

# Beginners Only

## HOW TO BREED GOOD BUDGERIGARS WITH FIRST RATE FEATHER QUALITY.

The terms Yellow and Buff as applied to feather types, are more familiar to Canary fanciers than to their Budgerigar breeding counterparts. The reason for this lies in history. Two hundred years ago, fifty years before the first Budgerigar was brought to Europe, Canary breeders were writing and using the terms “Jonque” and “Mealy” to describe the same feather textures.

The two ancient terms are descriptive. Jonque was short for jonquil, a yellow daffodil like flower, and Mealy means resembling meal. In fact, the difference between Yellow and Buff, although it can affect coloration, is structural. Yellow feathers have short, narrow webs, which cause them to cling tightly and smoothly to a bird's contours. Buff feathers have long, wide webs and so they lie loosely. Although a bird with Yellow feathering generally has a richer colour, this is not always the case. I have bred many Buff Lutino Budgerigars that have displayed excellent colour.

The next time you take a walk in the park, pick up a few pinecones. Some will be tightly shut – the equivalent of “Yellow” – and others will be open – the equivalent of “Buff”. They are the same cones but look quite different because they are in different states. The closed cone looks tight and dark. The open cone has lost its smooth shape and appears to be lighter in colour and weight. Another parallel can be drawn between pinecones and feathering. The more open a cone becomes, the larger it looks. Similarly, a Buff Budgerigar with the same body structure as a Yellow will look larger.

A top quality, exhibition Budgerigar needs to be fairly large and display a good depth of colour. To some extent, these are conflicting requirements and so the skilful breeder combines the best features of Buff feathering with the best of Yellow feathering, on the same bird. Such a bird has become known as an intermediate feathered Budgerigar and most breeders set out to breed such individuals by paring Buff to Yellow. This type of pairing has the advantage of producing at least a proportion of intermediates – Budgerigars with the feather type that makes them most suitable for exhibiting.

An alternative is to pair Buff with Buff. This type of pairing produces Buffs, the occasional Yellow or Intermediate and a proportion of much coarser Budgerigars known as Double Buffs. A continuous programme of double Buffing results in a strain of very long, very coarse feathered Budgerigars.

### **Small Stature**

At the other end of the scale is the Yellow to Yellow pairing. This produces Yellows and double Yellows – birds that have even shorter and tighter feathering than their parents. These may well excel in depth and solidity of colour, but their small stature is a distinct disadvantage on the show bench.

Experience has shown that the best pairings for producing the type of Budgerigars that can win against strong competition are Yellow x Buff: Intermediate x Buff: Intermediate X Yellow and

Intermediate x Intermediate. Sound selection of breeding stock and careful retention of the youngsters which best combine body size and deep colouration will bring about an overall improvement in any Budgerigar stud.

Next time you go into your bird room, try to identify which of your Budgerigars are Yellows and which are Buffs. It may not be easy the first time, but as you come to appreciate the differences in feather texture it will become easier. The ability to identify the range of feather types will be one of your greatest assets when selecting breeding pairs.

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## **SHOW PREPARATION**

by Ray Steele

No sooner is the main part of the budgerigar-breeding season over than we have to start preparing for the show season. Inevitably the show season brings with it as many, if not more trials and tribulations as it does successes. Established fanciers should have accumulated enough experience and sense of proportion to enable them to withstand the disappointments. They should understand the reason for a failure and realise that sometimes just a slight improvement, perhaps in condition or preparation, can make the difference between this weeks failure and next weeks success.

Unfortunately, many beginners approach their first show season full of enthusiasm only to be disillusioned by a run of bad luck. No one pretends there is any method of guaranteeing instant success, but knowing how to go about preparing budgerigars for exhibitions is putting your foot on the first rung of the ladder of success.

The beginner starts with one great disadvantage by definition he lacks experience and there is no substitute for hard earned experience. Neither can it be denied that the man who joins the fancy with access to almost unlimited wealth is going to have a head start at the onset. However, it is in the long run that counts and in the long run the man with the skill, the knack, call it what you will, will have the last laugh.

Budgerigars need to be prepared just as much for the show bench as the breeding cage. As the adult birds in my show team are taken from their breeding cages they are put into large inside and outside flights for a period of at least six weeks before the finer points of show preparation are begun. In the flights they can exercise in a way that is never possible in a breeding cage, no matter how large. This increases their vigour.

The first reaction of most members of the breeding team when put into a flight is to fall into a moult. This is no bad thing as when they come through the moult they will be ready for exhibiting, with a little preparation. About four to six weeks before the first show, prospective show birds are caught up and put into stock cages. The reason for the range of times is that some put on weight more quickly than others and you need to build up a budgerigar before sending it to a show as many do not eat much whilst in a show cage. There might be a slight weight loss at first, but once they become accustomed to the cage they soon put the weight back on and more.

No more than twelve budgerigars are placed in an eight-foot (2.4m) long cage. Such a cage would comfortably hold twice that number but the objective is to avoid the problems, such as

broken flights and blood quills that a greater number might bring. Far more birds are prepared than will find their way onto the show bench. This is because I want the widest choice possible as the day of the show approaches and the possibility that a late minute substitute may be required, it is much too late to start preparing another bird.

Inevitably some members of the prospective show team will fall into a moult because their accommodation has been changed once more. These are returned to the flights for a couple of weeks. An advantage of starting show preparation six weeks before a show is that any broken flights or tail feathers can be carefully removed and will grow back in again by the date of the show.

Showmanship can be bred into an exhibition budgerigar in just the same way as individual physical features such as spot size and head shape. Some are born showmen but most benefit from a small amount of show cage training. You sometimes come across odd individuals who always misbehave when put into a show cage and no amount of training will effect any improvement of the worst cases.

Breeders soon come to recognise which lines of their birds are naturals and know just what a show cage is for from the moment they enter one. My stud is no exception one of my Lutino cocks won thirteen challenge certificates, two best in show awards and was second best in show at an area society championship show. The only time he was ever seen to leave the show cage perch was when he needed to eat.

It does not do to base all of your judgements about a budgerigar's showmanship potential on its performance in your own bird room. It can work both ways, an apparent winner in your own establishment may misbehave when taken into the unfamiliar surroundings of a show hall, while one that misbehaves at home can turn into a paragon of virtue when placed before a judge. You soon get to know the adult members of your show team, but the youngsters can cause some shocks.

Very good youngsters can completely spoil themselves by "pulling" so that they lose their attractive shape and contrive to be smaller than they really are. There is no way that training in your own birdroom will counteract this behaviour. It is the atmosphere of the show hall that causes it and it is only in the show hall that the behaviour will improve. This is why current year youngsters benefit from a few early outings. Most will repay the time and effort at later shows.

I am of the opinion that budgerigars come into condition more quickly if given access to an outside flight, but this is not really practical when preparing for showing, because feathers get broken and count against a show bird. Some varieties, like albinos and Lutinos become too dirty to show unless they are washed with shampoo. Even so there are certain individuals (the type who keep up their weight while in flights) who can be caught straight out of the flight, be sent to a show and come home adorned with rosettes. During the show preparation period, I lightly spray budgerigars with cold water, every day for the first week and then every other day up until the day before the show. I do not believe that heavy spraying is ever necessary as light spraying brings about the same final condition.