

Using Ultra Violet or Black Light in the Breeding Season

This article is intended for the more technically minded among our fanciers and, in particular, anyone using artificial lighting in their bird room.

Over the years, I have kept an analysis of the ratio of cocks to hens bred each season, both from my own birds and from the records of several friends. In broad terms, I found that the average was approximately 60/40 cocks to hens, which means that most of us are left with a surplus of cocks at the end of the breeding season.

Some years ago, I met Harry Clarke, a very successful breeder and exhibitor of Fife Canaries. During a talk he gave, Harry discussed the advantages of using Ultra Violet (UV) or black light to increase the number of hens produced in a season. There is quite a lot of information available regarding this subject, and much of the early interest appears to have originated with Gouldian Finch breeders.

It is worth remembering that birds see the world differently from humans. Many species are able to perceive ultraviolet wavelengths that are invisible to us. In nature, UV light forms part of the normal daylight spectrum and is believed to play a role in various aspects of bird behaviour, including orientation, feeding, courtship, and mate selection. As a result, many aviculturists have experimented with UV lighting in an attempt to create a more natural environment within the bird room.

You need to be aware that nothing is for nothing in this world, and I believe there is a SAFETY RISK involved if UV lighting is used incorrectly. For this reason, I never actually look directly at the lights, but then, why would you need to?

The Gouldian breeders positioned their lights as close as 6 inches (15 cm) from the front of the breeding cages and reported breeding as many as 95% hens. Personally, I consider this unwise for two reasons. Firstly, who needs 95% hens? Secondly, there could well be a health risk to the birds from such close exposure.

So how can UV lighting be used safely and effectively?

Harry positioned his lights approximately 4 feet (120 cm) from the fronts of the breeding cages

The first year I used UV lighting, I mistakenly had the lamps operating for exactly the same duration as my artificial lighting.

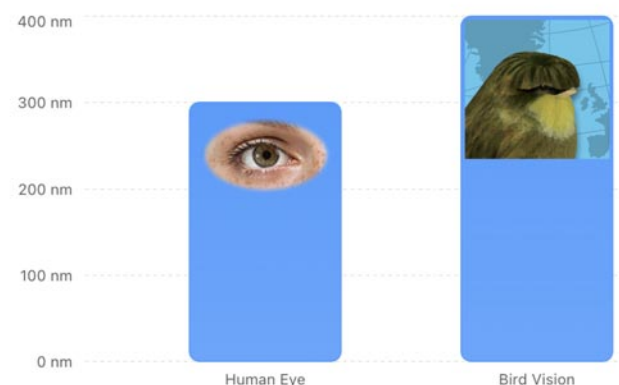
My normal lighting programme is as follows: the lights are switched OFF during the moult and then switched ON for a straight eight hours per day until December 26th. From that date onwards, I increase the day length by 15 minutes every third day until the birds are receiving 14 hours of light per day. This level is then maintained throughout the breeding season.



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Visible spectrum range

Approximate wavelength ranges visible to humans and many bird species.



and claimed that he consistently bred at least 60% hens. Whenever we meet, I make a point of checking his figures. The last time we discussed the subject, his records showed 165 hens from 220 birds bred — an impressive 75% hens.

One advantage often reported by fanciers using UV lighting is that it more closely replicates the natural spectrum of daylight experienced by birds outdoors. Many breeders believe this helps birds come into breeding condition more naturally and may contribute to increased activity, courtship behaviour, and overall vitality during the breeding season.

I position my pairs alongside one another in double breeders two to three weeks before releasing them together. The UV lights are switched ON when the birds are first positioned and remain on continuously, 24 hours per day, until the last hen in the final round has laid her last egg. At that point, the UV lights are switched OFF and remain unused until the following breeding season.

Since adopting this system, my own breeding records have changed from an average of approximately 60/40 cocks to hens, to around 60/40 hens to cocks. Whether this change can be attributed entirely to the use of UV

lighting is something each fancier must decide for themselves. However, the experiences of breeders such as Harry Clarke, together with my own observations over a number of years, suggest that it is certainly a subject worthy of further investigation by anyone interested in improving the balance of hens within their breeding programme.



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