

WHILE bird keeping is certainly an enjoyable (and potentially profitable) hobby, it seemed to be a dying art as there were very few people of 'younger generations' picking up this pastime. This was the issue being discussed in a general meeting of the Finch Society of Western Australia (FSWA) in mid-2018.

Being in the age range that was being discussed, a younger version of Naomi Prince—being Year 4 at the time—certainly had some ideas about how to make bird keeping more interesting. In fact, just a few weeks earlier I had submitted my creative writing assignment, a 'Letter to the Principal' on what facilities should be added to Carey Baptist College. While others wrote about swimming pools, equestrian centres and McDonald's, I had suggested that an aviary at the school would be a great way to bring students to the often-forgotten Carey Garden, and that it would be great to help teach many subjects, like art and science. Also, I thought it was very cool.

FROM IDEA TO ACTION

After the meeting ended, I went to my grandfather, Bernie O'Leary, and shared my idea. Having owned birds for over 50 years, he was thrilled at the concept and immediately declared himself project manager. He was eager to share his avicultural insights with the staff and students at the school. I was delighted, but not surprised, at my grandad's enthusiasm, and began to wonder what I had just gotten myself into. Little did I know at the time, this idea would turn into an on-going four-year project (so far), to build and run what we believe is the first Western Australian school aviary in modern times.

Our first step was to go to the garden manager and head of the school's 'We Love Our Earth Club', David Haddy, who loved the idea and inducted me into the club on the spot. He helped bring the idea to the principal, who quickly approved the funds and put my grandfather (who had spent many years as an engineer) in charge of designing the aviary.

With great celebration, the aviary was opened in November 2020, accompanied by guests from the FSWA and the Avicultural Society of WA, who both assisted (along with other individuals) by donating birds. We thank them for their great support.



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WITH
DAVID HADDY AND
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From left: David Haddy (teacher and garden project manager), Naomi Prince and Bernie O'Leary (aviary project manager)



THE ENDLESS REWARDS OF DEVELOPING A



WHAT DOES THE AVIARY LOOK LIKE?

The Carey aviary is 5m x 4m, with a 1m-wide walkway at the front for student viewing. It comprises two aviaries, each measuring 3m x 2.5m. One is purely for display, and the other is a breeding aviary.

The aviary is 100% mouse-proof, with 6mm x 6mm mesh, and a concrete floor with sand for comfort. The mesh and concrete floor are essential, so there will be no mice interfering with the birds, especially when nesting. The aviary also has double wire in strategic external areas, for complete protection against cats, foxes, predatory birds...and occasionally children.



Above: Red-headed Gouldian Finches are raised in the breeding aviary—juvenile and adult

The display aviaries hold a variety of species of finches, canaries with Scarlet-chested and Golden-shouldered Parrots, doves and quail



WHAT BIRDS ARE KEPT?

The aviary is home to a wide range of feathery friends, with a focus on Australian finches and small parrots, especially pure normal types which are endangered in the wild. One example of this is the beautiful Gouldian Finch, which shares the aviary with several other finches, including Zebra, Star, Painted and African Firefinch, all of which are adored by the students of Carey.

We also keep several male parrots—a favourite being the Scarlet-chested Parrot. There are also Cockatiels, a Golden-shouldered and Turquoise and Elegant Parrots. Finally, there are Diamond Doves and King Quail, which are favourites among students due to their pet-ability.

We are aiming to create a breeding program to increase the numbers of some of these birds and are pleased to announce that last year we bred over 50 Gouldian and Zebra Finches, Scarlet-chested and Bourke's Parrots, which were sold to new and loving homes, so we have enough space to continue breeding.

We breed one pair of Scarlet-chested Parrots and Bourke's at different times in the breeding aviary, as having more than one pair of breeding parrots in the same aviary can create competition and disturbance.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

The school aviary has been a resounding success among students and teachers alike, with kids running to the garden during recess and lunch so they can spend time with the birds. Five to six students can go into the aviaries at a time to experience these beautiful birds up close.

Students have found that being in the aviaries is very calming and a novelty among those who do not own birds and who often have small backyards.

One Year 6 student, Ryan (Naomi's brother), has not only been able to enjoy the aviary but has taken on a student leadership role, which he says is cool. He won the Junior Championship Award with the Finch Society in 2022 and enjoys sharing his knowledge and love for birds with fellow students. Other eager students have had the opportunity to borrow finches from the school aviary to enter in FSWA shows, further introducing them to this incredible hobby. One Year 6 student, Ethan, even won a pair of Cordon Bleu Finches, which he keeps and visits in the Carey aviary.



Ryan Prince has won two prizes showing birds, including the Junior Championship Award with the Finch Society in 2022

A younger Naomi Prince with awards



EDUCATIONAL BENEFITS

Carey Baptist College was founded by the church of the same name and takes pride in creating a healthy and loving Christian environment to nurture students and share their faith. My grandfather Bernie, who is a qualified Chaplain, developed a presentation called 'The Wonder of Birds, to show the Glory of God's Creation', which he shares with different year groups, so the students can see the incredible complexity, design and uniqueness of every type of bird.

Some examples include:

- The magnificent variety of colour and form in different birds.
 - The incredible design of flight, which mankind has copied.
 - The egg tooth, on top of the beak, which appears just in time for the baby to use as a 'can-opener', to get out of the egg. (This completely disappears a few days later.)
 - The unique design of bird lungs, with continuous flow, and light enough to enable birds to fly.
 - Amazing migration by the Arctic Tern (North to South Pole and back every year, about 70 000km), despite being much smaller than a seagull.
 - The brilliant design of feathers, including having microscopic hooks in each vane, to enable the feathers to be very smooth, allowing flight to be possible.
 - The magnificent tapestry of a peacock tail when raised, with every feather in perfect unison, including the 'eyes' placed in exactly the right position.
- Teachers are also finding ways to incorporate the aviary into other parts of the school curriculum, including biology, art and mathematics.

THOUGHTS FROM PRINCIPAL KELLIE COCKRAM

The Carey aviary project has brought much delight in the few years since its set-up. The aviary is impressive in its structure, which enables children to get right up close and personally encounter the stunning creatures who inhabit it. Visitors to the aviary are always filled with wonder at the beauty, variety and songs—a feast for the eyes and ears!

The primary school is indebted to the avicultural and finch societies who have supported us over the years, and we pay particular tribute to Bernie O'Leary who has volunteered faithfully with us during this entire time.

THOUGHTS FROM GARDEN MANAGER DAVID HADDY

Our aviary has made a resounding and successful impact in the lives of many students, parents and staff at the Harrisdale campus. Students ask me almost daily whether the aviary will be open, can they hold a bird...are the chicks okay? They are engaged with the lives of these beautiful creatures and cannot wait to run to the garden and interact with the birds on a daily basis.

We have a team of leaders who assist Ryan, now a Year 6 student, with monitoring the aviary doors

and chatting with their peers about everything relating to birds. The aviary project has added an opportunity to take on responsibility and leadership roles while satisfying their enjoyment of these wonderful creatures.

Bernie, our project manager, is a key figure in the success of the Carey Aviary Project. Not only did he design the aviary for us, but he has also designed and delivered presentations to both the primary and secondary students. I am very grateful for his expertise and ongoing commitment to ensuring we can deliver the highest quality aviary and learning experiences to the students, and for everything he has taught me in the process of establishing and delivering the aviary project.

I highly recommend schools consider developing an aviary project of their own, and to connect with the Finch Society and Avicultural Societies of WA (or their state). We can help to build the numbers of endangered species while guiding the next generations of young people how to care for the Earth and its inhabitants. If you have any queries, you are welcome to contact Bernie or myself at bernie.sws@bigpond.com or dhaddy@carey.wa.edu.au.

MANAGING A SIMILAR SCHOOL PROJECT

To consider this type of project for a school, it is essential that you are, or can find, an experienced aviculturist to volunteer and treat the aviary as an extension of their own, coming in year-round to change seed and water, and preferably teaching the students about the birds. Any volunteer must have a Working with Children card. At the Carey aviary, Bernie fulfils this role.

Finding a teacher who can actively support and campaign for the aviary within the school and find ways to integrate it into the curriculum is also an invaluable asset to any school aviary project. Our key teacher is David Haddy.

CONCLUSION

The school aviary at Carey Baptist College has been an incredible project that continues to keep bringing happiness to many children, but it would not be possible without the FSWA, ASWA, Kellie Cockram, David Haddy, Bernie O'Leary and any other person who assisted in helping make this dream a reality. For that, we thank you. **ABK**

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Our congratulations to Naomi Prince for instigating this wonderful project. It is so inspiring to see someone so young thinking outside the box and being supported by the adults around them to create something so worthwhile, changing the lives of so many, and helping spread the word of the wonderful hobby of bird keeping, particularly regarding its contribution to conservation. Well done to all involved. We would love to see other schools taking up the challenge and rewards of developing a school aviary.

ABK has donated an annual subscription to the school and supplied various back issues for the enthusiasts' ongoing guidance and development.

