



## The Bengalese Finch

(AVIDATA: Journal of The ASNSW Vol. 1 No. 3 - Winter 1974)

By Adrienne Allen

Despite their low cost Bengalese finches are most attractive birds. I bred a few of these birds last year but lost many through an almost invisible hole after the birds were frightened by a visiting cat. One hen came back and insisted on being let in to finish rearing two fledglings who called to her.

Earlier this year I brought the remaining five birds into my bird room and put them into a training cage which is 3' long. At one end a round door opens inwards opposite the door of a finch showcase. My plan was to steady the birds and get them used to the showcase. They became so steady that they filled up the showcase with grass stems and proceeded to raise five young ones in it. All five adults fed the young ones.

By trial and error, I have found that these finches prefer [Japanese millet](#) and [pannicum](#) for seed. For rearing the young ones, [sprouted seeds](#), seeding grass and quantities of [silverbeet](#) and [Chinese cabbage \(Buk Choy\)](#) are relished. I keep the greens in an instant coffee jar about one third filled with water. While the greens stay fresh and crisp the parents will feed enormous quantities to the young ones. Occasionally I give a little [Madeira cake](#) but the fresh greens are preferred. They will also eat rape leaves and other kinds

of cabbage, but Buk Choy is the top favourite. These can be obtained by some cooperative greengrocers or they can be brought from Chinese greengrocers in Sydney, or you can grow them from seed. Finally, I keep some of the punnets in which seedlings are brought and in them I put whole tufts of grass, especially [winter grass](#) with seed heads.

These finches readily learn to drink from hanging water bottles. I use screw top soft drink bottles. The tops are simply punctured with a nail, preferably a small one. I find you can make the hole bigger but the larger ones are hard to shrink. The bottles are held by a galvanised iron strap about half an inch wide, nailed to the edges of a piece of wood about 7" x 3 1/2" x 3/4". At the top, two holes are drilled about 2 1/2 inches apart and a piece of heavy gauge wire inserted. The two ends are bent down flush to the wood. This can be hung on the wire inside the cage front and the bottle removed for filling when necessary.



Bengalese Finch  
File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)



Bengalese Finch  
File courtesy of [Wikimedia Commons](#)

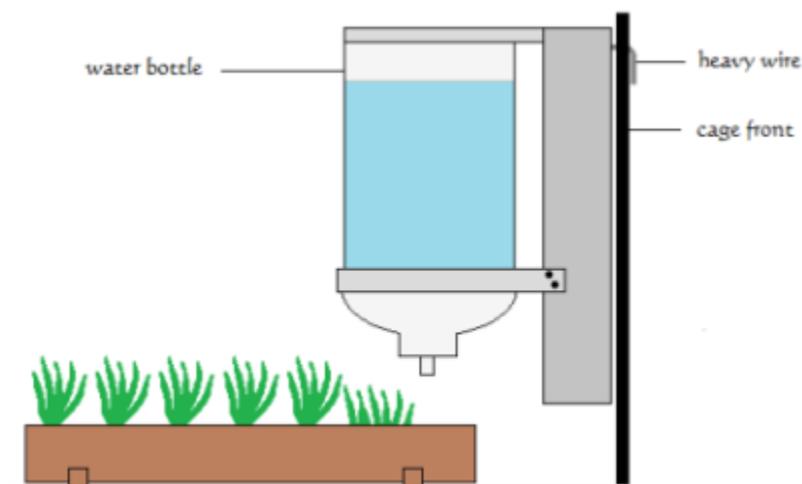


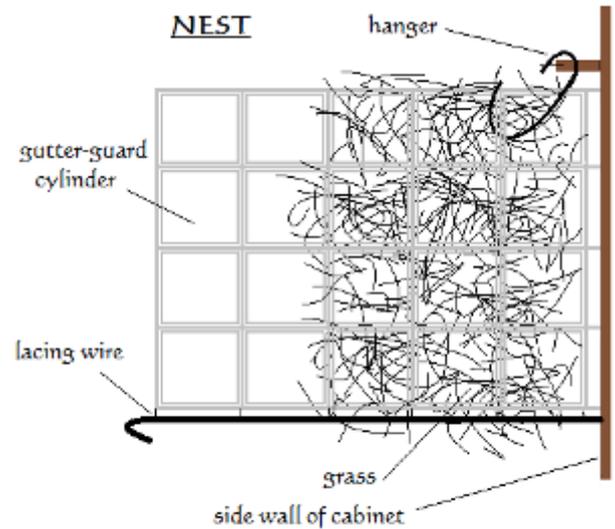
Figure 1

The dimensions of the hanger are not critical. One advantage of this method is that light does not encourage algae to grow in the water. The Bengalese drink far more water than [canaries](#) do.

Hanging water bottles in this way helps to prevent foul water being left in the cage. I put punnets of live grass underneath the water bottles and they soak up any water which drips (see Figure 1). The birds also get baths when it is convenient but they would have four each day if given them. A thorough spraying is also appreciated in hot weather.

I have offered these little birds quite a variety of nest accommodation, but they have preferred a fairly open nest box to which they added two further storeys when allowed to colony breed in a large cabinet about 6' x 2' x 2'. I have offered them dense shrubbery in this cabinet and while they seemed to appreciate it, they did not nest in it.

However, I have one hundred percent success with nests made from lengths of [Nylex gutter-guard](#) (see Figure 2). Enough of this is cut to make a cylinder about 4-5 inches in diameter; then I lace it together with a length of wire. Another piece of wire across one end acts as a stiffener. The nest is then stuffed with a handful of [couch grass](#) runners which always seem to be available in my garden. The cylinder is then hung from a long hook, hooked about three squares from the stiffened end. With a little practice, the nest wedges firmly against the wall at the side. A perch running in front of the opening about two inches away is all that is necessary. The birds will settle into one of these nests within twenty minutes of being put into a new cabinet. They like to add a little more grass each day until everything meets with their requirements. Like the greens, they like their nesting grass fresh and dry. Sometimes they flatten the stems before building them into the nest. The plastic nests are safe and easily cleaned by soaking in water and drying off.



**Figure 2**

Having spent a couple of seasons trying to sort out all the likes and dislikes of these birds, I turned to other breeders to ask them about the desirable characteristics shown by a well bred bird. I have yet to find out, although I have heard something about clear markings and tight feathers. I do not know if a standard exists. I have not been able to find out what a "self-coloured" bird looks like. Some of my birds are chocolate and white, some are fawn and white. Others are in-between chocolate and caramel. I have one which a canary breeder would call "dilute" and some which a [budgerigar breeder would call "pied"](#).

In attempts to sort all this out I have paired two caramel and whites in a compartment 3' x 2' x 2'. Another cabinet contains four chocolate whites which are breeding at present. If the caramels breed true, and the chocolates breed true, I will later pair a caramel and a chocolate to determine whether the chocolate is dominant, which I suspect. These split birds may show some colour differences. If the chocolates produce some caramel chicks, then I will know this year that chocolate is dominant to caramel and that the birds are split chocolate/caramel. Then next year I can try to sort out which of them are split and which are pure-breeding, if any.

In a third cabinet I have a pair of "pied" hens which show a lot more white than ordinary birds. They are mated to a light chocolate (? split) bird, but are themselves chocolate where the feathers are pigmented. This may help me to begin to find out some of these characteristics.

The fourth combination is a pair of crested birds. One is a cock, I know, but is the other a hen? The only way to find out is to sit and observe their behaviour and especially the singing displays. If they are a true pair and I mate them, do I run the risk of a lethal combination, as in crested canaries? Is the crest dominant or recessive? Is the crest single or double?

For the future, I may be able to breed some chocolate coloured "self" birds. These are supposed by some to be inter species hybrids but zoologist Desmond Morris<sup>(1)</sup> says Bengalese are a pied domesticated form of [Lonchura striata](#), the striated finch, a native of South-east Asia, India and Malaysia. He based his remarks on a study of the behaviour of the two types of birds and on some breeding experiments where Bengalese striated finches gave young almost identical to the striated parent.

I suspect that there is as much interest in breeding these as in [Zebra finches](#) and canaries and they can be used as foster parents too! If any members have more knowledge of Bengalese genetics perhaps they could tell us. As well, the finch men may tell us what they look for in these birds.

<sup>(1)</sup> ["Patterns of Reproductive Behaviour" - Comparative Ethology of Grass finches and Mannikins](#)  
p.436. 1970 Jonathon Cape Ltd., London. First published 1958 by the Zoological Society of London.

---

**The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW):** <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org>  
**Contact Us:** <http://www.aviculturalsocietynsw.org/contactUs.php>  
**Join us on Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/AviculturalSocietyNSW>  
**Follow us on Twitter:** <https://twitter.com/#!/AvicultureNSW>

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in the Avicultural Review and/or on this website do not necessarily represent those of the Avicultural Society of NSW. No responsibility is accepted by the Society, the Editor, the author/s, Webmaster and/or Administrator/s for the statements, opinions and advice contained herein. Readers should rely upon their own inquiries in making any decisions relating to their own interests.