

An Aviary Manual for Bird Sitters

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Most bird breeders and keepers have no problem remembering and doing all the tasks related to the care and feeding of their birds, servicing cages and equipment, and cleaning their facilities. However, there are times when the principal keeper will be away from the facility due to conferences, travel, illness or other reasons. When this happens someone else must care for the birds. Since there are many important details to this task, it is extremely useful to have an instruction and information manual prepared. This manual becomes a guide and resource document for the interim bird keeper. Whether the owner is away for a couple of days or for several weeks, having such a written manual is extremely helpful.

Preparing the Aviary Manual

One must consider what information is essential for the person substituting for the owner. Certainly, the first consideration is the food service: what is to be fed, where is it stored, how is it prepared, how much is served, how are the food bowls cleaned, along with serving the food. What protocols are followed in term of maintaining the health integrity of the aviary birds? If there is more than one set of aviaries or buildings or if birds are set up in several different locations, is there a method for disinfecting the service person's feet, hands and clothing? What disinfectant is used? How is it prepared? Where is it stored? Are there special clothes or boots worn for this work? How are the aviaries cleaned? Are they cleaned daily, weekly or different levels of cleaning at different times? Where are the cleaning supplies and equipment located? Is some sort of log maintained on the aviary? Will the interim service person be utilizing this log? All of these questions should be addressed in the aviary manual.

Preparation should include dividing the various activities or topics into different sections. Suggested sections would be Food Service, Aviary Cleaning, Bird Identification and Cage Location, Important Phone Numbers, Supplies and Storage, and, of course, how to reach the owner. One might also include a bird log that indicates when a particular bird left the aviary, whether it was sold, died or took a trip to the vet. In order to make the manual easy to use, each section should include simple sentences separated for easy reading, written in large capital letters and accompanied by the appropriate photographs. The purpose of the aviary manual is to assure that the birds receive excellent care and the bird sitter can avoid serious problems. With careful planning, the aviary manual will provide the guidance and information needed by the service person.

Important Phone Numbers

Of course, the bird breeder will want to leave phone and fax numbers where he or she may be located in an emergency or just to answer basic questions. In addition, information on the avian veterinarian's phone number and hospital address should be included. It may be helpful to include the phone number of one or more nearby trusted bird breeder friends who are knowledgeable about the collection and could provide assistance in an emergency. A close friend or family member's phone number and location may also be helpful. Although the bird breeder may not expect the service person to order foods for the birds, having these numbers in the manual, along with the phone numbers of other service providers, is very handy.

Bird and Aviary Identification

Important information to keep in the manual includes bird identification and cage location data. This makes it easy for the service person to correctly identify a bird or cage when discussing the birds over the phone with the absent owner. Information on special care, such as hens sitting on eggs or potential problem birds, should be included in the manual. Any information that the breeder feels is important to convey to the interim service person should be included. It should be recognized that everyone does not remember the spoken word and everyone does not remember what they have read. When the information is written down and readily available, the information is readily accessible when memory fails.

Photographs

Using photographs in the aviary manual will help clarify instructions for the service person. For example, how much food is routinely served? Written instructions accompanied by a photograph are very valuable in making the information more easily understandable. Inexpensive simple-to-operate cameras are available which make it less costly and very easy to provide this helpful addition to the aviary manual.

Additional Benefits

Not only is the aviary manual extremely useful for the service worker, it can also be useful when the bird breeder discusses problems with the avian veterinarian. An aviary manual is a handy resource for the bird breeder when ordering supplies, performing an annual review of the operation including cost analysis and when planning for the future. It requires work to plan and assemble an aviary manual. However, the clear and detailed information in an aviary manual provides greater assurance that the birds will be well cared for during the short or long period when the bird breeder must be absent from the facility.