



Bowerbirds in My Aviary

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By Doug Bailey

The male [Satin Bowerbird](#) *Ptilonorhynchus violaceus* takes seven years to fully colour and is black all over, except for the beautiful iridescent blue and violet sheen the plumage attains in sunlight. The hen is a mottled green with brown wings. I am hopeful that my pair will breed this season.

Their natural habitat is [rainforest](#) or dense moist bushland. They are found from [Victoria](#) to [Cooktown in Queensland](#) through the coastal region. As a matter of fact I have seen them in the valley at [Pennant Hills](#).

They are a very active bird and in my aviary 24' x 6' x 9' high and heavily planted, they have made up a flight pattern and spend most of their time repeating the pattern or picking on the ground. The aviary is planted with [tree ferns](#), [staghorns](#) and [wild tobacco](#), which they really enjoy eating.

They also enjoy the [bird's-nest fern](#) and to avoid excessive destruction I place a complete [lettuce](#) in the aviary and they spend most of their time tearing it to pieces. Their diet is [apples](#), [oranges](#), [bananas](#), [grapes](#), [Madeira cake](#) and even chook laying pellets. They also enjoy [snails](#) and [mealworms](#) and are quite tame when I am feeding them.

The cock bird is a magnificent mimic and in my opinion not far behind the [Lyrebird](#). One day I had a flock of [Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos](#) in the backyard, or I thought I did. Another day I thought I had a colony of [Rosellas](#) in the yard - he'll mimic just about anything.



The Bower of the Satin Bowerbird
File from [Wikipedia Commons](#)

The bower (built by the cock bird) is purely a means of attracting the hen and mating also occurs in the bower. The bower consists of two side walls of sticks opening into a playground area decorated with anything blue, if available, as well as snail shells and yellow and green flowers or berries. The Australian Museum has a poster of the Satin Bowerbird in his bower decorated with blue clothes pegs. The male struts and fans his feathers and puts on a performance.



Satin Bowerbird (cock)
Ptilonorhynchus violaceus
Photo © Lynn Stinten 2013



Satin Bowerbird (hen)
Ptilonorhynchus violaceus
Photo © Lynn Stinten (Clark) 2013

Once the hen comes into the bower and mates any further contact with the male ceases. She will go and build the nest, lay, incubate and feed the young and have nothing further to do with him. In an aviary this can be difficult as obviously you have to take the male out after mating, but unless you see them, the timing of the removal can destroy all your plans! Too early the results are obvious. Too late the presence of the male could prevent the hen from nesting. The hen will lay 1-3 cream to buff brown and heavily spotted eggs.



Satin Bowerbird (immature cock)
Ptilonorhynchus violaceus
Photo © Lynn Stinten 2013

The Satin Bowerbird is a wonderful bird but the most beautiful bird anyone could wish to have in an aviary is the [Regent Bowerbird *Sericulus chrysocephalus*](#). It has a beautiful yellow head, neck and wings contrasting against the black body. Under the wings is also yellow and when the birds fly in the morning sun it's really a sight to see. They also take seven years to colour and so far I am not sure of the sex of my birds. They have a similar diet to the Satins of fruit, greens and insects. The hen has a dull brown head with an olive back and rump. The bower is similar to the Satin but less intricate and not as adorned conforming to the principle of the brighter the plumage the less intricate the bower.

The Regents get along fine with finches but I'm sure the Satins which I keep in another aviary would cause havoc amongst a finch collection.

In conclusion, these birds give me a great deal of pleasure with their beauty and activity and I would derive tremendous satisfaction if I could actually breed either of the species.

All my aviaries are at least 24' long and the one with the Regents and finches has [gold dust bushes](#), [orchids](#), tree ferns, [Japanese bamboo](#), golden [privet](#), [azaleas](#), [conifers](#) and many others. Overhead there is a spraying system which cleans and waters the shrubs and as well as provide showers for the birds. I think with finches it is preferable to have fine leafed shrubbery rather than the heavy semi tropical foliage of staghorn, [monsterios](#) and [palms](#) as they do not provide nesting sites or good perching areas. However rotting vegetables in stag horns and tree ferns do provide a good source of insects, but [grevilleas](#), privets, dwarf [bottle brush](#) and [golden cyprus](#) are readily accepted by finches.

One of my aviaries is full of azaleas or [camellias](#) and both these plants are subject to infestation by insects. My shrubs are the healthiest plants you could wish to see, probably due to the birds continually foraging for insects. To enhance the appearance of the aviaries I always paint the aviary wire with black enamel. This makes the wire very unobtrusive and the plants and birds are seen to better effect. The wire is easily painted with a roller.



Regent Bower Bird
Sericulus chrysocephalus

This colour plate of the Regent Bowerbird owned by the Society is taken from a painting by William R Cooper in "Portfolio of Australian Birds". Published by A H & A W Wood.

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