

Swiss passion for quality includes flights

Continuing his series on budgerigar maestro **DANIEL LÜTOLF**, Fred Wright is very taken with the flight arrangements in his birdroom, as well as a host of other management details

BUDGERIGARS

THE arrangements of the flights in Daniel's birdroom surprised me. Two flights were in the main birdroom and a huge L-shaped flight in the

basement. What was really surprising, though, was that there didn't seem to be any obvious reason why birds were in a particular flight. I would have expected birds to be separated: young birds, over-year birds, cocks, hens, sales birds or even a flight for specialist varieties. There seemed no particular system for the flights; everything was totally mixed. A bit of a shock for me!

I would have expected birds to be kept in groups, not necessarily for the good of the birds themselves but as a

more efficient way of managing them and helping to identify which birds were in certain groups. Maybe it's just another reflection of the time Daniel spends with his birds and how well he knows what he has in the birdroom, without separating them into groups.

Plenty of seed is offered in open

aluminium framed mobile flights. Being on wheels makes it so easy to pull them to the middle of the birdroom and clean behind, then push the flights back.

There is one large door in the middle of the flight and the flights are from waist height to the ceiling. These half-flights are popular and make it easier to check the well-being of the birds at all times. The flights are similar in size.

In the basement there is a huge, fixed L-shaped flight. It's a half-flight with storage underneath. (That's where all the millet sprays live.) The flight is against the wall running the whole length of the basement, with the "L" kicking around the far end. It's all one flight but with a couple of doors and of the same German construction as the flights in the main birdroom.

While I was there Daniel had cut lots

When Daniel returns a baby or older bird to the flight, he dips its beak into the water

trays, and various minerals and grits are freely available. Daniel provides plenty of red millet sprays in the flights and the birds love them. Most fanciers offer millet sprays as a treat, Daniel seems to feed them in plenty as a matter of routine.

In the main birdroom are two large



Spacious, clean flights with a surprising mixture of birds that appeared to be arbitrary



Monster L-shaped flight in the basement, with storage beneath



Seed is always available along with constantly refreshed water



The wheeled flights in the main birdroom make cleaning simpler

of branches of willow and placed them in the flights. I was surprised at how much he offered the birds and realised how familiar with the branches the birds were, coupled with the fact that they loved chewing at both wood and leaves. They just loved them! Daniel told me that he regularly gives this to the birds and he believes it brings them into breeding condition. It exercises them, too.

He is somewhat obsessive about fresh water and the birds have constant access to it. Daniel offers it in open, round porcelain dishes and constantly changes it throughout the day. Obviously seed, shucks and waste find their way into the dishes. Daniel believes it vital for

the birds to have this easy access to fresh water and the effort of making sure the dishes are regularly washed and fresh water replaced is worth it.

And the obsession with fresh water does not stop there. When Daniel returns a baby or older bird to the flight, he dips its beak into the water just so the bird first gets water and knows where it is available. I have been in lots of birdrooms over the years but I have never seen a fancier dip the face of the bird in the water in this way. It's a first for me!

Fred Wright has been a regular contributor to Cage & Aviary Birds for some 30 years.

Change partners, please

For experienced Gloster champion **MICK ROSE**, it's a bit of a mating merry-go-round, with only 10 cocks for 30 hens

CANARIES

ONE of the most important stages of the birdkeeping year has begun in my birdrooms with the introduction of the cocks and hens starting at the end of February into the beginning of March.

As I have said previously, Glosters must be paired when they are truly fit and ready, and not to a pre-planned date. Hens in breeding condition will start to carry nesting material well back in their beaks and begin to make nest scrapes on the floor.

My own approach when it comes to pairing is to spend as much time as possible observing my birds and when they show signs of readiness I introduce the nest-pan to the hen's cage. Hens that are ready to breed will soon set about building nests. This year, most of my hens have built as soon as they have caught sight of the pan. Like most fanciers, I use a plastic nest-pan lined with a standard nest liner. I then provide jute and sisal for the hen to use to get on with nest construction. Most build decent nests, but a few will build something below

standard. Often, these are young hens with no previous experience of what is required in the breeding cage. It is understandable, I suppose, as these behaviours are not taught to them.

It always amazes me how the natural instincts of our birds kick in and so many fine nests are built and chicks raised each year. If a bird does need a hand in getting a nest built, I will step in and line the pan with a decent amount of nesting material and then mould a nest with the



Cocks are run with multiple hens, and are moved from cage to cage by hand



Mick Rose: 'It always amazes me how the natural instincts of our birds kick in and so many fine nests are built each year'

help of an upturned lightbulb.

When a nest has been built, I will then introduce the cock to the hen. My hens have been singled up since Christmas and the lack of a pecking order means that most of them have come into condition at roughly the same time. This can make day-to-day management more straightforward, as nests will be set and hatch at about the same time. However, this year I am only using 10 cocks with 30 hens, which may cause a slight problem as having to run a cock with multiple hens at the same time is not necessarily the ideal.

One cock, for example, is being used



Up to five per nest: early laying results were good in Mick's birdroom All photos: Dave Brown

with four hens that are all ready at the same time and I have to ensure that he has a morning and evening visit to each hen each day until a full clutch has been laid, which does require some commitment of time on my part.

The cocks aren't housed next to a hen and divided by a slide as most books will state; more simply they are caught in the hand and moved from their cage to their intended hens in turn. On the evening visit they get to spend the night with the last hen they visit. The cocks soon get used to the routine and, while they can be a bit flighty when they are first caught up, after the routine has been up and running for a

few days, they soon get the message and are almost waiting to be caught up each day!

Cock birds, of course, need to be in full breeding condition and truly fit. Breeding condition is very different to show condition and the cocks, having now lost the excess weight, look like pencils.

Most introductions have gone to plan and mating has taken place as soon as the pair have been introduced with, of course, the occasional exception. In the main things have started well, with five of the first hens laying clutches of five eggs each. ■