

## **Breeding Normals with *Henry George***

The reason I approached Henry George on the topic of “Breeding and the Importance of Normals” in one’s aviary is because there is no person more qualified than he to pass on some of his vast knowledge to us. The reason being that Henry won the following awards at this year’s Nationals:

Best Green: Best Greygreen: Best Blue: Best Violet: and he came second and third in the Grey class.

Before we get to the interview, I will list the Normal and Recessive varieties for you so you have a better understanding of the conversation.

<b>Normals:</b>	<b>Recessive</b>
Green	Greywing
Greygreen	Clearwing
Grey	Fallow
Sky Blue	Black Eye Self
Cobalt	Dilute
Mauve	Recessive Pied
Grey	Dark eyed clear
Violet	Crest
Yellow Face	Saddleback / Darkwing

*Carol: The birds that did very well for you at this year’s Nationals are all super birds and I am wondering if they are related at all?*

Henry: There are a lot of relationships amongst them but I would have to look at each of them to tell you precisely.

*Carol: So how much emphasis do you place on Normals in the breeding programme?*

Henry: To breed good Normals you have to concentrate on Normals. Put your best Normals together or to Cinnamons or Opaline Cinnamons. Most of my best birds come from Normal cocks to Opaline Cinnamon hens or Normal cocks to Cinnamon hens so my top birds generally have Cinnamon in them. Opaline Cinnamon hens are a most important component in the breeding of top quality Normals.

*Carol: Why do you use the Cinnamon so much?*

Henry: I find Cinnamon fines down the feather and gives it a more silky kind of touch. I think it helps the quality of feather. Going back to breeding good Normals, one of the main things I think is to concentrate on Normals so probably not to breed Recessives. In recent years I have reduced the number of recessive varieties I breed. The reason is if you have a Recessive variety and you put your Normals to them, the Recessives drag the Normals back in quality so put your best Normals to Normals or a good Cinnamon or Cinnamon Opaline. You have to have a lot of Normals if you breed Recessive varieties as well. A lot of people say “put your best Normals to the Recessives to improve them” but I say no, put your second string Normals to your Recessives and keep the first string to improve the Normals. The

reason for this is by mating Normals to Recessives, the Normals that are bred from them are carrying the smaller genes.

*Carol: When you are pairing up, are there any Normals you would not put together?*

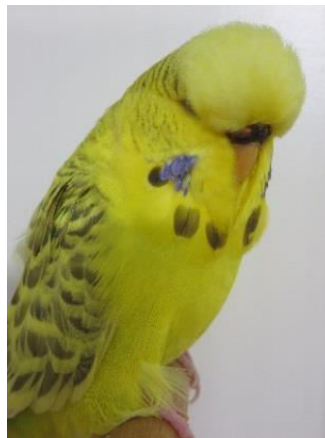
Henry: I tend to try and breed the Violets through the Blue series which includes the Greys of course. Probably in the Normals the Greys and the Greygreens are my strongest birds generally, but I do have some nice Blues as well. All the Normal varieties I will mate together like Greens to Greygreens or to Greys or to Skyblues. A lot of people say you shouldn't double up on the Grey factor but I do regularly and get good birds out of the pairings because the Greys are powerful birds.

*Carol: When you are pairing up, do you look for size first, or concentrate on nice black markings on a yellow or white background?*

Henry: I look at the bird first, size, shape, balance and deportment then I look at the size and shape of the head and feather direction, length and width. On the feather length I know a lot of people pull out feathers and compare them, I don't do that. I let the spots dictate because if you check you will probably see that the birds with the round spots will usually have the wider shorter feathers and the birds with the elongated, rectangular or oval spots have the longer feather so I compare them based on pairing up the round spot with the elongated spot from a feather point of view..

*Carol: Does it matter which parent has the elongated spot?*

Henry: No. I don't believe in putting two long feathered birds together that used to be called "double buffing" and that doesn't work in the long term. You can get some good birds out of the pairings of "double buff" but I am not sure that it doesn't encourage the possibility of feather dusters however I believe most feather dusters come from a recessive gene. I have just bred one out of my Recessive Pieds.



Spot shape:  
Grey on left has elongated spots whilst  
Fallow on right has round spots.

*Carol: How would be the best way you could describe "feather direction?"*

Henry: It is a matter of two things with head feather – one is blow which is the outwards and upwards look. Feather direction tome is sideways so ideally yo9u want a bird with blow and feather direction with the sideways direction. Now we have the "Buffalo look" which is blow, sideways direction and down again at the sides. There are some around but not too many.

Henry: It is all a matter of degree. I think some of the Buffalo looks that are in Europe these days are going too far. But you can get the Buffalo look with the finer feather and to me that is the ideal with the blow as well because you do get the directional feather with birds that the head feathers go sideways but are flat on top and you only have half the story then.

*Carol: How would you recommend to a Novice breeder on how to get the blow on a bird? You have to have it in the bird don't you?*

Henry: Yes you have to have it in the bird so if it isn't in the birds you are producing you really have to buy it in. A lot of these feather features are recessive so if you buy a pair of birds that don't have the blow visually but have been bred from birds that have it, you can produce it and these birds are much more reasonably priced. You won't get a huge proportion of youngsters with blow but you will get a proportion. The same principal applies to feather direction.

The best analysis is to catch the bird, spread out its wing and look at the underside and if there is Violet there it is a Violet Sky and if no Violet than it is a Cobalt.

*Carol: Also I think the Violets have an iridescence to their colour and the Cobalt's don't.*

Henry: Yes they do. There is a shade in the tail feather as well but unless you are looking at the two side by side it is hard to pick it up.

*Carol: With our discussion today, I am not mentioning the Yellow Face which the powers that be stating they are a normal. I only want to concentrate on the other Normals. Are you pleased with the increasing numbers of Normals appearing on the show benches?*

Henry: Yes I think it is a very positive thing. Talking about the Yellow Face though I only breed Yellow Face to blue series birds. I know a lot of breeders will mate them to Greens and Greygreens but I don't as you don't know which birds carry the Yellow Face and which birds don't. I actually purchased a Greygreen from the Welshman auction and paired it to a Blue and half the chicks are Yellow Faces. I have some green series birds from them as well so I don't know which ones are carrying Yellow Face and which ones aren't. I was quite surprised that a breeder with that much experience would do that.

*Carol: How long do you think the birds can get. They seem to be getting longer all the time.*

Henry: How long should they get? I have had birds that have died and I have measured them and they have been 250 to 275mm. I have even had one 285. I think that 250mm is as long as they should get. One of the things though with length at the moment, especially in Normals, is the length in the tail. The tail length of some of these birds is getting excessively long and out of proportion with the bird. It should be 35% of the body length as per the Standard.

*Carol: I was speaking to Grant Findlay from Scotland and he was saying extra- long tails are becoming a real concern in the United Kingdom and Europe.*

Henry: I gathered that. The World Budgerigar Organisation was talking about banning them from shows. I have been stressing that at lectures I have given lately. Some of the best birds have excessively long tails. Normally it is the cock so I ensure the hen I am pairing him to doesn't have this fault. There are a lot of things to look at when pairing birds up.

*Carol: By the sounds of things, the extra-long tail could be a dominant feature.*

Henry: There is a bit of logic about it. As you try to get the longer feather, you get the longer feather elsewhere like the tail. It is not going to be easy to split the gene to get the longer feather generally without the longer tail. It is a challenge that has to be faced I think.

*Carol: Do you think enough emphasis is placed on the clarity of wings or is it just on the outline of the bird?*

Henry: I think if you look at the size, shape, balance and deportment of body and size and shape of head that counts up to sixty points. If you try to mark the bird by points and then you look at markings where you have twenty points, if the markings aren't good, you can't mark too many points off. The other thing is colour and you can't take off too many of the twenty points allocated for colour for lack of clarity of wings. Generally the birds are pretty good on colour so it isn't an issue. It is really marking problems out of twenty points against size, shape, balance, deportment and colour which is eighty points. Even if you knocked half off, making it ten points, then the larger better bird will still win.

Carol: Do you think more emphasis should be placed on variety requirements?

Henry: In general to a degree but especially in the variety sorts of birds. I would have like to have seen it go back to how it was in my early days of bird judging where there were different points for different varieties of birds. I feel the Standard has been oversimplified on the points system. I have tried a few times to get it changed towards the other way to some degree but the general opposition prevailed.

*Carol: If you were a Novice or giving advice to Novices, what varieties would you suggest they start with for the first few years.*

Henry: I would suggest they do start with Normals. I know some of the other varieties are prettier birds but you can add a Normal Violet amongst the Blues to add some extra colour and interest. But really it is Normals, Opalines, Cinnamons, Opaline Cinnamons and I believe that is the grouping that I pair together to breed the best birds in the Normal series. Now you can toss in Spangle as I believe some of my better Normals now are coming out of Normal to Spangle pairings. I don't normally classify Spangles as a variety bird and I think they are an important bird that can be used with Normals. The next one would be the Dominant Pied, although they have gone backwards a bit over the years, but that has not happened in my aviary as I have been concentrating on them. I put Normals to Dominant Pies thus getting some of both varieties. So all of that grouping I would suggest would be a good basis to start with without getting into the Recessive varieties but unfortunately the Recessive varieties are the pretty birds and are consequently popular with Novice breeders.

*Carol: As a bit of a sideline and you don't have to answer if you don't want to but I remember you saying that the Opaline hen and the Dominant Pied hen you won with at the Nationals this year, which are sisters, probably won't breed for you. Is it because of their feather, size or head shape? Can you expand on that for me please?*

Henry: It is really a combination of being big birds with long feather and a lot of directional feather. I find you can breed with cocks with those features but the "cock headed" hens which they really are, are difficult to breed from. Anybody that is buying birds I suggest they not buy the cocky headed hens and that they buy the lesser sisters.

Carol: Have you got any lesser quality sisters of these two birds to breed from?

Henry: In my breeding programme I ensure that if I breed these sort of hens, I always keep some sisters to breed from as they have the same genetics as the better quality sisters. The secret if you like of breeding the better Normals is that you keep the siblings of the super birds and they invariably breed better numbers than the super birds themselves.

I can tell you a story of when in 1990 or whenever the first shipment of birds were being brought into Australia from England, I went over to buy some birds. I purchased about half a dozen super hens and even back then they were a thousand pounds each. They were very expensive to buy and when they finally arrived here and I mated them I got one chick out of the six super hens. I made another trip back a few years later and I was speaking to a few of the English breeders and one in particular who I commented to that I had bought one of these birds from him and he said "I put a whole lot of birds up for you to select from and you picked her". I said "yes I did". He said those are the birds we show and sell. We don't even try to breed from them, I just sell them and get big money for them and breed from the siblings. It is nothing new.

Carol: So we have to be a little bit more selective?

Henry: You certainly have to be more aware. You have the birds you breed from and the birds you show. Showing your birds is also stressful for them. Birds that go to a lot of shows are less likely to breed and once again the lesser ones you keep at home breed well as they don't have the stress of shows. People say to me (and again I was asked this week) how are your National birds breeding? And my response is "they are not. I have not put any of them down to breed yet".

After they came back from the Nationals, I kept them for a month or so in a holding cage, then I put them into a smaller flight and then into a larger flight and I won't even try to breed from them for about six months to a year and then they will mostly breed with the exception of those cocky headed hens I mentioned earlier which may not breed.

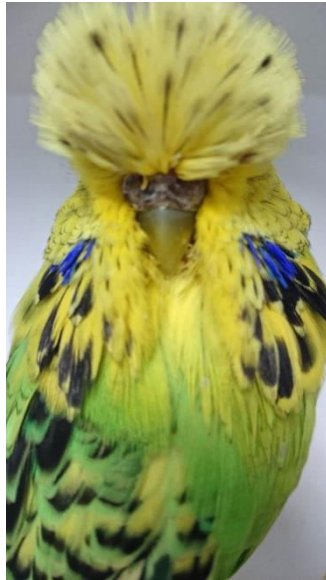
When you think about it, there is a lot of stress. The birds go to a club selection show then go home. They are then caged and sprayed etc. They then go to the Zone Selection show for the whole day, they go away from the show, not to their home aviary but to a different aviary with different people looking after them and birds do know the people who look after them and there is no doubt about that. They have different seed, different water, and people handling them and preparing them who the birds don't know so there is a lot of stress there. They then go on a flight interstate, into a holding cage there and get more preparation. They then go onto a big stage with more people than they have ever seen in their life (they can have up to 400 spectators), under spotlights which they would not have experienced before. They then go back into a holding cage, into a transport cage, a flight back, not straight into their own aviary but to a different aviary before being collected and taken back to their own aviary. This is a tremendous amount of stress and that is why I leave them alone to get over it, go through a moult and come back and if they are looking lively then I will consider pairing them up.

Carol: *Do you give your birds any electrolytes leading up to the Nationals?*

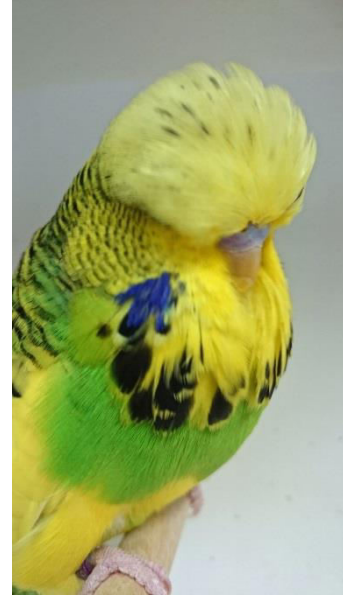
Henry: Yes for about three or four days before and after. I also give them before and after all shows not just the zone selections. I generally use Spark. The SQBBA gives the selected team birds Spark whilst they are away as well so there is consistency there.

*Carol: I cannot get over people who have birds selected to go away and then show them a few weeks later at club shows. I don't know what they are trying to prove.*

Henry: Mine don't get shown again as they have gone through enough. I never again show my National winners nor the



ones  
that  
are



placed.



Top left: National Champion Violet

Top Middle: National Champion  
Opalilne

Top right: 2015 rung young Pied cock

Lower left: Side view and front view of 2015 rung young Greygreen cock.

I am certain you will agree all magnificent birds and the youngsters are looking hopeful for the Nationals in Hobart next June.

Thank you Henry for spending so much time with me to help our members.