampabay.rr.com

Treasure Coast Exotic Bird Club

Delegate: Timothy McCormick, email:
tm50et@yahoo.com
Meeting Schedule: 4th Sunday of the
Month 2 PM
Location: Port Salerno Civic Center,
Stuart, FL
Show/Expo: Bird Fair Apr 6, 2008
Location: Okeechobee Agri-Civic Center

Tri-State Avian Society

Delegate: Barry Laster
Club website: Tristateaviansociety.org
Meeting Schedule: 2nd Saturday of Month
Location: Tallahassee, FL
Show/Expo: Spring Bird Fair May 17-
18, 2008
Location: North Florida Fairgrounds,

ILLINOIS

Finch & Softbill Breeders & Exhibitors Club

Delegate: Gail Benson
Club website: www.fsbec.finchfiles.com
Meeting Schedule: 2nd Thurs. of the month
Location: Palatine, IL
Show/Expo: Annual Show Sept. 6th 2008
Location: Crowne Plaza, Mundelein, IL
Judge: Sally Huntington
Information contact: Gail Benson
gailsgouldians@comcast.net

Greater Chicago Cage Bird Club

Delegate: Diana Federl
Club Email: info@gccbc.org
Club website: www.gccbc.org
Meeting Schedule: 3rd Friday of the Month
Location: 215 S. Riverside, Lombard, IL
Show/Expo: GCCBC 77th Show Nov
1, 2008
Location: DuPage Expo Center
Information contact: president@gccbc.org

The Avicultural Society of Chicagoland

Delegate: Jason Crean
Club Email: tascchicago@aol.com
Club website: www.tasc-chicago.org
Meeting Schedule: Months with 5 fri-
days at 7:30PM
Location: Lombard Log cabin, Lombard, IL
Show/Expo: Midwest Bird Expo April
2009
Location: Wheaton, IL
Info contact: Jason Crean
tascchicago@aol.com

National Institute of Red Orange Canaries

Delegate: Steve Hopman
Show/Expo: NIROC Annual Show

November 29th 2008
 Location: Waterford Banquet & Conference
 Center, 933 S. Riverside Drive, Elmhurst, IL 60126
 Info Contact: James Fessel
 jdcafessel@sbcglobal.net

INTERNATIONAL

Asociación de Criadores de Finches de Este Inc.

Delegate: Ernesto Polidura
 Contact: Rurico Vidal
 Phone: (787) 653-7322
 Show/Expo: 2008 Summer National
 Show June 27 - 29, 2008 Show entries
 are received on Friday the 27th from
 1:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Place:
 Plaza del Carmen Mall Caguas, P.R.
 Judge: Mr. Alfredo Bruguera
 Show: 2008 Winter National Show
 November 7 - 9, 2008 Place: TBD
 Judge: Mrs. Martha Wigmore

Canadian Finch and Softbill Society

Delegate: Vince Moase
 Club Email: vmoase@rogers.com
 Show/Expo: TBA

Essex-Kent Cage Bird Society

Delegate: Alfred Mion
 Club website: www.essexkentcbs.com
 Show/Expo: Show Sept. 28, 2008
 Location: Fogolar Furlan Club,
 Windsor, Canada
 Information contact: Alfred Mion,
 julianne@mnsi.net

IOWA

Mid America Cage Bird Society

Delegate: John Thielking
 Club website: www.MACBS.org
 Meeting Schedule: 4th Sunday of the Month
 Location: Des Moines Botanical Center
 909 Robert D Ray Drive
 Show/Expo: Bird Fairs, March 23, May
 18, August 24, 2008

Location: Des Moines Botanical Center
 Info contact: John Thielking,
 Thielking@Iowalink.com

MARYLAND

Baltimore Bird Fanciers

Delegate: Robert Mehl
 Club website: www.baltimorebirdfanciers.org
 Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the
 Month except May & Oct 2PM
 Location: Towson Public Library,
 Baltimore County
 Show/Expo: Spring Mart and Finch
 Show May 17, 2008
 Location: Tall Cedars Hall, Parkville,
 MD 21234
 Judge: Cecil Gunby
 Info contact: Robert Mehl,
 robert.mehl@verizon.net

Maryland All Canary Club

Delegate: Jonathan Smith
 Club website:
 geocities.com/heartland/3575/macc.html
 Meeting Schedule: 4th Sunday of the Month
 Location: Varies
 Show/Expo: Show Oct. 4, 2008
 Location: TBD
 Judge: Miki Sparzak
 Info contact: Jonathan Smith
 jonbsmith@cox.net

MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts Cage Bird Association

Delegate: Tom Keegan
 Club website: www.masscagebird.org
 Show/Expo: Show Oct. 18, 2008
 Location: TBD
 Judge: Nizam Ali

MICHIGAN

Great Lakes Zebra and Society Finch Club

Delegate: Rebecca Mikel

Club website:
greatlakeszebra&societyfinchclub.com
Show/Expo: Show Aug 23, 2008
Location: Livonia, MI
Info contact: Jim Heffernan,
tielnmore@aol.com

Michigan Society of Canary and Finch Breeders

Club Email: tielnmore@aol.com
Club website: www.societyofcanaryandfinchbreedersofmichigan.com

MINNESOTA

Canary Club of Minnesota

Delegate: Jeanne Murphy,
pinataminiatures@yahoo.com
Club website: canaryclub.su.com
Show/Expo: Show Oct 18, 2008
Location: River Heights Motel, 1020 US
Hwy 10 Prescott, WI 1715-262-3266
Information contact: Darlene Witt,
pinataminiatures@yahoo.com

MISSOURI

Gateway Parrot Club

Delegate: Christine Kinkade
Club website: gatewayparrotclub.org
Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the
Month, June 2nd, Aug. no meeting 2PM
Location: Kirkwood Community Center,
1111S Geyer Rd, Kirkwood, MO
Show/Expo: All-American Hookbill
Fair Aug 23-24, 2008
Location: Greensfelder Reception
Complex, Queeny Park, Baldwin, MO
Info contact: Phyllis Cotton vicepresident@gatewayparrotclub.com

Greater Kansas City Avicultural Society

Delegate: Anthony Day
Club website: www.kcas.org
Show/Expo: GKCAS Bird Fair Oct.
18th 2008
Location: Coronation of Our Lady Church,

1300 Bennington, Grandview, Mo 64030

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Birds of a Feather Avicultural Society

Delegate: Raymond Schwartz
Club website: www.boaf.com
Meeting Schedule: 2nd Monday of the Month
Location: Villa Crest Retirement Center,
Manchester, NH
Show/Expo: 21st Annual Fall Show &
Mart Oct. 25th 2008
Location: NH National Guard Amory,
Nashua, NH
Info contact: Ray Schwartz,
president@boaf.com

NEW YORK

Empire Finch & Canary Club

Delegate: John Lund, (516) 564-4692,
email: IRMANPEREZ@aol.com
Show/Expo: Show Nov 8, 2008
Location: St. Marks Methodist Church,
200 Hempstead Ave, Rockville Center, NY
Judge: Robert Vargo
Info contact: Gabe Dillon 516-593-2841
Other Divisions: Colorbred, Type, Fife,
and Gloster Canaries

New York Finch & Type Canary Club

Delegate: Stan Kulak
Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the
Month except holidays
Location: Averill Blvd. Park, Elmont
(Long Island), NY
Show/Expo: Annual Show September
27, 2008 St. Judes Church (Coyne Hall),
1677 Canarsie Road, Brooklyn, NY
Judge: Laura Tinker
Info contact: Stan Kulak
barstand@aaahawk.com

NORTH CAROLINA

Raleigh-Durham Cage Bird Society

Delegate: James Dvorak

Club website: www.RDCBS.org
 Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the
 Month 2:30 PM
 Location: Glen Eden Pilot Park, Raleigh
 Show/Expo: Fair and Show 5/24/08
 Location: NC State Fairgrounds
 Judge: Cecil Gunby & Ken Gunby
 Info contact: John Marquis,
 john@jamcosys.com
 Other Divisions: 2 shows in one day

OREGON

Columbia Canary Club

Delegate: KJ and Linda Brown
 Show/Expo: Bird Show Nov 8-9 2008
 Location: National Guard Armory,
 10101 SE Clackamas Rd, Clackamas, OR
 Judge: Alfredo Brugueras
 Info contact: Linda Brown 503-266-7606
 JeepersPeepers55@aol.com
 Other Divisions: Type and Colorbred
 Canary

PENNSYLVANIA

Chester County Bird Club

Delegate: Doris Rickards
 Club Email: Info@ccbirdclub.com
 Club website: www.ccbirdclub.com
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sun. of the month
 Location: East Whiteland Township Bldg
 Show/Expo date: 20th Annual Show &
 Mart November 8th, 2008
 Location: Church Farm School, 1001
 East Lincoln Highway, Exton, PA
 Info contact: Doris Rickards
 Info@ccbirdclub.com

TENNESSEE

SE Tennessee Aviculture Society

Delegate: Susan Murphy
 Club website: www.stasbirdclub.com
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the month
 Location: Niota Elementary School
 Niota, TN
 Show/Expo: Fall Show & Fair NFSS

Region 2 Finch & Softbill Show,

Sept 27-28, 2008
 Location: George R. Stuart School,
 Cleveland, TN 37312
 Info contact: Lisa Murphy
 wlmurphy@usit.net
 Other Divisions: NCS, NAPS

TEXAS

Canary & Finch Society

Delegate: Mary Hearn
 Club Website:
<http://canaryfinchsociety.tripod.com>
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the month
 Location: See Website for directions
 Show/Expo: Annual Show Oct. 11, 2008
 Location: Sheraton North Houston
 281-442-5100 or Tollfree reg. 800-325-3535
 Judge: Cecil Gunby
 Info contact: Mary Hearn
 mlshearn@comcast.net 409-744-3141

Fort Worth Bird Club

Delegate: Clarence Culwel
 Club website: www.fwbc.org
 Meeting Schedule: 2nd Sunday of the month
 Location: Botanical gardens, Fort Worth TX
 Show/Expo: 55th Annual All Bird
 Show Region 4 NFSS Show 11/27/2008
 Location: Grapevine Convention Center
 Judge: Ken Gunby
 Info contact: Jerry Casor
 show@fwbc.org

Texas Bird Breeders

Delegate: Clarence Culwell
 Club website: www.texasbirdbreeders.org
 Meeting Schedule: Quarterly
 Location: Varies
 Show/Expo: Fair and Show 1/8/2008
 Location: Mayborn Convention Center,
 Temple TX
 Judge: Laura Bewley
 Info contact: Clarence Culwell,
 coculwell@wccs.net

VIRGINIA**Penninsula Caged Bird Society**

Delegate: Peggy Duval

Club website:

www.vapennisulacagedbirdsociety.org

Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the Month

Location: Columbia Center, 12742 Nettles Dr., Newport News, VA

Show/Expo: Fall Bird Mart Cockatiel & NFSS Show Nov. 1st, 2008

Location: Columbia Center, 12742

Nettles Dr., Newport News, VA

Info contact: finchbreeder@earthlink.net

Young Bird Show Oct. 18th, 2008

Location: Fair & Exposition Center, Louisville KY

Judge: Smith - Ringnecks Ken Becker-Diamonds

Info contact: Stapp

secretary@doveline.com

Avicultural Society of America

Delegate: Sheri Hanna

Club Website: www.asabirds.org

Info contact: Sheri Hanna

turacoldy@aol.com 805-208-1759

WASHINGTON**Cascade Canary Breeders****Association**

Delegate: Janel Johnson

Meeting Schedule: 3rd Sunday of the month

Location: 120 West Sunset Way, Issaquah, WA 98027

Show/Expo: Finch & Canary show Nov 29-30 2008

Location: Evergreen State Fairgrounds, Monroe, WA

Info contact: Janel Johnson,

Katbird57@aol.com

Southeast Bird Fanciers

Delegate: Ginny Allen

Club website:

www.members.tripod.com/sebfg/

Location: Varies

Information contact: Ginny Allen

gndallen@bellsouth.net

WISCONSIN**Central Wisconsin Cage and Exotic Bird Connection**

Delegate: Marlene Minor

Club website: www.cwwcbc.us/bc/

Show/Expo: Annual Bird & Garden Fair May 24, 2008

Location: Marshfield Fairgrounds

Information contact: Marlene Minor
mminor@tds.net

REGIONAL/NATIONAL**American Dove Association**

Delegate: Denny Stapp

Club Website: www.doveline.com

Show/Expo: ADA @ the Nutritional

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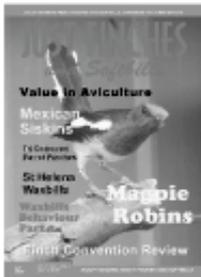
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 Jersey City, NJ 07307
 membership@nfss.org

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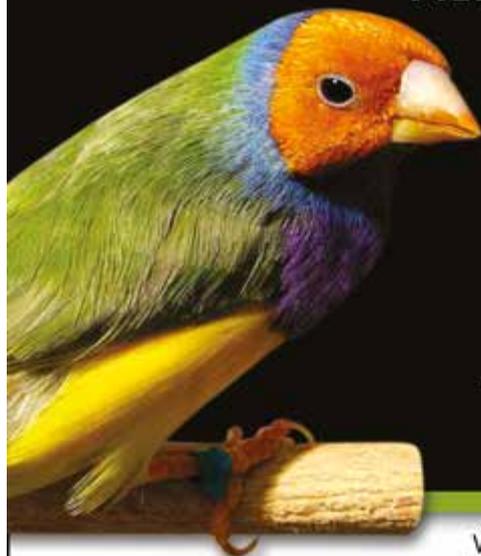
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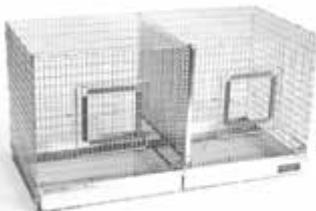
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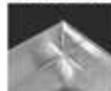
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