

COSTA & ANDERSON PARTNERSHIP – A little insight



Carol: How did you both get into budgies?

Bill: Probably about 25 years ago we were driving down the Tasmanian Peninsula and we saw this old guy's house with a sign stating "budgies for sale". We went in and ended up seeing his wife's shell collection and bought two pair of pretty ordinary budgies from him. He had been breeding for many years – we took them home. and had a cage on the back wall of the house with our green and blue budgies. Then we

made a trip up to New Norfolk where we met an old guy named Jack Bryne. Again there was a sign asking if anyone was interested in joining a budgie club . He introduced us to Jim and Judy Fletcher and we have been members of the Tasmanian Budgerigar Club which I have been told was the first budgerigar club in Australia.

John: From there, we built an aviary and it has grown to six times the original size. It started at 6 x 6 and now it is probably equivalent to a ten square house and is on three levels. I have found that the bigger aviary you have the less work you have to do and the smaller the aviary, the more work you have to do. This one I have now, I scrap and sweep the floor every day. If I leave it for a day or two the situation is disastrous.

Carol: We put wood shavings on our flight floors and we can go for quite a number of weeks without having to sweep etc.

John: Yes but yours is a lot bigger than mine. I have to walk through mine every day. I have a real thing in that I must give them clean water, clean seed every day and have clean floors. Even the breeding cage the floors must be clean.

Bill: We have PVC awnings that drop down at night so there is no dampness at all. Plus I have four pieces of cord going from the wire to the trees and that makes an awning so if it rains they get the breeze without the moisture. It is just like a verandah. We also have trees shading the area. We have concrete floors and wire breeding cages. We bought them from Frank McQuade and it took almost a year to get them from him. We are fairly happy with the system except we don't really like the babies to be walking on the wire so we put the bottom of a shoe box in there for the babies to huddle into.

Carol: So what are your nestboxes like?

John: We have external wooden boxes with the concave in it. We put wood shavings in the bottom. We find if the bottom of the nestbox is too smooth you will have splayed legs on the chicks so I always rough up the bottom of the box. The secret is not to have smooth bottoms!

Carol: What feeding programme do you implement?

John: I just buy normal budgie seed and also canary. Out of 20kg budgie I add an extra 10kg canary seed. I put the seed into margarine containers and just blow off the husks every morning. Then once a week I put all the seed into a sieve and clean it out but in the breeding cages I do it every couple of days. I give silverbeet, corn, tree fern, gum, basically grevillea.

We also feed natural stuff – never any medications – and we just don't seem to get much sickness or death. We just don't seem to have to buy any medications. We also give them fresh shell grit from Tasmania even though the modern trend is not to give shell grit

Carol: We give our birds shell grit and we give them the red grit as the birds love it. The only thing you have to watch is the red faces on the birds.

Bill: I think the salt content would be higher seeing it is pink. Cuttlefish and calcium bells are always on the menu. Straight water also – no medications.

Carol: At what age would you look at pairing up your birds?

John: Twelve months of age.. We put the hen in for 3 or 4 days and then introduce the cock. If there is no action within the next 3 or 4 days the cock comes out. I won't bother with them – I did it once and waited a month and nothing happened. I put another cock in and she laid within 6 days. We limit the number of chicks to four but preferably three. We foster chicks out if we are lucky enough to get that many fertile eggs. ON the day the eggs are due to hatch, I listen to it. If I can hear the chick chirping I leave it until about five in the afternoon. If it sounds desperate I assist the chick out of the egg. If you see blood or yolk you have opened the egg up too early. I tried to help one out a couple of weeks ago and it was too early. I felt sick for a few days as I felt I had killed it.

Last year, I had full eggs and not one hatched. This year I helped all six out and got five chicks alive so it does work at times. Sometimes I find the egg is too small and the chicks haven't got room to manoeuvre. You expect a big bird to lay big eggs but it doesn't work out like that. The size of the hen has no bearing on the size of the egg and the size of the egg has no bearing on the size of the chick. I just think the egg has to have a bit of size to give the chick a chance to move around.

We let our birds have two rounds each year. If the babies are too young to come out of the nest and the hen lays a third round, I take the eggs out.

Bill: we always stop our breeding season by Christmas. In Tasmania you can breed all year with its climate but not up here. Our breeding season starts in April but in Tasmania you can breed all year round.

Carol: You have been splitting your years half in Tasmania and half here in Queensland. Is this going to continue?

Bill: No, we are here permanently now. Splitting our year was very difficult on the birds. Jetstar, which is the friendliest air line to transport birds with, was very good with the birds. It used to cost us \$50 to take all our birds down to Tassie but once we were ten minutes late in arriving they were going to charge us \$500 to put all the birds on a cargo plane and they would have gone via Melbourne. This meant they would have been travelling all day and that was not the ideal situation.

Carol: If you had a pair that bred really super chicks this year, would you mate them together next year or look to improve further.

John: I would try with different partners but if the first round did not produce quality I would put the original pair back together. But I haven't had any luck this year at all and this throws all our plans out of the window for the next few years.

Carol: Do you find it really hard to purchase outcrosses?

John: Yes, auctions have taken over and I refuse to go to them now. You get ripped off with the prices people offer.

Carol: You can't blame the breeder as he is not responsible for the bids.

Bill: Exactly. I think it is getting out of hand. This is one of the reasons you can't attract young kids into the fancy. Look at the cost of the show cages, breeding cages, the birds, build an aviary. It is almost a baby boomers hobby. We are not in this fancy for money and we are happy to help people out. If a young person comes to our house we are happy to give a bird away to them. If breeders come over, we are happy to sell a bird for \$30 each although you can get that price in the pet shops. It is a great hobby and we have met some great people but it is still a hobby.

Carol: Do you like going to the Nationals and catching up with everybody?

John: The local scene is our interest rather than the Nationals.

Carol: What do you think is the hardest feature to get on your birds? What would you concentrate on first if you were starting out in the fancy:

Bill: Now that is the question – Head quality is important. I know birds have got bigger but I think when you first look at a bird what attracts you is the face and head and directional feather.

John: Yes but when people are starting out in the hobby, they like the pretty colours which is the mistake I made in the beginning. After about one and a half to two years, I had to get rid of all those birds and purchase some Normals. The thing is I enjoyed it more looking at the pretty birds in the flights than I do now. These days I am looking for a good bird and the way to improve it.

Carol: Getting back to improving the line, how long should you persevere on a feature. Say it takes you three years to achieve a decent head, would you try to imbed that for another two or three years or start looking for different features to improve.

Bill: I think you have to spend money to get quality. You have to spend money to get a good outcross with the features you are looking for.

John: When you start you want at least 20 or 30 birds. If I was starting again I would want about half a dozen pairs at the most at good prices – but there again you have got to get to know breeders and really haunt them. Keep the pressure going and going and sooner rather than later they will let you have some good birds just to get you out of their hair but I believe persevering pays off.

Bill: I do believe that too many varieties is the wrong way to go.

Carol: I agree with you. Years ago, we used to have a three way challenge between Queensland Budgerigar Society, Pine Rivers and Sandgate Club. To get points for your club you had to breed all the different varieties and this brought down our Normals to such a level by crossing them with so many recessive varieties that the Normals were worth nothing to us in our breeding room – it is a very quick way to lose a stud.

John: This is so true – just concentrate on a few varieties at a time.

Carol: So how do you think we can encourage more people into the fancy?

Bill: I think within your club you have to take new members under your wing. Be a little bit generous. It is difficult with council regulations too. I believe most of us are doing the wrong

thing when it comes to numbers of birds and sizes and positioning of aviaries. Touch wood we have had no inspectors.

Carol: But it is hard to get the young ones even interested in breeding livestock with all the computer games etc. You don't even see kids out playing in the streets anymore.

John: It is different generation. Our parents didn't see us in our childhood days as we would be gone from morning till dark. But it is a different climate these days as you don't even get to know your neighbours.

Carol: What is your favourite variety?

John: The Dominant Pied and the Yellow Face.

Bill: I like the Yellow face Grey. I used to love the Australian Yellow Face but they were too small when compared to the English variety and now they are almost impossible to find. I really like the Spangle. I remember when we first started out we had Spangles that were charcoal Grey. This old guy named George White who had them and we learnt so much from him. He was a real old timer who had the tap dripping continually in his flights so his birds had access to fresh water all the time. He used to put Condi's Crystals in the birds water once a month. George was a life members of the Tasmanian club. He would burn old logs so his birds always had charcoal. It was a treat to go to his place and visit and we would always come home from his place with a bunch of silverbeet and tomatoes. He was an amazing old man. Unfortunately we don't have many characters in the fancy these days and we need them..

Carol: We are having trouble attracting judges to our hobby these days – fourteen is definitely not enough. Have you any suggestions?

Bill: Our society has put forward to the SQBBA an idea to train people how to prepare the birds for shows and I feel this may be a start to getting them more interested in the hobby and maybe further into the field and consider judging. I think in South East Queensland we may not have the quantity in judges but we have the quality.

.I sincerely thank Bill & John for taking the time out from their show duties to answer my questions.