

# BIRDS BY THE ACRE

## Singers, Talkers, Squawkers Big, Little, Wild and Tame Ones

By G. E. OWENS

CAN you imagine seeing 10,000 beautifully colored birds on display at one time?

No, sir, neither could we until we visited the Flower's Tropical Bird Company, 17555 Ventura Blvd., Van Nuys, California, recently. The thing that amazed us was the fact that there is a demand for cage and aviary birds sufficient to warrant the firm carrying a stock of such enormous proportions.

Ten thousand birds all comfortably housed and cared for is a sizeable job and requires a lot of space. The aviaries required to house this vast collection cover several acres of ground, all of which, save a plot for growing green food, flower beds and shrubbery, is covered with large, well equipped aviaries, built with only one main thought in view, the comfort of the birds. The aviaries are built to specifications, each group intended for the housing of certain species of birds.

In the Parrakeet section, the aviaries which have proved the most practical measure 6'x14'x8' tall. These, like practically all the aviaries are divided into two parts, one-half closed in for sleeping quarters and the other half enclosed in wire netting for a flight pen. Such an



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aviary will hold about one hundred Parrakeets when not breeding, or ten pairs when breeding. The firm keeps an average of 3,000 Shell Parrakeets on hand the year around.

The aviaries for small Finches are of the same type, but measure only four feet in width and hold fifty Finches, or ten pairs of breeding stock.

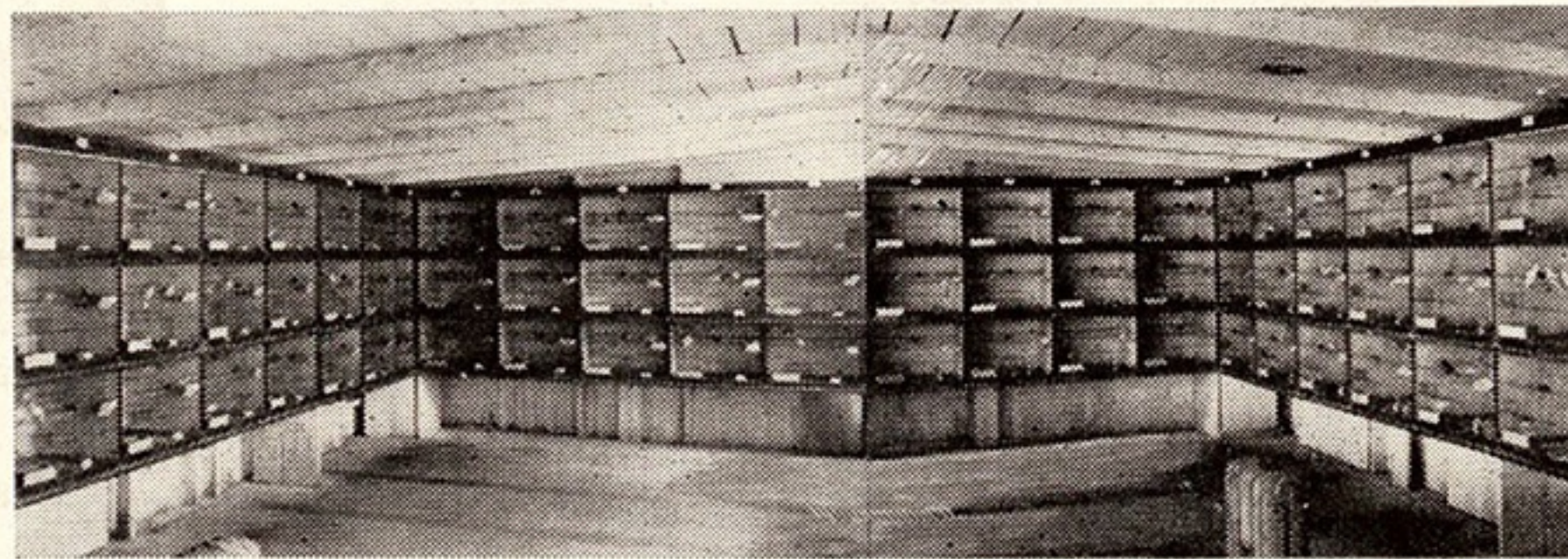
The Love Bird aviaries are like the above except they are only four feet in width and hold twenty-five Love Birds, or five pairs of breeding stock.

Of the larger type birds there are the Cardinals, Jays, Thrushes, Magpies, Cockatiels, Conures, Parrots and hundreds of other species that require more flight room. Aviaries for these birds measure

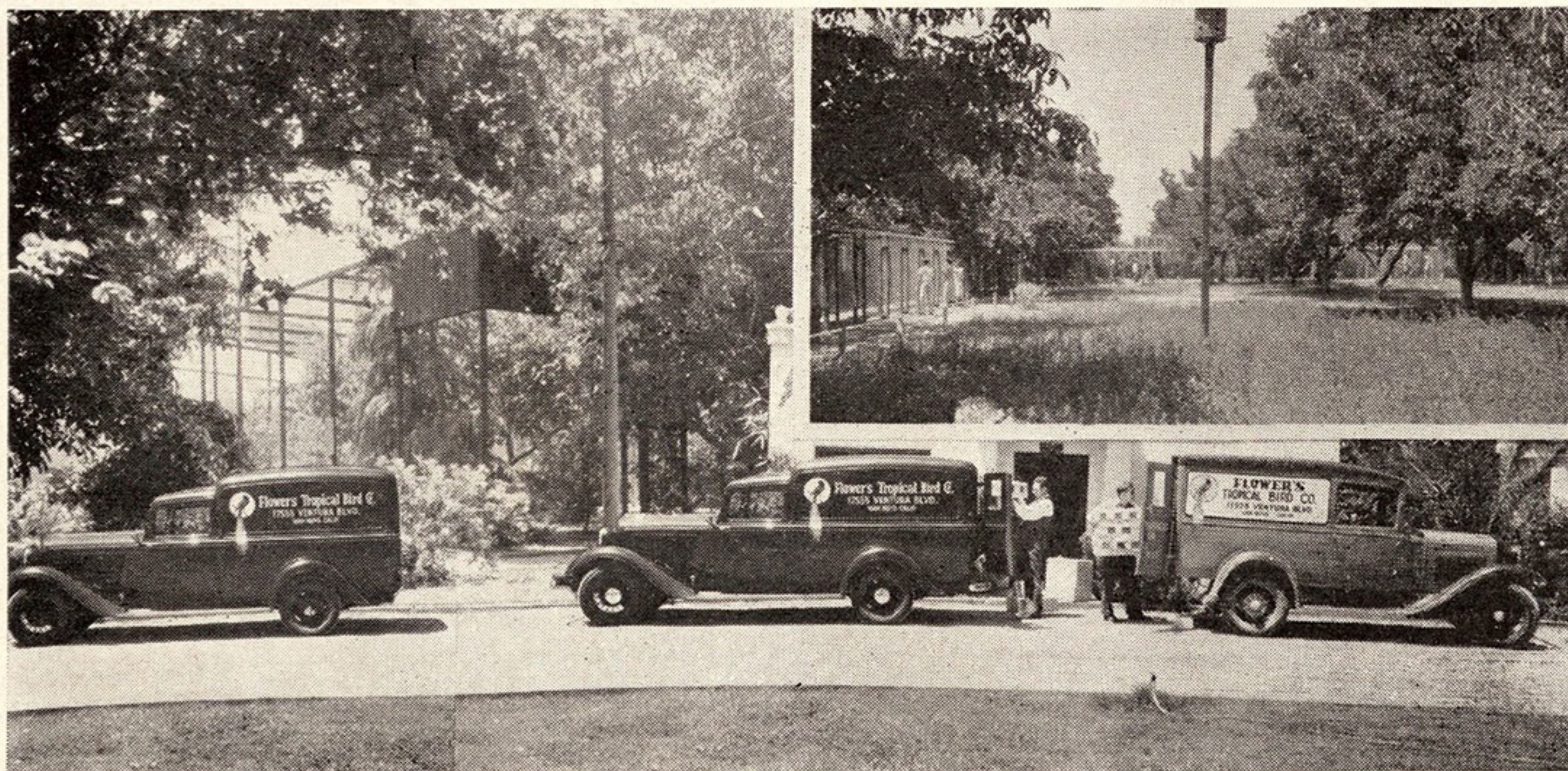
12 ft. wide by 30 ft. deep and are planted in tropical bamboo and other shrubbery.

For the large estate birds, such as Peafowl, rare waterfowl, wild Turkeys, Curasows, Pheasants, Quail, etc., the pens are large enough to allow the occupants plenty of flight space and exercise.

The largest aviary on the place is a magnificent display aviary near the entrance, measuring 75 ft. x 40 ft. x 22 ft. tall. This gigantic enclosure has full grown walnut and apricot trees growing inside, as well as a jungle of evergreen tropical shrubbery in which the birds are allowed to breed freely. No stock is ever sold from this aviary as it is kept for display purposes only. The aviary has a fountain and pool in the center and the ground space is equipped with an automatic sprinkling system so that no one need ever go inside for watering the shrubbery. This aviary is a veritable jungle and is one of the main attractions for visiting buyers. It contains a large assortment of colorful waterfowl, Pheas-



One of the Receiving Houses, Each of Which Holds 900 Laurel Mountain Choppers



These Modern Delivery Trucks Deliver Local Orders as Well as All Express Shipments to Trains  
Inset—A Section of the Parrakeet Aviaries



This Office Sees to It That Your Price List Reaches You Promptly Each Month

ants, Quail, fancy Doves, Cardinals, Finches, Tanagers and other showy species, all nesting freely in the trees and shrubbery.

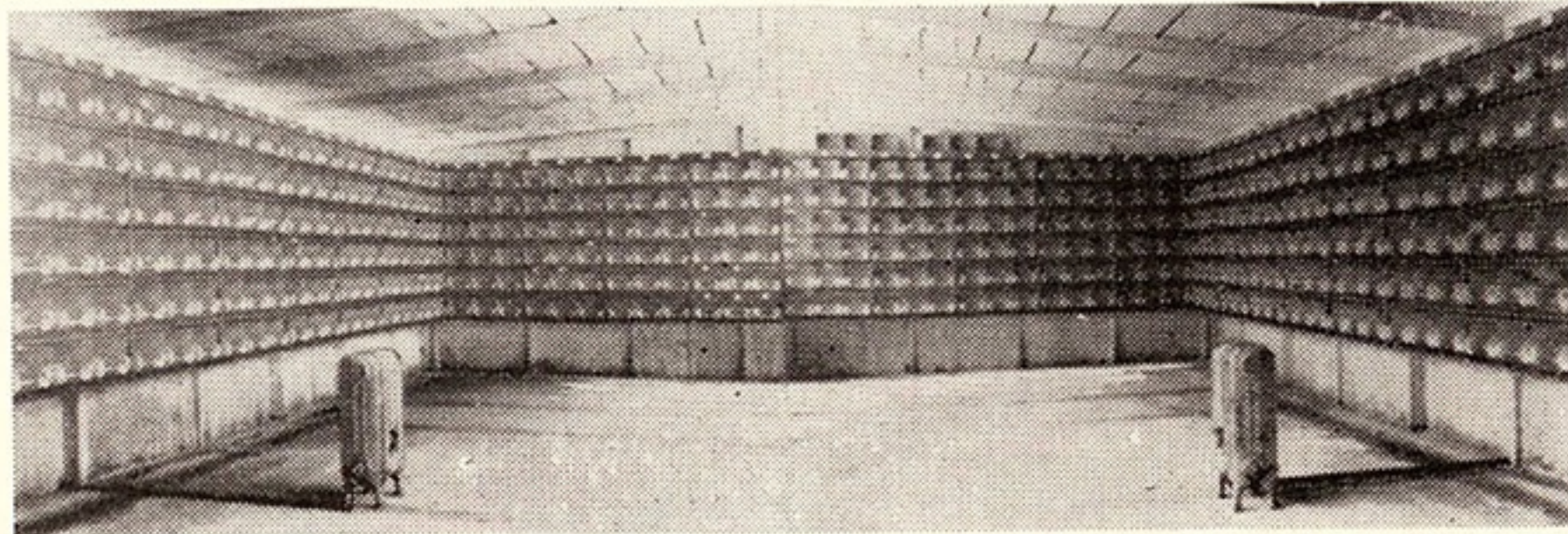
The Parrakeet and Parrot aviaries are arranged in the form of a quadrangle occupying three sides of an acre of ground, the center of which is devoted to artistic flower beds and shrubbery, watered by automatic sprinklers. The Finches and other small birds occupy six rows of aviaries, each row measuring over 100 feet long.

The most interesting feature and one that attracts the visitors most is the acclimating houses. These are a series of snugly built houses measuring 30 ft. long by 14 ft. wide, with entrance door at each end. Both sides of these buildings are built of solid glass windows, assuring the birds an ample supply of sunshine and ventilation. Leading through the center is a three foot aisle, on each side of which is built a row of ten aviaries, twenty in each house, each 3 ft. wide opening into the aisle only. Each house is steam heated in winter. These acclimating houses are used for acclimatizing newly imported birds. All new arrivals are put into these comfortable indoor aviaries as soon as they reach the plant where they are allowed to rest thoroughly after their long ocean trip. In winter the temperature is kept at 80° day and night for the first three days, during which time the birds are allowed to exercise and bathe frequently. This high temperature is then gradually lowered until at the end of about two weeks it is down to normal. The birds are then ready for the open air aviaries for further "hardening." Here they are kept for an additional period of from three to six weeks before they are offered for sale. This "hardening" process is expensive and means a lot of additional work but it is very necessary if the birds are to live after they are shipped to the Pet Shops and show the retailer a profit.

I asked Mr. Flowers what he thought the difference in value was between a newly imported bird and one that had gone through the firm's acclimating process. He could not quote definite figures on the actual difference in value of two such birds, but he illustrated his point by showing me a large shipment of Scarlet Tanagers that had just been put in one of the acclimating houses. These birds had just arrived the day before

from South America and looked pretty much tired out. He explained it as follows:

"Our wholesale quotation on Scarlet Tanagers, first class acclimated birds is today \$8.50 each. These birds went through the same acclimating process that this group is going through now. During the "hardening" process about 10% of the group died. Thus the weak ones were eliminated here rather than on the shelf of one of our dealer customers. The rest of the birds after much care and expense gradually became "hardened" and reconciled to confinement. Counting the cost of this process and adding to this the cost of the weak birds that died during the "hardening" amounted to about 25% of the original cost of the birds. You can readily see that had we wanted to do so, it would have meant money in our pocket if we had sold the birds on arrival at \$6.00 each rather than hold them and selling later for \$8.50 after acclimating. And don't think they wouldn't have sold. Had we placed them on our monthly price list at \$6.00 each they would have appeared to be a good buy and all of them would have gone out in one week, but by so doing our business would have been injured, for our customers would have been disappointed in them. It has taken us many years to convince our dealer customers that there is a vast difference in the quality of various birds. It has been a long up hill job and has meant the loss of a few short sighted customers who see only the price mark when buying anything. Such dealers go over the various price lists which sometimes vary as much as 25% and blindly send their order to the fellow who prints the cheapest prices. Such dealers have gradually eliminated themselves from our files, but the buyers who want quality instead of price have stood by and made it possible for us to build the largest wholesale bird business in America on



Song Testing House, Where the Famous Laurel Mountain Choppers Get Their Musical Education

quality instead of price."

Now getting back to the acclimatizing of imported birds, the Flowers organization is the only firm in the U. S. who is using this system. No one else has ever deemed it necessary to "harden" birds before offering them for sale. The argument has been that it costs too much money and that the bird dealer is not willing to pay more for quality birds. The Flowers firm has proved the fallacy of such statements and is now offering for sale only acclimated stock. They claim that dealers

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less come through the mauve strain some of which are already a very dark gray.

A combination of blue and yellow has also been discussed among breeders but this phenomenon, though a worthy study will likely never be produced for when the blue and yellow blood is mingled in the bird it produces the natural green and it is not possible to breed the yellow out of one part of the birds anatomy and the blue out of another part of the same bird, which would have to be done before a combination like the above would be realized.

During the last two years "gray wings" have become popular. A gray wing may be a bird of any color possessing gray wings. What is meant by the term "gray wings" is that the wing feathers are composed of a combination of gray and white instead of the natural wing plumage of black and white.

The term "gray wings" is seldom understood by the novice, hence this simple explanation. They are not especially pretty but are different from the common run and consequently desirable.

The space allotted to this article will not permit the discussion generally of the various matings necessary to breed certain colors. Volumes have already been written on the subject and volumes more could doubtless be written about it.

The principle governing such breeding is explained by Gregor J. Mendel, an Austrian scientist who discovered the law now called "Mendelism," during the eighteenth century. Most cross breeding of plants and animals since that time has been influenced greatly by this great law, and many new species and colors owe their existence to Mendel's discoveries along this line.

Color breeding in any bird is exciting but is especially so in Shell Parrakeets. There are many surprises always in store for the experimenter and new colors are liable to come to light at any time. Breeders who practice color breeding often have nests of young embracing all six of the established colors, green, blue, yellow, cobalt, mauve and white. Thrilling? Yes, indeed, to the true Aviculturist.

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## Birds by the Acre

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do want better birds and are willing to pay more for strong hardy stock.

Our next stop was the Canary houses. They utilize two types of Canary houses. One type is called the "receiving house," the other the "song testing house." First we will describe the "receiving house." These houses are 30 ft. long by 15 ft. wide. The end walls and one side wall are lined with cages measuring 24 in. wide by 18 in. high. Each house contains 60 such cages. Each cage has a capacity of 15 birds, making the capacity of each house 900 birds. The "receiving houses" are used for receiving and housing new arrivals at the plant. These new arrivals are Chopper Canaries raised by some of the 300 families engaged in raising Laurel Mountain Choppers for the firm and who live in the vicinity of the plant. All of the birds are brought in by the breeder or called for by their own collector. None are ever shipped in. On arrival each bird is given a thorough "delousing" and bath. They are then placed in the flight cages in the receiving room for inspection. Here they are watched carefully for ten to twenty days by an attendant who patiently selects only the choicest specimens. These are then moved to the "song testing house" where they are placed in roomy individual cages measuring 9 in. square and are ready to begin their musical education. Each

song testing house contains over 400 individual cages. Here the birds are tutored by exceptionally fine singing birds, called teachers. These teachers are selected with great care and are responsible to a great extent for the varied and luxurious song famous in the "Laurel Mountain Chopper."

The teachers are distributed throughout the song house, averaging one teacher to every 25 pupils. "Laurel Mountain" is Flower's trade name for these famous Choppers. It is patented and copyrighted. The name was chosen by reason of the company's plant being located at the foot of a group of Laurel covered mountains just twenty miles north of Los Angeles.

I visited the spacious offices and shipping rooms and was surprised at the activity manifested, especially at this season of the year which is supposed to be the dull season. The office and shipping department employs four men and five women the year round. These departments are equipped with every modern convenience.

During the busy season the firm ships over 5,000 Shell Parrakeets per month and many times this number of other popular species. They have customers in every state in the union and most foreign countries.

They have a man now in India collecting rare and semi-rare birds, another man is leaving soon for the Orient. At the time this is being written a third collector has just returned with a cargo of rare and colorful soft bill birds from South America, among which was a pair of rare Bell Birds. It is believed that this is one of the few pairs of these birds ever brought into America.

The firm receives regular shipments of European birds from England, France and Germany.

This establishment is indeed a beehive of interest. The latch string is always out to visitors. Out of town dealers are especially invited to visit them when in California attending the San Diego Exposition this year. A company car will meet you at the station and take you direct to the plant, if you will let them know when you are coming. You will be shown over the entire grounds without any obligation whatever to buy.

Those behind the enterprise and who are responsible for it having grown to be by far the country's largest wholesale bird business are M. F. Flowers, in charge of sales; W. F. Flowers, breeding; V. L. Flowers, advertising, and M. R. Flowers, importing. All members of the firm are born naturalists and bird lovers. They have edited many articles and written several books on the subject of foreign birds in captivity. Judging solely on my own observations, this firm truly lives up to its slogan, "A dependable source of supply."

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