

A GLANCE THROUGH FIFTY YEARS OF BUDGERIGAR ACHIEVEMENTS

By John Scoble - January 2010

The late fifties was a boom time for budgerigars with the BSA founded and new branches being formed for the influx of new members, with shows of over 2,000 birds exhibited.

Backyard breeders were even charging \$20.00 for Australian Dominant Reds -quite a price when a good weekly wage then was only \$40.00. These Dominant Reds were a very strong mutation at a time when many reverse Pieds were being produced. Such Pieds were virtually all yellow or all white with split-coloured cheek patches and a small patch of undulations around the head.

During this period, generally Victoria had larger and better exhibition birds than NSW, however, NSW had superior colour and superior spots in Normal light greens, dark greens (laurels as they were called in those days), olives, skyblues, cobalts, violets and mauves which were plentiful in most breeders' aviaries. There were a few greys. However, the late Harley Yardley advocated if grey-greens were introduced into other Normals they would ruin our depth of colour. His reasoning may have been because he knew the Normal grey bird is the only one whose markings generally appear black under a microscope.

The first long-flighted budgerigar I saw was in the late fifties and had been sent by Frank Gardiner of Melbourne to Sid French at Caringbah, a suburb of Sydney. This bird represented an English long-flight mutation apparently sent to New Zealand which reached Australia. The bird can be described as a light green cock with good top end and shoulders, good length and size, with swank and deportment -a superior bird by far in most respects to anything I had at that time. The bird's only problem was his extra three or four primary flight feathers and his slightly longer tail.

In the early sixties, Brian Birmingham (a Melbourne exhibitor) won the BSA Annual Show at the Sydney lower Town Hall with a bird that was a solid Greywing Grey- Green that inherited the long flight feather problems (although the problem had decreased from the bird I saw sent by Frank Gardiner a few years earlier).

My mentor, Billy Hoare, became the dominant breeder and exhibitor until his passing away in 1983. His birds in all varieties were the best coloured budgerigars ever bred in this country. He was able to increase the Yardley spot size another 50%. Some of his winning Normal cocks were split Cinnamonwing and they had inherited the soft, silky wide feather from the Cinnamon sex-linked gene.

Bill always advocated the best Normal hens were always bred from a Normal split- Cinnamon cock crossed with a Cinnamon hen; the best light green Normal he ever bred was by a light green Normal cross with a violet skyblue Normal hen. His most outstanding bird was a Lutino cock he called "boof head" which won several shows. In those days Lutinos, Albinos, Black-eyed Yellows and Whites were all grouped in a section called self colours at shows. This meant these varieties of birds regarding wings, tails etc. For perfection had to be the same as their body colour. Judges from this era used to take the birds into sunlight (especially Lutinos and Albinos) to see if any exhibit had green or blue suffusion which was considered a bad fault. Some of Bill's Lutinos were also masking Australian Yellow-face which inherited this mutation's yellow flights and facial feathers.

In those times you could exhibit purchased birds in the Old or Adult Classes. I remember Jim Don from Victoria buying two pairs of Black-eyed Yellows from Billy Hoare. Jim then entered them in two successive Melbourne shows where he was awarded Best-in-Show. When Bill's health deteriorated he asked me to send two pairs of Lutinos to Mrs Fellows in Melbourne. She also won many major awards with these birds. During the late fifties and early sixties, groups of Fanciers would gather at Bill's home to increase their knowledge of breeding and exhibiting budgerigars. Bill emphasised the need for any quality stud programme to have superior Normals.

In the late sixties, quality Greywings were in vogue and were winning champion bird at shows. Some strains had light grey wings whereas others had dark grey wings. Most of these birds originated from the aviary of Ted Carter in Melbourne.

Greywing Yellows also won top awards. They too had light and dark wings and undulations. Dick Mathews of Sylvania (Sydney) bred the mutation which had lighter coloured wings and markings, as well as good yellow body colour. The dark Greywing Yellow was bred through a Normal Greywing owned by Arthur Brown of Bexley. The colour of these birds was accompanied with green suffusion, especially on the rump. We used to pair these to Cinnamonwing Yellows to clear up the green suffusion and we ended up with solid, stylish, attractive Greywing Yellows; and when these birds were at their peak, they won major awards. I bred this variety for more than thirty years with many ending up a composite variety, i.e. being a Greywing Yellow as well as masking Cinnamonwing. However, for the first week of their lives I observed these chicks possessed the red Cinnamon eye colour.

In 1968 my first trip to visit Melbourne Fanciers that year I viewed many impressive groups of birds at Harry Wines' aviary. I was fortunate to be able to purchase three pairs of Normals and a pair of Black-Eyed Yellows. We talked and looked at the buds for hours and it was from Harry one learned the benefit of using Cinnamon Opalines. At that time he had a flight with a number of superior Cinnamon Opaline hens and he said to me "if he ran into a problem he could fix it with those superior hens". Harry was most informative and happy to share his knowledge.

I spent many hours learning from him the benefits of Cinnamon Opalines and he stressed a hen had to have width between the legs for her to have a wide pelvic area (thus less chance of egg binding). They also tend to pass on their bone structure as well as good spots and superior long feather. To strengthen this theory, for years on my trips to England I noticed most successful studs had numbers of Cinnamon Opalines. However, on a visit to England some five years ago, my studs had no Cinnamon Opalines whatsoever in their flights and the birds in my opinion had declined in quality.

Arthur Bugg was another clever Melbourne budgerigar breeder. He was hard to beat in nest feather classes because his youngsters were large and solid when they left the nest, and looked more like adults. He attributed this to his feeding programme whereby he placed his seed between two wet jute sacks and let the seed commence to germinate. He then spread it with a meat and blood extract before giving it to the birds. Arthur was obviously ahead of his time with protein enriched feeding.

I remember Karl Payne from Penrith buying some skyblues and others birds from Arthur Bugg. When Karl exhibited them with great success in Sydney these birds were seen to be well ahead of the competition, especially in size, top end and feather quality.

Victorian budgerigar breeders did have a real problem with Cinnamonwings where patches of faded, blotchy feathers were evident, especially on the wings. Breeders were advised not to let them out in the sun because it was fading their feathers. Unfortunately, like most causes persisting with such unwanted features, it all relies on the workings of heredity.

In 1980, a group of twenty budgerigar breeders decided to form the Budgerigar Improvement Society with our main object to exhibit interstate as a club. Eventually we had members from nearly every State and through the efforts of our secretary/treasurer Bill Dunbier, we took teams to the Gardiner and Heath Shields in Melbourne with great success. One could say this interstate competition was the forerunner to the National.

Frank Gardiner was a very competent judge and the driving force behind the development of the superior budgerigar. He also helped pair and cull numerous Fancier's birds in Victoria which resulted in many look-alike studs and especially so their Normal variety. I recall on my first visit in 1975 to the bird rooms of leading English budgerigar breeders Alf Ormerod and Doug Sadler I saw the same type of cock bird Frank advocated in a couple of breeding pairs.

In Australia, birds in the late seventies and eighties generally lacked spot size, depth of mask, colour and type. An unwelcome characteristic being bred was the semi-dominant long-flight birds which in appearance were quite dissimilar to the original English long-flights of the fifties seen in

Melbourne. It was obvious that most budgerigar breeders were compounding this anomaly and to make matters worse for the exhibition budgerigar, another semi-dominant mutation appeared in Australia, i.e. birds with long secondary feathers.

Some of these secondary feathers curled upwards and appeared not unlike sails. Unfortunately, some South Australian breeders and others tended to ignore this serious problem, thus never eliminating the fault from their stock.

Australian Dominant Pieds were becoming rare with perhaps some only having a head spot or a couple of pied wing feathers. When quality imported birds arrived from the UK, these unwanted faults seemed to disappear and we now have exhibition budgerigars with a high standard of excellence (and some judges therefore needed to change their outlook, if possible).

"One could say the Australian Dominant Pied was reborn again".

Imported Dominant Pieds produced some of the best Normals seen on the show bench. Numbers of imported specimens were excellent birds because they had inherited pure reproductive backgrounds; as a result, it became easy to breed good birds from such strains for a considerable time. However, after fifteen years a lot of breeders seemed to be going backwards in quality. Generally speaking, many breeders may still have the blood line but not the superior birds that were imported and reproduced.

The ideal wing carriage on an exhibition budgerigar is one whereby the rump feathers display the outline of a shield. This formation begins at the cutaway of the secondary flight feathers and then follows down the edge of the seven primary flight feathers.

Centre of the mask problems now are those which are split by the beak forming a definite V, thus eliminating any deep mask, and facial feather throat spots are edging smaller as well as being 'Year' shaped and elongated. Hinged tails are noticeable now which disrupt any form of a straight backline and this undesirable feature is apparent on birds which stand at approx. 12 o'clock. Most of these are cut off at the perch, thus unbalanced, and unable to perch at approx. 10 o'clock (or 2 o'clock) as illustrated in most ideals around the world. Faces that appear to curve in at the beak (key hole birds) are appearing because of the lack of continuance of width from the shoulder to the crown.

Jo Mannis comments were to me "one can go as wide as you like in the face, it's the height that's the hardest to maintain which is so necessary to complete a good super top end".

A glaring imperfection that the rest of the world appears to be banning from the show bench is head flecking and ticking. This problem is generally arranged by multiple genes and therefore can be expressed in different forms. Such birds may be useful to breed from, however it will be all bound up in the selection one makes to complete the breeding pair.

Fortunately, there are still some very careful budgerigar breeders who try to keep breeding birds and their offspring to most ideals, thus safeguarding any stud. Most of the great budgerigar breeders, past and present, have always had dark factor and violet factor birds, Duplex birds such as good Cinnamons and Opalines are still in the background of super birds. With every mutation there is also a feather construction change and as Alf Ormerod always told me, it's the down feather that makes an outstanding budgie and the darker and denser the down, the better. The Australian Spangle mutation has helped in the development of the exhibition birds worldwide. One of the best examples of spangling I have ever seen lately you may share with me -this Cinnamonwing Grey Spangle hen bred by John Hewitt is as good as one will see.



My parting words are, the value of any pair of budgerigars considered for breeding with, cannot be assessed on the excellence of each individual themselves, but by the youngsters they eventually produce.