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## *Errol & Lynne Miller Story*



I took the opportunity to interview Lynne when we were in Melbourne together for the National Show and I thank her for her time and I



also thank Errol for his input and the photographs.

Carol: Just to give some of our readers your background, what got you into budgies and when? It goes back to the 1950's when Errol was a young teenager. Errol's Dad was a keen canary breeder and Errol took a keen interest in their breeding although he decided never to breed canaries due to their finicky nature. At that time Errol's dad worked in the Ipswich mines with Len Tucker who was and still is an avid and renowned budgerigar breeder so it comes as no surprise that Errol's dad build him a small aviary and Len supplied the birds. Errol bred the birds for 3 to 4 years before he got a job with the Government which took him away for a year at a time. After 2 years his mother got tired of feeding and watering the birds and one day let them all out. All 200 to 300 of them!

In 1983, we had a very shy son David who was thirteen at the time and Errol thought David needed a little hobby and as Errol recalled his own previous interest in birds he decided to have a small aviary built for David. We gathered some birds but David told us we had wasted our time so we were stuck with them.

I remember one time we wanted to source some Gouldian Finches and we were given Len Tuckers number. He put two budgerigars into show cages – one was a nice typey bird and the other was a much bigger buffier bird. Len asked Errol which one he preferred and Errol selected the big buffier bird. The scream from Len could be heard all over Ipswich as the other bird had just won Grand Champion of Show – Errol is hopeful his eye has improved since then.

Carol: What made you join a club and who was the biggest influence on you then?

Lynne: I think Errol had looked into it and felt that as in everything you must be in a club to learn what is important so he looked in the Yellow Pages and saw a number for the Sandgate Club. He rang you Carol who gave us Bill Silvertand's number and that is where we sourced our first birds from. With you being just a persuasive type you talked us into joining the old Sandgate Club. I think there was a mixture of people who influenced us at that time. There was Keith and Carol Gough, Jack Hackshall, Bill Silvertand and they were probably the biggest influences we started with.

Carol: Over the years the birds have changed a lot – what are the biggest changes you have noticed with them?

Lynne: Well it all started when the English birds came in 1990 but we were having quite a lot of success with the Australian birds up to then. We also had bought some nice birds from Brian Watkins and did very well with. We bought birds from different people like you and Keith. Then when we went to England with you and Keith in 1985 that really got our interest going.

Carol: comparing our birds in 1985 to what we saw in England – what was your impression?

Lynne: Nothing like each other. We all had nice birds but when we saw the birds in England we were just bowled over by their quality and size. We went to the big BS show with 6000 birds and it was wonderful event and of course we knew Jeff Attwood so we along with you and Keith were allowed in to watch Jeff judge the Greens and we were bowled over by the quality. We were also bowled over by the friendliness of the English people. Just the way they ran the show was superb.

Carol: You got birds in the first importation of bird from Jeff Attwood, what did you do with them as in did you mix them with the Australian blood or did you keep them pure English?

Lynne: No we kept the Pieds together and bred beautiful Pieds for several years. No all the birds we kept together and then when we bought more birds in with future importations we mixed birds that we knew would go well together from within the English bloodlines. This was from knowledge of what English breeders swapped between themselves etc.

Carol: We all have the English blood lines now and we were talking earlier about how the present day English birds are a bit too feathery – would you like to expand on that?

Lynne: Yes I think Europe including England has just gone over the top with what they expect in the budgerigar. They are just looking now, and mind you they might disagree, but the birds are just like huge faces sitting on a perch whereas the Australian birds although they have grown considerably have kept their beautiful shape and deportment.



One thing to note though is that our lines still have the huge English feathering even after all these years. Our birds have maintained it. A lot of breeders thought the English birds would lose the huge feathering after a few lines but we have definitely maintained it.

Left: gold ring Greywing cock displaying lovely feather length and width:

Carol: You have been to the Nationals many times now – what is the attraction?

Lynne I just love coming and seeing the fabulous birds and we all aspire to breeding the fabulous birds that are being bred these days.

Carol: What motivated you to become a State Judge and then a National Judge?

Lynne: That is a difficult one. I think the more interested you become in your hobby and the more involved you become, then you just want to learn more. I became a State judge and then I just had to go to the next level. Errol and I are both National judges with Errol judging the Nationals in 1993 in Adelaide and myself in Perth in 2000.

Judging the Nationals is a real buzz but it has its drawbacks as when I judged in 2000, we would have had at least three to five national Champions that year after a bumper season.



Carol: How many birds do you and Errol fly at home normally?

Lynne: Before we do our cull normally we keep about 700 to 800 and then we like to cull it down to about 250 to 300. We like twice as many hens as cocks because you often have misfortunes in the breeding season and usually with hens rather than cocks.

Left: The aviary showing the size.

Carol: So what size aviary do you have to hold this many birds?

Lynne: I am not good with sizes unfortunately. We have a very big breeding room with two long flights and breeding area that holds forty eight cages. Then we come into our holding area that has three banks of holding cages and then we have two flights that join onto that. I don't know the measurements but it is quite a good size.



Carol: What type of construction are your breeding cages?

Lynne: We have forty eight wire cages with trays under them and the other twelve banks are timber and wire. When the four of us went to England in 1985, we had of idea of introducing wire cages into both our aviaries after seeing them in Jeff Attwood's breeding room. After a few minor modifications and the success in them, they are practically universal now across Australia.

Carol: Do you introduce the hen to the breeding cage first or just pair them up at the same time?



Lynne: We introduce the pair together. We pair up both visually and by pedigree to see how close they are. We have gone as close as half sister to half brother this year which should be interesting but we normally like to keep them within families. We never mate brother to sister, father to daughter or mother to son. We like cousins and aunties to nephews and uncles to nieces. We like our hens to be about twelve months of age and our cocks about ten months of age. We keep our family lines together.

On the left is a photo are two of our mated pairs.



Carol: What colour varieties do you fly in your aviary?

Lynne: We fly Greens, Greys, Greygreens, Greywings, some Opalines, some Opaline Cinnamons. We did have a lovely family of Yellowfaces but we got

struck with trouble last year and lost the lot. We also have some Pieds, Spangles and Double Factor Spangles. They are our main varieties.

Carol: You just mentioned you were struck with trouble last year, would you like to explain?

Lynne: Thank goodness everything is fine now and they are all looking fabulous. We could not have prevented the trouble. We keep a lovely aviary and keep it very clean. As we had not introduced any outside stock for some time the vet seems to think we brought a problem home from a show, as he said showing birds can be fraught with danger in that droppings and contaminated seed can be transferred from cage to cage. At the same time, our veggie patch where we source our greens was accidentally contaminated by a neighbor spraying his fruit trees. With the birds already under stress, Cocci developed and for some reason our birds had previously built up a resistance to Baycox. Eventually it was found that Coccivet rectified the problem where Baycox had no effect.



Left: a very young bird with a gold ring.

Showing is great and it is always nice to win but showing is fraught with danger. You only have to have a steward or a judge move a show cage and seed or droppings fall out into your cage and you could have problems. A judge at a show last year had a cup of coffee just under the staging where he was judging and finished up with birds droppings in it.

Carol: You did not show this year because you had just a bad season so what are your hopes for next year?

Lynne: Well we put forty eight pairs down of the best that we have left so hopefully we will breed some nice ones from them.

Carol: Forty eight pair of birds is a lot of work – how long does it take you to feed them etc?

Lynne: We are both retired so we have time. Errol will sometimes spend all day in the aviary. I do the feeding and all the waters. Errol does all the floor cleaning, check the nest boxes and fostering that needs to be done as well as any maintenance.

Carol: What seed mixture do you use?

Lynne: We have 50% canary, 25% Jap and 25% French White. Then they also get a bowl of horse grow, a bowl of high protein, a bowl of red Panicum, they also get rock salt and hulled oats. We grow our own corn and Silverbeet. We also give them celery along with whatever going. We start our soft food mix a couple of days prior to eggs hatching.



Carol: What does your soft food mix consist of?

Lynne: I do boiled eggs with the shells on, carrots, porridge oats, baby's milk powder, few breadcrumbs to give it bulk, egg and biscuit mix. Blend it all in the blender and give them a heaped tablespoon full. They also get soaked hulled oats as well. We soak them for 10 minutes with a little bleach to kill any fungus. Last year I soaked wheat as well and made a nice mix.

Carol: You stated earlier that Errol does the fostering of eggs and chicks. Do you foster out for numbers or if there is a problem?

Lynne: We will foster if there are too many chicks or if you know there is a problem hen we will foster out. Sometimes you may want a hen to go down early so you take her eggs out. Errol's philosophy is no egg should go unhatched if possible and you must work your birds. Infertile birds should foster eggs as it is all about numbers. The more you breed the better chance you have of breeding quality.

Carol: There is a big problem at present where birds come out of the nest looking fine, they then drop their tail feathers and never grow them again. Would you use them?

Lynne: We try not to but if they are really super birds it is hard not too. Jeff Attwood and Dr Harry Cooper told us never to use them. We had a fabulous bird when he was out one year and he told us he would never breed with it. We continued and admittedly some of the babies dropped their feathers. If we do use birds like this we keep very good records and don't pair up the same problems.

Carol: How has judging changed over the years?

Lynne: I don't think it has changed. Different judges see birds in different ways and you do your best to come up with the best bird. Our problem is the low number of judges in our area. People don't change either; they accept you or they don't. Some people are more easy going than others and some you could never make happy.

Carol: In relation to perch sizes in the show cages. At present we are allowed 12ml and 16ml – do you have a preference?

Lynne: No, I don't care. I don't look at the perch when I am judging, I only look at the bird.

Carol: The problem with birds toes is rearing its head quite a bit lately. We have three forward toes instead of two on each foot becoming more prevalent and toes across the perch. Have you got any logic as to why this is happening?

Lynne: I haven't got any logic but I do think it is an inherited deformity and I don't like it. It seems to come in families of birds and we need to watch what we are breeding with. If it is in the family we need to cull them no matter how good they are. They defy the standard which states two forward and two back on each foot.

Errol thinks that it is caused by damage when the bird is rung as ring size has not increased but the birds have, also the bigger perches seem to accentuate the problem as birds have more difficulty gripping the perch.

Carol: What about flecking on birds – what is your personal opinion?

Lynne: We do have rule son flecking but personally I looked at some of the Nationals birds today and I thought some were too heavily flecked to be in the top placings. I think we need to be really clamping down on flecking. I would accept a little ticking but not heavily flecked birds winning major prizes.

Carol: How do you think we can get more birds into the club selections.

Lynne: I have no answer for that one as I think it is purely a personal preference. The birds are very well looked after. I have no problems with the birds going away as I feel the team selectors and carers' do a fabulous job. Some people may not show at National level because of the stress to the birds. Off course some people say they have trouble with birds not breeding for quite some time upon their return.

Carol: Are you looking forward to the Nationals in Toowoomba next year?

Lynne: Yes hopefully we will be there with some winners.

Carol: How do you think the fancy is going as a whole?

Lynne: I think it is declining at State level but when you come to the National you get a buzz. It is just the way times are as money is tighter. All the auctions are bringing in ridiculous prices. I don't like auctions as people spend too much money on birds that are not worth it. I think genuine sales are better. I mean since when was a budgerigar worth \$4,000 to \$5,000 – it is ridiculous.



Following are some photos of some gold rung youngsters the Millers have bred – it is looking hopeful for 2012 Nationals in Toowoomba.







and below two Nestfeathers who are not old enough to leave the parents yet but showing many wonderful qualities.

