

Haven for Turacos

Text and photographs of David's turacos by Ron Toft

Building and repairing aviaries can be a time-consuming and expensive business, even if you do most or all of the work yourself.

Spare a thought then for specialist turaco keeper and breeder David Jones who initially thought he might well have to replace all 23 of the aviaries he erected 20 years ago on the side of a steep hill adjacent to his centuries-old cottage overlooking the quintessentially English patchwork quilt countryside not far from the River Severn in Gloucestershire.

"Upon closer inspection, however, it turned out that the wear and tear was not as bad as I had initially feared," said David, as he gave me a guided tour of his two-acre border-country 'wilderness', which also includes wildfowl ponds frequented by more than a few wild Mandarin Ducks.

"Considering their age, my aviaries have done very well. When I carried out a detailed examination of them last year, I discovered that the wooden uprights and chicken wire were still sound. The only areas that had completely rotted away were the timber supports at the bottom, which are in permanent contact with the soil and can become very wet in winter."

To save time and money, David replaced the decayed wood with new timber and drew up plans, instead, not for replacement aviaries but six new ones!

The construction work was carried out last winter with the help of friends, I.T.S. member Darron Corden and his brother Mark. "Working on the side of a hill when the ground beneath your feet is a quagmire is certainly not my idea of fun. We spent most of our time sliding down the hill!"

David's six new aviaries are now more or less finished. All the footings were dug by hand. "We then put down a concrete base, on top of which we laid two layers of breeze blocks. The pressure-treated wood and wire aviaries basically sit on top of these blocks."



David standing outside his new flights

David couldn't recall off the top of his head the exact size of the new aviary complex, but it certainly occupies an area larger than many people's entire back garden.

The lower part of the new structure comprises a suite of five adjoining aviaries. The sixth aviary is situated higher up the slope and connected, like the lower aviaries, to a bird room where David's turacos roost at night.

"My birds can come and go as they please. Generally speaking, they always make for the highest point, so they spend most of their time at the top of the aviaries near the entrance to the bird room. When I am in the garden, though, they tend to fly down to the lower part of their flights to see me."

Not all of the materials used to build the six aviaries and bird room were brand new. The bird room windows and door came from an old conservatory. The clear, plastic roof of the conservatory, when cut up, served as aviary dividers at ground level.

“All the timber, however, was new, as was the sheet of rubber I bought to cover and protect the roof of the bird room. The rubber came in one large sheet. After rolling it into position, it is edged with timber. The beauty of using rubber as a roofing material is that it is guaranteed for 25 years, whereas the felt on a new shed I have is leaking already. Felt is hopeless.”

The bare ground inside the six aviaries was seeded with grass and wildflowers and was a multi-coloured mini meadow when I visited David in late August.



David inside one of his new planted aviaries

“The birds don’t actually need all these plants, but they give the aviaries an attractive, natural look. More importantly, they knit the soil together and will prevent the floor becoming awash with mud in winter.”

Birds housed in the new aviaries are Red-crested, White-crested, Violaceous, Buffon’s, Black-billed and Fischer’s Turacos. Each aviary contains one pair of birds, except there is a trio of White-crested.



Red-crested Turaco above and White-crested Turaco below





Violaceous Turaco also in its new flight



In the new shelter: (left) Black-billed Turaco, (below) Fischer's Turaco



David told me he is delighted with the way the new aviaries and bird room have turned out. "I couldn't tell you exactly how much it all cost, but the outlay certainly ran into thousands of pounds. Timber costs an absolute fortune."

David, who is chairman of the International Turaco Society, currently keeps 11 of the 23-or-so turaco species, but has had as many as 14 in the past.

Buffon's Turaco



"I reared 57 youngsters from 11 pairs in 2010. The reason I had such a lot was because most of the youngsters were hand-reared. This year I haven't had the time to hand-rear, so the number of young will be well down. If left to their own devices they either rear or lose their young. If I remove the young and rear them myself, invariably the adults lay another clutch, thus boosting productivity. At present I have a total of 71 adult and young turacos."



Parent reared Fischer's chick recently fledged in the new shelter

Next to the six new aviaries and bird room is an area of land from which David has cleared the undergrowth.

"I am not sure what I am going to do with this area yet," he said. Erect yet more aviaries possibly? "Unlikely at present, but you never know," he added with a twinkle in his eye.

(Ron Toft can be contacted by e-mail: ron.toft@btinternet.com.)

My New Aviary Construction by David Jones

Ron Toft has written about my new turaco flights in the previous article. Their construction may be of interest to I.T.S. members thinking of building flights for themselves. My thanks to Darron



Corden and his brother Mark, who built my flights with very limited help from me! We cleared the land and dug in for the concrete footings to support the back of the shelter, with the front of the shelter resting on stilts.





The roof was covered in a single sheet of rubber, edged with timber slats.

Inside the walls were insulated with 2" thick fibreglass which was covered with another layer of plywood.



The inside pens were then constructed with 5 larger enclosures for adult pairs of turacos on one side, another enclosure at the far end and 5 smaller pens for young stock on the other side. The pens for young birds were raised up off the floor so droppings would fall through the wire onto trays, which can be pulled out for cleaning.



Behind the shelter outside, 5 raised pens were built which connect via pop holes to the 5 youngsters' pens inside. Sliding dividers between the pens give versatility as to how big the pens are at any time.



Outside, concrete footings support 2 layers of breeze blocks upon which sits a 2x2" timber frame covered in green coated 1x½" weld mesh. There are 5 pens along the front with a 6th pen at the end.



Natural perching was added and grass and wild flower seeds were sown before the turacos were introduced to their new homes.

A pair of Red-crested Turacos in their new flight



The turacos quickly settled in and learnt their way in and out of the pop holes, usually roosting in the shelter at night, as it is the highest part of their enclosures.