

INTERNATIONAL FORUM

By Carol Gough



On the Tuesday evening of the 2007 Adelaide Nationals, a very interesting forum was attended by about sixty fanciers. The Budgerigar Council of South Australia very kindly gave me permission to record the forum and I sincerely thank them



The forum panel were Marcel Buhler from Switzerland: Ricky Watts from United Kingdom: Warren Wilson from New South Wales: Alan Gamble from New Zealand: Ron Pearce from United Kingdom: Marcel & Ron are in partnership and if you google the web site and bring up Swiss budgerigar breeders you will come across some very good photos etc about their aviary set ups and birds

Question: Nigel Tonkin - I was having a conversation with Rick Watts the other evening and Rick can you explain why you couldn't breed budgerigars here?

Rick Watts: The comment that I made was in a discussion about moving and would I like to come and live in Australia and I said "Yes the climate you have got would suit me no end." But the problem is if I came to live in Australia I would find it very hard to do budgerigars and the look on Nigel's face when I said this was total dismay.

The reason I said it was, and I am sure there are a lot of people I spoke to on the weekend who think I am a pompous prat. I find it very, very strange, and I can totally accept your Standard and the way you have your penalty points etc. I do a lot of judging in the UK and I am reasonably successful in breeding exhibition budgerigars, but to me this hobby is very much on the decline and it seems to me we should be moving forward in every country. And I also feel the World Budgerigar Organisation should get their fingers out and start earning the money

they are given. I think as a hobby we should all have the same budgerigar Ideal standard.

In the UK we breed birds with size, feather, deportment, style, head quality, size of spot – no different to you people – but condition to us is only a small percentage of the exhibition budgerigar. If the bird is in that is fine, but if a bird is slightly not in we would not penalise it as severely as you do in Australia. I thought some of those birds on the weekend that were put back down the line.. Please forgive me, but I would find it must frustrating to breed an absolute belter of a young bird and find it pegged back for a claw fault, missing flights or whatever. To me as a UK breeder, they are a trivial fault whereas to you it is a major fault.

I have great respect for your views but to me there would be no incentive to breed a good bird. I don't just breed budgerigars for the sake of it, I breed to win, I breed to achieve. I breed various colours, like Red Eye, Lacewings, Spangles, Normals, so there is a fair selection, every bird I breed, there is no excuse for it not to have a massive head, deep mask,.., back skull, the lot. Every bird must come up to my visual interpretation of the ideal. We must have that visual image in our minds on how we would like to breed birds. We all strive to achieve the ideal and we want to breed past the Ideal.

Nigel thought I was criticising some of the decisions made at the show, that is not the case, because I judged your selection show I understand your Standard. I would find it very frustrating to breed exhibition budgerigars here. To me, if time would allow, and it would only be for a bit of amusement, if people like us and other judges who have judged overseas could judge six classes of birds as we would in the UK after you have judged them to the Australian Standard. And then ask you which budgerigars you would like to take home, it would be very interesting to see which ones you would select. That was the only comment and I apologise if people took it out of context.

Question from Nigel Tonkin: *Question addressed to Alan Gamble from New Zealand. Alan, could you give us a comment please on how judging is conducted in your country?*

Allan Gamble: Thanks for the opportunity to talk to you tonight and I am sorry I am not as entertaining as the previous speaker. Judging in New Zealand is totally different. We just don't have the quality that you have here. We definitely don't have the quality they have in the UK. I can hear where Rick is coming from. Something's are a little pedantic at times – but I have to be very careful here. Since your ANBC meeting yesterday, after huge pressure from us, we are now part of the Australian scene. For those of you who don't know, New Zealand fancy is now affiliated with Australia and now as a judge I can dodge that question without any trouble at all.

Question: *from Alan Rowe to Rick Watts: What do you think is the main feature we need on our birds to bring them up to the next stage like the birds over in the UK & Europe.*

Rick Watts: In answer to your question, I think face feather, width of face, width of shoulder and maybe consider more size which hopefully will come in with the feather. I am not saying all your birds are small, but I think feather creates size and size would create a better budgie. If you looked at the hens class on the weekend, then the first three hens would fit quite comfortably in the UK. I am not saying they would fit comfortably on the show bench but they would still be comfortable there. I thought the hen that was third was an absolute belter but having said that, there was also a very good hen in the Opaline class belonging to Garry Gazzard, I thought although it was flecked and would be penalised slightly in the UK, to me that was the sort of bird that you should be working towards.

Marcel Buhler was asked to respond to the question as well: Thank you very much for the invitation today. The main difference is not of the placings. There are a couple of nice birds in a couple of the classes but after the first couple of placings, the quality drops down fairly dramatically. I talk from the Europe side of things, you have quality here but not in the same numbers.

Question *from Leigh Downey: We were in the UK in 2002 and watched the UK show in Doncaster and would like to ask Ron who was the chief steward about the final judging of the Doncaster show compared to the judging of our show.*

Ron Pearce: The question is not really fair as you have a completely different system to us. At our club show, we had about 4500 birds so we couldn't possibly do it like you do it. Also we don't have Zones and we don't compete state against state, it is a completely individual show. We would start judging the 4500 birds at 8am and have it finished by 1pm but we have seventeen or eighteen judges. It is a very streamlined system we have. It turns from one award to the other. The BS has set out how the show is to be run and that is how it is run. I was quite impressed with your set up and the technology you have, although I found it quite slow, and you can't compare with the UK the numbers or whatever.

Marcel Buhler was asked to comment as well: I think in Switzerland we are in a similar show to England. Normally at the Nationals we have four judges. We commence at 7am and finish at 12 o'clock. It is run on a different system to you with colour classes going to groups then to main groups and then best in show. But we never get a chance to run a show like you have here. It would be very hard to get areas together as we only have 160 members so there is no chance of your competition being available. The show here has been a wonderful experience for me as a judge.

Warren Wilson. We have to bear in mind that our team thing is not something they are used to seeing overseas. In those countries they would be very happy if they could have a show run like that because of the geography. When I judged

one of their UK shows in July last year, the whole thing is over in three hours. The judge doesn't even do most of the paperwork. The chief steward is there to do it. Everything is pre prepared and the only thing the judge does is mark the cages and in some cases he doesn't even do that. It is very fast. For those of you who do most of our ordinary annual shows, then it is nothing like what we do here. The system is entirely different. Stewarding is totally different. They have more stewards working on each bank. The chief steward is virtually standing within inches of the judge the whole time. They are not used to comparing the way we judge our national show which we have to bear in mind is completely different to how we judge our annual shows.

Alan Gamble: It is quite interesting to see both sides. I have been fortunate to judge in England and was very impressed. with the standard of the stewards and how quick everything went. I must admit it didn't put any pressure on me either. Whilst it was very fast, and the time I judged there was 4700 birds benched, with nineteen judges from all around the world, we started at 9am and finished at 1pm. It was phenomenal but no pressure – it was just quick. When it came to picking the top birds, they treat that as a form of secrecy and you couldn't talk with each other or wheel and deal with each other to try and get the bird you particularly like. They keep rotating the judges so there is no closeness between you and the other judges and we ended up with most of the decisions being unanimous.

I was very fortunate that out of the five top awards three of them came from the yellow face which I judged. That doesn't mean to say I am a hell of a good judge, but it does mean that I drew the best straw and had the best class to look at. When I look at what happens in Australia compared to what happens in New Zealand than I envy you people. Now that we are part of it, we can not only come over and enjoy your Nationals, we are going to have more of a gain out of it. You have this comradeship that I don't think you realise. It starts of with your clubs, then your own Zone challenges, and it was great to be part of the South Australian selection this year. To see each club get together, to work together for one common factor. To make their club the best club in their state challenge. I am telling you what you already know.

Then you have the states competing against each other, the excitement or disappointment – whichever way you put it - at the competition this week end – to have only five points between your top two teams – and yet you were probably shaking hands and patting each other on the back to people you hardly spoke to all year but suddenly you were all together. What you have in Australia is brilliant – don't ever change the system. We are looking forward in New Zealand that one day we can be part of that competition. I was so proud yesterday that there was such a unanimous vote to let us come on board. Probably one of the biggest thrills I have ever had in this hobby. So don't compare with what they have in the UK and Europe to what you have here, but don't ever lose that comradeship and try and work together. It is very obvious when you hear people

talking, you hear the wheeling and dealing, you are all trying to get to a greater level. I think it is fantastic and carry on the good work - thank you.

Question *from Bob Smith from South Qld. This is a question to all the panel, over the past few days, there has been a lot of comments about birds not gripping the perches. What size perches do you have in your show cages and do you have the same problem?*

Ron Pearce: I was absolutely amazed when I heard the comment that birds were pegged back because they weren't gripping the perch. I have been fortunate to judge all around the world and I have never ever heard that comment before. For us in the UK if a bird sits up it doesn't really matter how it is holding the perch to determine if it is a good bird or a bad bird. Just going on slightly, we don't penalise birds in the UK like you do here. We only throw them off the show bench if they are sick or have scaly face. A bird missing a claw can still win Best in Show in England. It is all about comparison. If that bird was better than anything else, and you decided to take some points off in your own mind for a fault, and it is no more than a fault than flecking or opalescence is, I was amazed when I heard that comment and thought it was utter bull...t. I have no idea how thick our perches are except they are thicker than yours. Probably about 16mm. I have never heard those comments before.

Alan Gamble: Personally I feel the perches are far too small. When the comment was made I was rather taken aback. By the comment the bird should be gripping the perch firmly, would mean if the bird stood on one leg like they do when they are asleep and fully healthy, that bird should be put down too. It just doesn't make sense. I think if you put in a 16mm perch like we have in New Zealand, the bird just naturally grips onto the perch. We put Zebra Finches on the size perches you have in your show cages.

Warren Wilson: Our perches are the smallest perches I've seen in five countries. If you get a bird as big as some of the biggest birds we have here, they have absolutely no hope in the world of gripping the perch. I am not talking about slip claw or anything stupid like that. I am talking about actually physically holding on. It is almost impossible for the size of the but of the foot to grip around the perches that we have in this country. Virtually none of the huge birds we have in this country are able to grip our perches. I have four different cages from Europe – Marcel sent me over one many years ago, I have plastic ones and none of them have perches anywhere near how small ours are. I think as Rick said, their perches are the old half inch or more and I think at some stage it is an issue that we are going to have to address here because we can't expect big buffy birds to physically sit on those tiny perches. We use perches that big for Java Sparrows. I show Java Sparrows, as you know I show every darn thing, Java Sparrows sit on that size perch and if that size bird sits on that perch, how can we expect our bigger budgies to sit on them

Rick Watts: I can only agree with what has been said. Our show cages in the UK are relatively different to yours. We have a sloping back on the roof and over the past couple of years, the BS have introduced new perches. We never used to have perches that came right to the front but now we do have perches that come right to the front of the show cage. I do believe now that in the UK, and it is no exaggeration, we have birds exhibited over 9½ inches long. Some of the birds have been taken out and measured and it is no surprise to see them 9½ inches long, and that was a few years ago. What I would say, is we are talking about balance, size, shape and deportment and I think balance is a key word and if you don't have a budgie that feels comfortable in the show cage then you are not going to get a balanced budgerigar because it is never going to sit correctly.

Marcel Buhler: It is a little bit difficult as there are many different cages. England has different cages to Germany and also different to Belgium and Europe but I think the main thing is I believe the perches down here are too small. I think all the cages in Europe have perches about 16mm to 18mm so the birds can grip the perch properly.

Editors note: South Queensland moved a motion at the ANBC meeting a few years ago to increase the perch size to 16mm and it wasn't carried. Our reasoning was the bigger birds were having trouble gripping the perch. Unfortunately no other State was interested in our motion then, maybe times have changed. It is amazing how having a disqualification or penalty may change peoples' minds. Nigel Tonkin made the statement that whatever country you judge, there are penalty and disqualification clauses and they must be adhered to. In Australia it is a disqualification if a bird does not grip the perch with two forward and two rear toes and that is how it has to be unless there is a change to the disqualification points.

Question: *Sue Adams from South Australia). I have only been breeding budgies for five years , what are we actually talking about. Is it the bird wasn't gripping the perch or did it have its toes forward?*

Nigel Tonkin: I am assuming we are talking about a bird that was disqualified at the National show because the bird could not grip the perch and it had a toe that was distorted and four judges assessed that bird and at no stage could we get it to grip the perch. So it wasn't an individual assessment, it was four judges who came up with the same conclusion. That is our rule and we have to abide by that rule. Four judges made that assessment and we believe it was the correct assessment and we won't back down on that. Other birds were disqualified again we followed what the rules state we are to do.

Question: *Keith Gough from South Queensland: I am led to believe the standard in England frowns on Flecking. Is that true or are we going the wrong way with our flecking. We in South Queensland have had some magnificent flecked birds but have not put them in our teams because of the flecking.*

Marcel Buhler: I think flecking is a problem in Europe but not on the show bench. I think if your judges are stricter on flecking here, it will solve the problem in a couple of years. The whole process takes about five or six years.

Rick Watts: In the UK a few years, the BS implemented that flecking had to be reduced from the show bench and by that flecked could not win a first placing. Unfortunately there was a lot of judges that wanted to be little pioneers in that and in some shows some of the first placed birds lacked quality but that soon turned around a bit. Flecking ceased to be so dominant on the show bench after that as a lot of exhibitors got the idea that flecking was going to be the final decider whether it was going to be a first or second placed bird and a lot of breeders decided okay we have got to reduce that style of bird.

Flecking does not worry me as a breeder – I have a lot of Opaline and Opaline Cinnamons and have for quite a number of years and I have always been a firm believer that if you have flecking than you have rough feather and if you have rough feather you will always get a bit of flecking. Judges are totally against flecking in the UK.

I personally believe that if a bird is slightly flecked and also, you have to remember that you get ticked birds which in my opinion is entirely different to flecked birds, if a bird has a bit of flecking, and it is judged, and it warrants to win a class whether it is flecked or not, I will look at the other birds and decide on the best. If the flecked bird does win a class and wins the colour award, even if it is the best bird in the entire show it will be discarded and not considered to go any further.

As a breeder flecking doesn't worry me, you have to control it. I know Ron disagrees with me as he comes down to my aviary, and says that is a lovely bird but it is flecked. To me it is a good stock bird and that is the way I breed birds.

Warren Wilson: From the countries I have been to I think that the way we treat flecking as a penalty is one of the best - A slightly flecked or heavily flecked bird is penalised according to the amount of flecking. I don't think it is a decision that judges should be making. If a bird is ticked, it should be penalised, if a bird is slightly flecked it should be penalised a bit more, if a bird is heavily flecked it should be penalised even more. It is as simple as that. Having said that I don't breed many flecked birds as I breed varieties that don't seem to have flecking.

When I am judging I am mindful of flecking and I don't particularly like to see a flecked bird win my section. I judged the selection Spangle class for Caloundra for New South Wales and the bird I put up was ticked and won first place in the Spangle class. That bird has been on the front of Budgerigar magazine nearly the whole year. As far as I was concerned, it was by far the best Spangle we had on display that particular year even though it was ticked. I had other nice birds but the second bird that went to Caloundra finished eighth so that is how far in

front that ticked spangle was and it would be a shame to see that bird, that was so far in front of the others, not get a major award because it was ticked. It also had slightly bad wing markings for a spangle but it was still a superior budgerigar. You have to look at the entire package and in our country flecking should stay as it is. In South Africa, if a bird has flecking than it is out. When birds go out for one minor penalty than it is rather sad.

Alan Gamble: It doesn't matter where you go in the world, this question always comes up, everyone keeps asking it. I had the privilege of listening to Alistair Homes two or three years ago when Alistair ran an exercise for judges at a National. It was one of the most enlightening sessions that I've ever attended. We in New Zealand last year, did exactly the same exercise. We lined up some Opalines, some of them from our stud which were very heavily flecked.

Now I would love to have clean birds, make no question of that, these were big strong birds but heavily flecked. We ran two seminars, one in the North Island and one in the South Island. These birds were lined by all of the judges there in order of which was the worst bird and which was the cleanest bird which is exactly the same manner as Alistair ran his session. We then got a couple of judges to judge the birds. Now when the judges got the birds in order of worse to cleanest they all got it right. It was very easy and we all know that. But when we asked the judges to line the birds up in merit with their fellow judges watching them, taking into account that flecking is only a fault, and in all cases, Alistair's test and the two in New Zealand, the worst flecked bird came out as the best bird. None of us can answer your question.

We all want the bird to be nice and clean, we want a super bird with strength and shoulder, when compared to a little wild budgie the flecked bird must win. Now I am exaggerating when comparing it to a wild budgie but that is the point I am trying to make. It is a fault that has to be judged as a fault just the same has any other fault.

Ron Pearce: The thoughts of the Budgerigar Society about flecking was that if flecking was allowed to go unchecked, it would spoil the bird if you weren't careful. Sometimes when judging the Opaline class every single bird was flecked. That is why they brought it in as if left unchecked it would spoil the exhibition budgerigar so they brought in the rule that a flecked bird should be penalised heavily. I don't disagree with judges that it is a fault but that Spangle of Garry Gazzards would not win a class in the UK. It would be considered to be too flecked. When you are breeding budgerigars, and there are a lot of birds beginning to go like that, you will have many faults. If you breed budgerigars with feather you will have problems – it is an absolute certainty. If you breed budgerigars you will get flecked birds. It is how you handle those faults in the breeding room that will decide whether you have a shed full of flecked birds or a shed full of clean birds. It is how you mate the birds.

If you take the line that you don't care if a bird is flecked very quickly two thirds of your birds will be flecked in this country and you will never get rid of it. In England now, and I am not bugging this up because we have as many problems as everybody else, we do not see the numbers of flecked birds on the show bench. We flicked them out. It is as simple as that. We have other problems but basically breeders have bred out flecking. They have chosen pairings that do not give you lots of flecked birds.

I had a friend a couple of years ago who said to me, "I have bred some wonderful birds come and have a look". He said "Well what do you think of them" I said "well they're rubbish. They are huge birds but they are flecked which means they are useless to anybody. As soon as you start putting them to your birds, all the young will be flecked". So it is a serious problem that you need to try to breed it out. If you said that Garry's bird is considered to be a top budgie with that flecking than you will be in serious trouble. You will have 90% of your birds flecked.

Question: *Roy Blair from Tasmania. To Marcel, with Recessive Pieds these days the hens, especially the hens we have, they have barring across the forehead. We don't believe it is typical flecking and I was wondering how you handle the problem.* Editors Note: To the right is a photograph of one of Marel's & Ron's Recessive Pieds.

Marcel: Barring is flecking Most of the Recessive Pieds on the continent are flecked. We are in the same position with Recessive Pieds as most of you are down here with Normals. That is the same problem as in the Spangle class and the Opaline Cinnamon class. The best ones are flecked and over the next five to ten years we will have to work very hard on our Recessive Pieds to try to clean them up. As Ron told you before it is the breeding process to try to improve them. Try to select birds that are not to heavy flecked. It is selective breeding.



Ron Pearce: I have never bred one. My partner breeds them. We have just had a big controversy in the UK over the past couple of years. Our good ones have been crossed out to Normals and we have some very very good Recessive Pieds but they have dark wings. When you look at the Standard it states between 10% to 20% wing markings some of the birds far exceed that and we have had a lot of controversy over the past two or three years whether those birds with dark wings should be winning. They are far the best birds so you are not alone in having those sort of problems.

I will tell you something that happened to me a few years ago I was judging in Belgium and a very well known exhibitor, came up to me and said “I’m a little upset with your judging Ron”. Of course when someone who is eminent says that to you, then you think what have I done. So I said” well let’s go take a look at your birds”. We had a look and he said “this is a top bird Ron”. I said “yes it is a beautiful bird, it has a slight problem. It has no tail”. He said” Don’t worry about that Ron”. He said” Look at this bird over here – she is one of the best birds in the show.” I said “ Yes she probably is but there is a slight problem”. He said “what is that Ron”. I said “ It has no flights”. He said “Don’t worry about that”.

Look it is like this, when breeding budgerigars, the thing is not to turn out the bird with the biggest head, with the biggest body but no flights or no tail. The clever thing is to turn out the bird, a huge bird with huge head with flights and tail. No matter whether it is flecking, or dark wing markings on Pieds, whatever, as a breeder you have to balance these problems. The guy with the bird with no flights, - Well every single top breeder in England would have birds at home with no flights, it is epidemic in birds now that if you have birds with feather, you have feather problems, it is how you balance these problems. These are the birds you keep at home. The birds you put on the show bench displays how you have actually manipulated the problems. How you have managed them.

As it happens this well known breeder asked me to have a look at his aviary a couple of days later and I understood at that point why he was badgering me about not putting up his birds, even though they were fabulous. 85% of his birds had serious feather problems. If you breed 100 birds a year and you have 10% of feather problems you can live with it, but if you breed 100 birds with 85% of serious feather problems than you are going down a blind alley. You will back into the wall. It is all about managing the problems.

You need to look at the Standard and if it says the birds should be clean, than don’t accept people saying “but it’s a good bird – don’t worry about that fault” That is the wrong way to go. You have to breed the good bird without the fault and that is the clever breeder. Jo Mannes has hundreds and hundreds of wonderful birds and they are not flecked – they have not got feather problems. Every year he eliminates them and he has a wonderful stud of birds with wings, tails, and clean heads. It is all about skill of breeding birds to the Standard and it is as simple as that.

***Question:** Wayne Robinson from South Queensland. Can you give me your impressions on the down or directional feather around the eye on chicks when they are babies.*

Ron Pearce: Directional feathering is a genetic thing in the birds. When you look at the babies, if they have directional feathering, you can see it even before they have any down you can see the feathering going up and out from the eye

area. It is as simple as that. It is a genetic thing you breed into the birds but honestly it is one of the hardest things to put into your birds. The encouraging thing I saw here over the weekend is that you have everything here to breed those sorts of birds. I saw them on the show bench and I visited one of your breeders and he has birds that have it. I am not saying you have millions of them but if you recognise it, you are on the right path you will start to breed birds with directional feather.

Alan Gamble: We in New Zealand just have not had the opportunity that you people in Australia have had to get good stock to start with. You have a lot more feather on your birds. We only got about one hundred English birds and that was nine years ago. And from that they were shared around a large number of people and the vast majority have lost most of those birds. We are struggling in New Zealand to keep up with Australia. We are quite a few years behind you and light years behind England. It is hoped in the near future that imports will start again in New Zealand and then I will be able to talk with a little bit of authority. We haven't got what you got so I will pass the question along to my other colleagues.

Warren Wilson: I think Ron answered the technical part of the question. When you get more down on the bird then naturally the feathers stick out even more and are more pronounced and make the bird look more feathery and the directional feather will look better. I went to Gerald Bink's aviary when I was in the UK and he has birds there that are just humungous on feather. I didn't realise that until he put a bird in my hand that was about ten inches long and the feather was about half the bird and I just about dropped the dam thing. It was a powder puff.

Earlier in the evening someone mentioned about feather – you have to remember that their climatic conditions in their Northern part of the Country and probably it will eventually be the same in New Zealand – it will probably be a lot easier for them to retain directional feather on the birds. When some of the imports arrived here, they had more feather than they do today. I think it is because our birds are subjected in the main, to a much warmer climate throughout the year. And it would probably be always difficult for our birds to maintain as much feather as they do in the much colder climate in the South and I think it would be a bit unfair of us to expect as a package overall, that the whole of this country would be able to maintain that huge amount of feather as the birds do in the colder climate. But certainly the more down you have got underneath the bigger the bird looks. Directional feather comes right in the beginning. With the hens you can see it right from the start right across the top of the head.

Rick Watts: There is not a great deal I can add to that except my experience. I up until about four or five years ago, I don't think I had any foreign blood lines in my aviary. The birds I had been breeding with I had been breeding the lines for twenty or thirty years. I had noticed that in the last four or five years I've

had some birds in from Ron and Marcel that obviously had German background to them. I have noticed the difference in the density of the down which is a lot softer than the birds we had been breeding in the UK. The down on these babies that are coming from these German birds have a lot more density which is quite interesting.

I have always bred a lot of rough feathered birds which have a hard feather, and a friend of mine in Germany has been exchanging birds with me over a number of years and I have noticed that in the last four or five years that he has brought birds to me with a softer density of feather. So I am quite excited to be in a situation where I am able to use it and I have noticed only slightly at the moment, that the width of directional feather is starting to be seen in families that it was not seen before. I have always bred birds with tight feather. About seeing birds in the nestbox, I don't worry about assessing them at an early age. If they come out of the nestbox and they look good than that is fine as long as they are healthy and I get good nests of chicks then I am quite happy. If they are going to have directional feather or not at a certain age is of no interest to me whatsoever. It is what comes out at five or six weeks and sits on the perch and what matures after that is what I am interested in. And what I would like to say is they all have directional feather but I would be fooling myself because they all won't. That is what breeding budgies is all about – you get some that have it and you get some that haven't and you have to use the ones that have it.

Marcel Buhler: One of the main features of a budgerigar is directional feather. You some good examples down here as I have seen it on the fifth hen, also the Skyblue spangle of Garry Gazzards, there is plenty of feather direction on those birds and you have to work with them. If you don't get a chance to get more down here, then you have to put good selections and hopefully get more of those type of birds. It will be the main feature of the future, deep mask and good feather direction will be the main features of a good budgerigar.

***Question:** Nigel Tonkin from South Australia. I would like to follow up on a comment that Allan made that Australia is many years behind and New Zealand is light years behind Europe in regards to the quality of our birds. After judging our birds at the Nationals, how do you assess our situation?*

Marcel Buhler: I think your top birds here are in line with the top birds in Europe but it is still the numbers. There are far more good birds in Europe. You will have to work with the good birds very hard in the future so you can increase the number of good ones in Australia.

Rick Watts: The birds in Australia have got a bit of an edge over New Zealand and that is based on pictures on the internet not from personal viewing. I think there is a difference between the UK birds and Australian. I would not say it is a considerable difference. I just feel that maybe there is probably more availability of good birds in the UK.

Warren Wilson: Having judged in New Zealand I can say that probably the very best birds in New Zealand would be competitive here. Take away the top line of birds and

they are behind us. In the UK the birds I saw and judged, some of our very best birds here would probably be competitive but may not win in the UK that they would not run last. But certainly once we got off our very top birds here then we would be a fair way behind particularly in some of the breeders aviaries over there. I think we can only breed what we have got and try to improve what we have got and if we ever get back to imports again be very selective and bring in the features that we look for rather than a stab in the dark approach across the board. Because there are some very nice birds in New Zealand and in some of the class winners and some of the seconds and thirds here would go very well in the UK. if they were presented properly. I am not saying they would all win but we would not be disgraced. We should not be thinking we are that far behind with our top birds we just need more of the buggers , that's all..

Nigel Tonkin made the following comment: I would just like to say the top birds in New Zealand would certainly be very competitive over here but they seemingly drop off more rapidly than ours do here.

Alan Gamble: I am not saying we would win, but we could hold our heads high, but we do drop off very quickly.

Ron Pearce: I think the top Australian birds would do very well in the UK In Europe now there are two or three breeders who are so far ahead of anyone else around normally- there is a guy in Holland called Jac Cuyten and the best of his would make yours look like pets as they do most of the bird in England. There is a gentleman in Switzerland Daniel Lutolf and some of his top birds are just unbelievable. We don't have any in the UK as good as his. There are two or three breeders, including Jo Mannes, whose birds are so far in front of anyone else's. They are just amazing. Marcel, Ricky and I went to Daniel Lutolf's a couple of months ago and his top birds we just drooled over. They had heads like buckets. At the end of the day you can only compete with what you have got. and the best of what you have got is very good here. Don't put yourself down as the best of what you have got here is excellent.

***Question:** Sue Adams from South Australia: When you breed dominant features, like back skull and recessive features like direction feather, can you tell me what are the supposedly dominant features. I have read that direction feather is recessive is this correct.*

Ron Pearce: Is that true, I don't know if that is true or not. There are two very different things to achieve. One of them is size. Size in budgerigars is absolutely everything IN the UK we have a scale of points although we usually don't judge to the points system as such it can still be quite useful. There are lots of champion budgerigars in England around eighty to eighty five points which are good birds with lots of good features. The really top birds would point out about ninety three to ninety four and the difference between the eight five and the ninety four is purely and simply size. Size is everything unfortunately in budgerigars, the big ones don't breed very well so you are always struggling. If you look at the history of the budgerigar there have been a few "accident greats" in the fancy. At the moment, we are lucky in Europe to have three guys at this present time that their thinking is so far forward from most guys. I was very lucky years ago to know Harry Bryan. Harry couldn't really tell you how he did it. He knew no more than anyone else about how to keep birds or how to feed them but Harry could look at two birds and know whether they would produce well. It is like having a neighbour who has a green thumb. I don't know what it is – I think it is vision and

these three guys have this vision. Daniel is a pretty freaky guy anyway. He talks about things I don't even see and I think I am a pretty reasonable breeder of budgerigars but they have a different vision. Whether things are dominant or not I don't know. I think it is all about families and trying to establish things in families.. Budgerigars don't breed true. You can put two powerful birds together and breed absolute rubbish. You can put a brother and sister that are native to that super pair and breed wonderful birds. I must admit sometimes I ask myself what is happening here especially when my best birds don't breed what I think they should breed. I cannot tell you what is recessive and what is dominant because I honestly don't know.

Alan Gamble: It doesn't work the same way as flecking. I nearly gave up birds about seven years ago and then I took a partner on and he has a bit of a photographic memory for birds. We have some good debates, we have some good arguments but each year we seem to agree on the birds we are going to keep and our stud keeps on improving year by year. If you have got a good bird and you pair it to another good bird, you have got to have a reasonable chance of getting good chicks . Likewise brothers and sisters of good birds can throw good birds.

Like Ron I don't think there is something more dominant in the breeding of birds when it comes to features unlike colours are, but if you are very selective with your birds, concentrate on the quality rather than the colours, you will improve your birds. In my opinion there is no straight answer to the question you are asking but one of these other gentlemen may be able to help you more.

Warren Wilson: I can tell you a few stories about reeding livestock because I have had livestock throughout my family all my life – birds and racehorses. I bred a bird that ran second in the 1995 National in the Clearwing class. It was bred out of birds that came from my reserve stock of birds. My son saw them mating in the aviary and I said “no don't put anymore down, we are going to pack up”. Of course as soon as I left the aviary, he got the net and wished them straight up and put them in a breeding cage very low down where I wouldn't see them straight away. A couple of days later I went in and saw them and it twigged what he had done.

That pair produced fifteen chicks in two rounds and one of the chicks in the first round was a huge bird and eventually went on and ran second in the National. He was shown thirteen times and won twelve Best in Clearwing awards in both Old and young bird classes and won the gold medal in New South Wales when he went to the Nationals in Hobart was the only time he was beaten when he ran second.

Of the other fourteen chicks, I kept two cocks and used them and they bred me the best clearwings I ever bred whilst the other twelve were absolute total and utter rubbish. I put that pair down for the next two seasons and I never bred anything better than pet shop birds.

I had another situation concerning a racehorse which is also livestock. I had a mare that hadn't produced a winner in its first two foals. I had put it to a particular stallion which had won many races in Queensland. She produced a horse that eventually won as a two year old though to a nine year old. He won two races as a nine year old - he won twenty one races, seventeen seconds, nineteen thirds, and several hundred thousand dollars in stakes. He won at many tracks including Rosehill & Warwick farm. I put that mare back to that stallion nine times, nine years in a row, she produced nine foals the best any of those progeny could do was to get four country wins out in the bush. Four of them were that slow that I could beat them on foot. That is livestock – how do you access the dominance or recessive natures. We all have an opinion that spots on an opaline hen will give you better spots on the progeny but whether it works when you put the two together and shake the pot, who knows. These are true examples of what has happened to me over the years. You can get good birds out of particular matings and you can get poor birds – why don't they all get the dominant features is a lovely question but I don't think any of us can answer it and be absolutely positive about it.

Rick Watts: Every year I set myself a standard but before you do this you have to lay down the ground rules. Two of thereof the main ground rules I have always set out when breeding exhibition budgerigars are is I do not keep the short length budgerigar and I do not keep the short mask budgerigar. They are two of the most awful features in any budgerigar. It is the whole deportment of the bird. I think birds without back skull will never produce birds without back skull. If you are talking about recessive and dominant features, I would say you have to base your truth in the visual aspect of the birds. I think to do visual 99.9% of the time and pedigree the .1% I've got a better photographic memory of my birds and I have had them since I was a kid it is all about selection. To me it is all about visual comparison and I always say you cannot breed rats out of mice.

Each year you have got to set yourself a better standard and you should never be satisfied with what you have got. Take a visual feature of each pair and don't be afraid to mix colours to get a better bird because at the end of the day it is budgerigar first and colour second. In the UK colour is not paramount. In the nineties I produced a very good family of Albinos that were absolutely out of this world. I bred sixteen out of one pair and I put the same pair down and I got twelve. Nearly every chick was a powerful bird – they were untouchable. Over four years one hen won four best in shows by August, she won seven young bird shows, numerous challenge certificates which is a good result. But you have to be careful as you can take families too far (to closely bred). Sometimes you have to introduce more bloodlines. It is all about selections.

Marcel Buhler: If back skull, directional feather, mask features etc were so simple to improve, why have we got so many birds on the show bench with small spots, short mask etc, on the show benches. There are many good magazines in Europe with articles by good breeders but they never ever tell you how to

produce good spots etc on every bird. We have to select our birds on each feature and try to breed the best we can. There is no black or white answer on this issue.

Question: *Brian Hollingsworth from South Queensland: You said you have seen Daniel's birds in the flesh where I have only seen them in photographs and they only show from midway up. Will you tell me if he still has good deportment with these massive shoulder and large headed birds. We just never see past the perch in the magazines.*

Marcel Buhler: That is a problem with magazines. Daniel breeds some of the biggest birds on the continent.

Ron Pearce: One thing about Daniels birds is that when you put them in the show cage they start to show. They have only ever seen it once before and that was with Harry Bryans birds. Harry was an old man and his eyesight wasn't the best so he would get a bird out of the stock cage and throw it into the show cage. The bird would literally smash against the back of the cage, jump on the perch and stretch out so Harry could see it. Daniel is very good with birds. He puts birds in a show cage without a front on the cage. There they are sitting in the cage showing extremely well but no front. He gets a bird out of the flight by sitting it on a pen, puts it in the show cage and it shows extremely well and when he is finished with it, he puts it back on the pan and takes it back to the stock cage. I have never seen the likes of it. No his birds have lovely deportment. If Daniel is not careful he does have feather problems as he is not God but he has a lot of super birds.

Question: *Bruce Bradford from New South Wales. Nola and I have been receiving Budgerigar World since its issue and not an issue goes by without a question on fertility. I would like to know do you breed for fertility – is that something you are striving for all the time – do you pluck or trim the birds prior to pairing up – and is there any artificial insemination going on over there?*

Rick Watts: In regards to fertility, it is all about selection. If you have bids in your stud that do not breed, that do not produce fertility then you have to ask yourself – is this a fertile line – do I proceed with it – do I throw it out? In order to get fertility we all have to be very careful as it all comes back to the selection of our pairings. If you are going to pair pairs together with excessive feather well you do have to trim the vent. If you produce hens with terrific feather then you are not going to produce seven, eight, nine or ten fertile eggs in the nest. You only get four or five and sometimes you are lucky to get one or two. I have got some very big hens that I have to pair up at about six months of age – if you have hens that are that big, that mature then that will indicate to you they are old enough to mate. I feel that if you don't pair them up before they are a year old, you very seldom get the best out of them after that.

I don't pluck, I trim the feathers. I think it must be bloody awful for some of these birds to have a handful of feathers ripped out of their backsides. I remember being shaved at the hospital once and that was enough for me. I

shudder at the thought of plucking. I do trim the vents but not right down to the skin. I leave a small amount of feather there and I trim in a very large area. I feel it is mainly the cocks that require trimming because I think the hen will naturally lose their own feather because that is nature and I don't think we should go that far away from nature. If you do start trimming especially the cock birds, when they lay the second round they don't trim themselves. There are a lot of fanciers who trim for the first round and forget the feathers grow back so the cocks require trimming again before they start mating for the second round. Fertility is not just about trimming feathers, it is also about selection.

Alan Gamble: We have had problems in our stud with infertility. I think we all had problems with infertility when we got the English birds in – I know I had my fair share of it. One thing about our partnership is that we have excellent records. We also have a very good vet in New Zealand and whilst our fertility has been down we have been working on it. By selective culling of the birds we have turned the corner. I don't like the idea of trimming the feathers, maybe I am old fashioned as I pluck them, and I have not had one of my budgies complain or say that hurts. All you can do is carry on with what is working for you. Fertility with the buffier birds has definitely caused problems in New Zealand. I used to breed about seven hundred chicks from lesser numbers of birds years ago, whereas nowadays, we would be lucky to breed three hundred birds from more of the better quality pairs. Some of our birds are breeding much better numbers than others so we are keeping very good records and looking at them when pairing up as well as the visual aspects.

Some of the diseases we have picked up on the birds that were imported from England were never previously in New Zealand. New Zealand is looking at another lot of importation and we are hopeful that in another couple of months we will have the go ahead. When we do import again, we will not be going to a whole lot of aviaries like the Australians did. Our application is to go to just one aviary and we will make sure that aviary is spotlessly clean and the birds are disease free. By that sort of selection I am sure Mike and I are going to do a hell of a lot better with our birds.

Question: Keith Gough from South Queensland: None of you have actually answered the question on Artificially inseminated. Some fanciers have the notion that birds have to be in top condition to breed. Whilst in the UK I noticed that quite a number of breeders were pairing up birds that had pin feathers but still very active birds. I think we are waiting too long before we are actually pairing up the birds.

Ron Pearce: Well I can honestly tell you that with artificial insemination, I have never put a sample and had it taken somewhere else. AI is not very prevalent in the UK. I would be stupid if I said some people are not doing it but it is not the majority. The Budgerigar Society banned it and the thought was that before anyone could come into the fancy they would need three needles, a medical degree etc and what a load of nonsense. You are much better off plucking the

birds and letting them mate naturally. The second part about breeding condition is that it is simply observation. I don't worry about feather condition. If the birds are active, in good health then I pair them up.

I was at Jo Mannes a couple of years ago and I could not understand some of his pairings. He had one cock going to a number of these very ordinary hens. He had been having trouble with fertility with this cock bird Jo decided to let him select his own mate to get the ball rolling. With fertility, if you have a pair together and they breed only one youngster but it gets you best in show, are you going to leave that pair together? Probably yes as we are architects of our own problems. Most pedigreed dogs and cats do not breed actively together. Once you start narrowing the gene pool you start having fertility problems. The really good birds are difficult to breed with and that will never change.

Alan Gamble: What we do with our birds is if they are in a bad moult we will not put them down so we have to get the birds through the moult as quickly as possible. If they are coming through it at a good rate I see no problem with putting the birds down for breeding. I personally see it would be a waste of time to pair up if in the middle but as they are coming through is the time. I believe the area that Mike and I come from we couldn't breed our birds at the same time of year as you people do in Australia. At the moment at home, we will be going through frosts and cold weather of about -2 to -3 degrees. So you can't have your birds in anything else but the best condition so you have to stimulate that through something artificial.

Warren Wilson: The second part of that question is that there is no way I would pair up birds that are in moults. Years ago you would be looking for cere colour etc but the birds are different these days. I have several hens that always have white ceres. One of these hens produced about seventy babies. I think it is a question of knowing whether the bird is in condition without worrying about pin feathers. If a bird is carrying on and looks as if it wants to breed and is fit and well I put them down. I have very little trouble. I think the average breeder gets an idea of when his birds want to breed just by constantly looking at them. It is not as difficult as it seems. You have to get an eye for knowing. It is not like the old days when the cock ceres had to be blue and the hens cere brown and shiny – that doesn't exist anymore. If they are banging beaks, banging the perches, hitting the perch hard and arching backs then it is time to pair them up I put hens up about nine to ten months and cocks a little older.

Rick Watts: In the UK our birds tend to go through a very heavy moult in October/November and my own experience is I would be quite happy to pair my birds up just when they are starting to go over the height of the moult and are just starting to come back in. It is that time I feel the birds have less weight on them because the moult draws it off them, the birds are pretty active, they are a lot fitter. The one thing we have failed to answer is that your birds will not be fertile if you fail to feed them correctly. It is one of the most paramount things

to breeding budgerigars. Throughout the entire year you have to control the feeding, make sure the birds get plenty of protein, ensure they get variety, green food, soft food, anything to enhance the breeding condition of that bird. I think if the birds go down to breed and they are not 100% fit then it is the recipe for French Moulting. I don't want to get onto that subject but I do like to believe that my birds get a very balanced high protein diet when they are going through and starting to come out of the moult. I don't care what time of year it is, if a bird is looking fit, I pair them up. What you have to remember is a bird doesn't have to be in show condition fit to breed. If a bird is in show condition fit it is over the top.

Marcel Buhler: I think Rick has summed it up with the difference between breeding and show condition. If a bird is in top condition and through the moult then it is well past breeding condition. Birds come through the moult at different times of the year because they are different ages throughout the year –not all the chicks hatch out at the one time of the year so they are maturing at different times. If hens are born in one month, you can count nine months from then and then they may be ready.

In relation to Artificial Insemination, we could be discussing this all evening. It is not banned in Switzerland and the main thing is how clever can you be – if you put a ban on things, how on earth are you going to control it?

***Question:** Peter Simic from South Australia . I would like to ask about defective flights and buffiness in birds. The strategy I read in an article from a Northern New South Wales breeder was it is very difficult in the warmer climate to keep the feather density and down on his birds. I think Warren also mentioned this fact and I think this is a fact that we have lost the buffier bird lines. In England there is the artificial conditions of light and you have the keeping of your bird rooms warm. Here in Australia we have natural heat and this might sound like a ridiculous thing but maybe we should look at air conditioning our bird rooms down to about 16 degrees. I certainly don't want to pay for the power bills – have you got any thoughts on this. Have you heard anyone else from warmer climates saying it is hard to keep that down on their birds?*

Ron Pearce: I have heard it many times but I don't breed birds in a warm climate but I would have thought that feather was a genetic thing in your birds. If it is there, then the chicks will have it. I don't believe it makes any difference whether the climate is warm or not. In South Africa they have very hot periods and very cold periods and they have massive birds there. I cannot believe it will make any difference. If it is in the genes the birds should have it.

Rick Watts: When I pair my birds up, that usually starts the beginning of winter, I tend to close the outside flights down. I am a firm believer that birds need to fly. All these people that keep birds in small enclosures and not able to fly, well I am sorry but you are not keeping birds, you are keeping four four legged things. Birds are meant to fly, not walk up and down stock cages.

Anyway I close the flights down and secure the bird room not so much that there is no ventilation but I have big extractor fans to monitor the air flow. If you breed birds you breed them when they are fit. In case I always have twelve to fifteen breeding cages on the go. If you have birds you can't show, then you breed with them when they are at their fittest and that is regardless of what the time of the year is. At the same token it amazes me why on earth you haven't used solar power in this country. Surely the sun could generate your own humidity with Perspex roofs etc. In the UK a lot of people have gone over to skylight windows but in this wonderful country solar power would be the way to go.

Question: *Roy Blair from Tasmania. Rick mentioned earlier about feeding his birds. There is a big debate going on in this country about the soaking of seed and so on. How does the panel handle this situation?*

Rick Watts: Personally I don't feed soaked seed., the only thing I soak is millet sprays and the only reason I soak them is for cleanliness. We get our millet sprays in boxes of 15 kilos and everybody must understand that when these sprays are brought in from wherever, it could be China or elsewhere, they come in on huge container ships and the vermin must be horrendous. There is no way they can control the vermin. I have had boxes of sprays and you can see that vermin have tampered with the boxes by the holes in them. Even so, I can open the boxes and the paper has been disturbed and you can even find mice droppings in there. These millet sprays have also been fumigated when leaving the ships so I soak them in Benadine for twenty four hours prior to using and then I strain off the surplus water.

Marcel Buhler: My birds get soft food 365 times a year. I use soaked seed, like oats wheat and mung bean daily. They also get sweet corn, beans, carrots, etc. They get it in big pots in the breeding cages and on trays in the flights.

Warren Wilson: For years, I used soaked seed but when the English birds arrived, so did a lot of problems and my vet suggested I cut it out because of bacterial diseases. My own mixture of soft food I feed contains twenty six grains and a whole lot of other products including egg & biscuit, etc and it is fed dry. The only things my birds get that is classed as wet feed is carrots, corn and spinach.

Alan Gamble: We had exactly the same problems with soaked seed. We in New Zealand are at a huge disadvantage to the rest of the world. The only seeds we are able to buy that are able to germinate would be canary, a little of millet and sunflower – everything else has to be imported into New Zealand and then treated. The seed once it is treated loses all its goodness. We used to soak sunflower and anything else we could throw in. It wouldn't matter whether we soak the seed in Heptane or whatever disinfecting solution we like, we could always trace a smell and if you let the sprouting process go too long you ended up with fungi or mould. When we got autopsies performed on our birds, we

found this bacteria had spread throughout the stud. Poultry or chicken starter is the basis of our soft food. We give a little fruit salad of various vegetables including beetroot, carrot, broccoli - just about any vegetable we can get our hands on. We add a little kelp powder, a little biscuit, a little lorikeet mix to sweeten it up, and it is amazing the amount of that mixture our birds eat. In fact it would probably be a good third of their seed intake. The seed generally that we buy in our country is all fumigated and we store it in a container at my work. We keep it in a very cool condition and I normally buy at least one year's worth at a time. This is to give us consistency throughout the entire year. Generally speaking, it would be nice to have the mixture of seeds you have in this country but that is impossible in New Zealand. Millet sprays we do feed them but again it is all heat treated so what we have to do is feed these extras. Our birds are very large eaters of soft food. The chicken starter is animal based protein and that is making up for some of the parts we are missing out on. You people have such a huge advantage in this country as you have seed that can germinate. But we definitely do not soak our seeds.

Question: *Bob Smith from South Queensland. I have got two parts to this question. The first part is about artificial insemination. I am a AI person, I am a believer in it. They do it in cats, horses, cattle and you name it. I believe if you have a good cock bird, maybe an outstanding cock and he could hurt himself or whatever and that could be the end of your line right there. You could be taking a backward step if you don't allow AI. I ended up buying a microscope and I put a bit of sperm under it I AI all my cocks before I put them down and I realised very quickly that 2% of all of the cocks are infertile even though they have sperm, they are infertile so you are wasting your time. I disagree with you Ron about the feather and down. Because of our high humidity, especially on the North Coast on New South Wales and Queensland, we can have humidity of up to 98% we cannot grow thick down. We can grow long down that pushes our feather out, which I am trying to do which improves the bird out of site. As far as thick down in our area, we cannot grow it.*

Ron Pearce: As I said, I don't breed birds in a hot country so I am at a disadvantage. The thing with AI is that budgie breeding is a hobby and you can't compare breeding them to breeding cattle and I do believe that the birds should be as natural as possible. Once you have to start resorting to artificial means to making them breed then something seriously has gone wrong.

The thing about budgerigars is their size and if you breed budgerigars beyond their size then they are unable to sustain themselves. If you take away that natural limiting factor, using nothing else but AI, there is no reason why in a few years time we can't have a 12 inch budgerigar. Do we want a 12 inch budgerigar. Can you imagine the breeding problems. The limiting factor is within the genes of the bird whereas with AI it can go on and on and do we want that?

Also if you have one stud cock that has everything and you start using AI and start putting it throughout your entire stud you could have more problems. In animals you have good points and bad points that you can breed into that stud and you can breed tremendous hidden problems, like infertility so I am perfectly convinced you are better off using the birds naturally. The challenge is to use your skills as a breeder and to breed into those birds the good features rather than using artificial means that may only bring disaster.

Question: *Vicky from South Australia. I am a novice breeder and I breed a lot of the rarer varieties like Clearwings, Clearbodies etc. I have been told to read the standard, it is the bible which is what I am doing. What I find really confusing is that when I get to our Logan Shield show (the States main show) is that the birds that are winning are the birds that are not described in the Standard. Clearwings have muddy wings – I was ready to discard my Clearwings as I thought the wings were too muddy looking but after seeing what was winning, why should I? I find it very confusing as a Novice when I am reading that this is what we should be breeding, what we should be looking for when on the show bench we are finding birds with flecking, or the Clearbody with suffusion or the Recessive Pieds with dark wings or the Clearwings that are looking more like Greywings. What should I be going for – is size everything and forgetting about the markings or should I be concentrating on variety and if I just get within the top ten then congratulate myself and say ‘well done and say I stayed true to what I should do’.*

Warren Wilson: All Novice breeders should take the Standard to bed with them each night and read it for three quarters of an hour and place it under their pillow and sleep on it before they have sex each night. If any novice breeder attempts to breed budgerigars under any other circumstances then they will fail.

It is a two barrelled question because what is in the Standard is what you need to put on the show bench. If the Standard tells you this that or the other then that is what you should bench with the stock you have available. Having said that there will be birds shown at various times that have nothing to do with sections of the standard. There will be Clearwings shown that have other features that has nothing to do with the Standard like dark tails instead of light tails. The fact is you will see a number of classes when you have about fifteen Clearwings and they all have grey tails and that means a grey tailed bird will win. Now that is not in the standard but it happens. You should always strive to show the birds that are in the Standard, that is right and that is what you are trying to breed.

If you have marked Clearwings, then don't get rid of them all. It is back to the same old problem. If your Clearwing is a good budgerigar, if it has the qualities you are looking for in a budgerigar, but it's major problem is it has markings then you use that bird to another hen that obviously doesn't have markings and you try to eliminate the markings as much as possible. It can depend on whether the Clearwings have buff feather or not if it has markings or not. You should spray the feathers out see. The Clearwing in particular and a lot of the self

coloured birds when they start to get the buff feathering , then the feathering curves. When the feathering curves, if you have normal fluorescent type light it appears as if there is a shadow on the edge of each feather which a lot of people look at and say that the bird is marked.

I have done this with Ken Gray when he came out to Australia and have shown him my yellow feathered Clearwings, I showed him my medium buff Clearwings, I showed him my buff Clearwings and he understood straight away that my buff Clearwings were not marked. When he took them out of the cage and spread out the wings, he could see they were not marked. So make sure the birds are marked and it is not the light on the curved feather. Naturally the judge cannot pull the bird out to spread its wings to see but he needs to understand the variety and needs to understand that a lot of those birds with that sort of feathering do sometimes show markings that happens on the Albinos and Lutinos quite often. But you should not discard those birds willy nilly. They should form part of your team where you look at the quality of the bird.

If the bird has got the other features you want, then the markings should be a secondary feature. I wouldn't put two marked birds together unless you are aware they have come from two very clear families. I think you have to treat all your varieties the same way. – on the show bench is one thing, and in the breeding cage is another. I have some specific birds in the recessive varieties and I have birds that I only show and then I breed with their brothers and sisters who are not as good as them in the features. Very few of my major show birds ever get into the breeding cabinet. If you are going to mix your show birds with your breeding birds make sure that you are not ruining them by showing them to death and expect them still to breed. You have to decide what you are going to do with them as some birds won't do both. The features of the bird are not as important in the breeding room, same as condition quality. As Marcel said earlier, if the bird is in good niche and has come right out of the moult and is ready to go then that is not the bird that should be put in the breeding cabinet, that bird is in show condition.

***Question:** Vicky from South Australia: It appears to me that features of the head are more important than a properly marked Recessive Pied. The same with Clearwings - It doesn't matter if it has muddy wings as long as it has a big buffy head it is right.*

Warren Wilson: That is not necessarily right. If all the other birds in the class have got equal big heads. It is only what is best on the day.

Marcel Buhler: I think we spoke about it earlier on. It is always a compromise. We try to get the best bird with the best colour and the best markings. and again as in the Opalines and Cinnamons with the flecking it is up to the breeders to clean them up. It is good fun for the judges to judge good quality Clearwings with clear wings and if you come over to Europe we have to put signs on our Clearwings to tell you what they are as they are really badly marked especially

in Switzerland, Germany and England. We work it that we have really good Clearwings with marked wings and you work it the other way that you have really clear wings.

Ron Pearce: I think again you cannot lose track of the sight and variety of the birds you want to breed and it goes back to one of my original statements. You either want to breed exhibition budgerigars or you want to be a colour breeder. There is a hell of a difference. You have to be a very good breeder to be a colour breeder and an exhibition breeder because if you are going to concentrate on breeding colour you are not always going to impart the exhibition features.

Question: A fancier from New South Wales: My question is over the last eighteen months there has been no period at all where at least not 15% to 20% of my bird have been in a moult. Most of the birds have been in a big moult so is there someway I can get my birds started into a moult so they are through it by show season or is there anyway I can have control of this at all?

Alan Gamble: I think we are all taught we have to get our birds through the moult as quickly as possible and sometimes we have to artificially help them through it by either altering the temperature or spraying the birds. I have never had a continuous moult in my aviary but I am fortunate as I come from a very cold place in the world. The birds have probably got to grow feathers to keep warm.

Rick Watts: This is a common thing in the UK. I often have different birds in a moult all year round. I have birds just coming through and all of a sudden there is a drop in temperature and the birds just go to pieces. I don't think the birds go normally through one single moult a year – they are in and out throughout the year and I think that is the modern day budgie.

Ron Pearce: We don't hesitate in the UK to maybe four times a week give all of our bird room a very fine spray. It can either be cold water or a little bit of F10. If you go around the breeding cages, you can spray the birds that are in the breeding cages and you will find that just a very light spray will bring a bird through the moult as quick as anything.

Statement: Brian Hollingsworth from South Queensland: This gentleman has a problem moulting birds and I think it could have been from the drought. There has never been feathers dropping like this ever before but it maybe too that a lot of us are breeding all year round so the budgies are moulting all year round. Ages ago we al used to pair up on Anzac Day and now we pair up all year through so I feel that is our big problem. We are disadvantaged in Queensland with the heat because sometimes in my outside aviary it can get up to 35 to 40 degrees and that is hot.

I can remember buying a Pekingese dog in Melbourne a number of years ago and about eighteen months later it had hair on it like a fox terrier – because of the heat it had dropped its coat and I feel that is the problem with the birds.

Peter Simic from South Australia added to Brian's statement stating he induced a moult every February March by putting them on a skinny diet of only French Millet. That works for me and they come through the moult fairly quickly and then I put them on a luxurious diet to bring them in.

Warren Wilson: My fellow guest speakers are a bit disadvantaged as they have different climatic conditions to us. But the vets will tell you that if you breed all year round like I have for many years, then the birds that are breeding will not go through the moult - it is very rare for breeding birds in their cabinets to moult – so if you have sixteen to twenty cabinets breeding then at some stage you are going to be putting about forty birds out into the flights that have not gone through a moult therefore they are out of sequence with your other birds.

So you are going to have the situation that they are going to go through an artificial moult and you look at your birds and think you have moulting already but it is only your breeding pairs. So you have birds moulting week in and week out. In the old days with our little Aussie birds, used to always moult in April or October. In those days we all bred to the show season and you had very few breeders who bred all year through. You go to most of the leading breeders in this country about 70 to 80% of them, their cages are never empty. I go around writing articles and every single breeder we turned up at all through New South Wales and elsewhere, every single one of them had birds up breeding. Not their full complement of course but they all had birds down breeding.

A quick summary was then had by the guest speakers.

Rick Watts: Regarding the earlier comment, if your birds are in a moult, give them a spray every other day. Keep them moist. They will be a lot more active as well. I am sure you must put sprinklers on your birds. (It was pointed out that we have sprinkler bans). At the end of the day, you can hand spray. Sacrifice a cup of tea to spray your birds. In the UK we had bans, and it didn't stop me from spraying birds in the flights. Buy some bottled water if you have to because it does make a difference.

Warren Wilson: I think we should be pretty pleased with the birds we have in this country. I don't think any of us should feel they should panic. There are some very nice birds bred in this Country. Don't panic too much that you don't see them at the Nationals as there are a number of breeders who do not send their birds away. They keep them at home and maybe send the relatives of the good ones. They are nervous about sending their good ones because they feel they may lose them or not breed when they get home. That is their prerogative obviously. If you have gone around to as many aviaries as I have and seen as many birds as I have you will realise that there are some very nice birds in this country and we shouldn't be worried at all about whether they will be competitive or not. Don't think we are Robinson Crusoe when it comes to having

birds that are good, bad and ugly. I have only ever seen one aviary in my whole life where I can honestly say he has got so many really good birds. It was Reinhardt Molkentein's. I haven't been to Daniel's or Jo Mannes. Reinhardt has hundreds of really good birds. The average person has still got his good birds and we shouldn't be feeling that they are any worse than other birds.

Alan Gamble: My bit of advise to any other Novice breeders or beginners is to have a look around you. The people who are successful as breeders and talk to them, work alongside them. Don't go and visit half a dozen people and hear half a dozen points of view. Try to get a mentor in the hobby just to help you along. The chances of winning of breeding and understanding all the colour varieties you have here in the first couple of years is an impossibility. Just find someone you can communicate with, someone who will share that knowledge don't add a bit of this and a bit of that just stick to the basics.

To the other gentleman who spoke about the moulting, I have been thinking about my own experiences over the years and I remember many years ago, I spoke up in Queensland about fodder mite. Fodder mite doesn't affect all birds but it does affect your seed. In your hotter temperatures, if you are not careful, you can get an infestation. The main component of Fodder mite is silica and silica is the main component of your feather. I suggest when you do get seed, you fumigate it and store it in a very cool place away from your birds. If you have fodder mite you will have birds going through continuous moults because the feather itself is very weak. I am not saying that this is your problem may it may be.

Ron Pearce: I don't think Australian breeders have anything to be shy about. You have super birds here and super breeders and I can see you are going forward. I mean why wouldn't you have good birds they all come from the UK.

Question: a question was asked earlier about the feather on the birds in Queensland where it is warmer –I would consider the weather in South Africa to be just as warm. How do they sustain their feather?

Rick Watts: I would think that people like Reinhardt Molkentein and others would use a fair amount of air conditioning. I would think they would have to as you cannot sustain birds in that hot climate if you are not spraying or providing water somewhere along the line as you are not going to get the moisture in the air otherwise.

Warren Wilson: Reinhardt has his aviaries virtually within a building which does have open windows and from 6am to 6pm every day at about every twenty minutes all those aviaries are sprayed with a very fine mist and he uses the F10 spray constantly When he walks you down the aisle between the aviaries he has a spray bottle in each hand and he wets right down the line and back up to the top. This happens day in and day out, 365 days a year.

Ron Pearce: I know that if you want to have birds with feather you have to feed feather and I know it is very hard to feed animal protein in a hot climate but it is what you need – you have to feed the feather. A bird cannot produce the feather if you don't feed the feather. I use hard boiled eggs and I use lots of them. You can use powdered protein as well. I think you have to get away from water and hard seed diets. I think you have to feed lots of soft food. Lots of vegetables and protein it is as simple as that.

Warren Wilson: I think you need to also have a very mixed diet. I feed Madeira cake which has egg in it, I feed egg and biscuit, breakfast cereal and I have a full soft food mix which I get someone to make up for me. It is 20% protein. I don't boil the eggs as I use egg and biscuit. You have to have a range of those foods and I agree that if you don't feed the proteins then the birds just won't produce not only the feathering and all the other things. You will know if you are feeding your birds correctly by the number of losses you have. If you have losses for no reason then something is amiss. You will also lose the odd one but I am talking about more than the odd one. If you are losing chicks about eighteen or twenty days in the nest then these are the things you have to look at as a warning sign.

You have to remember that the little budgie who comes out of the egg smaller than your finger nail ends up being a 250ml long bird in a couple of months incurs an amazing growth rate. A child doesn't grow at the rate our little bird does so you have to pump in the protein and everything else that is required.

Question: Sue Adams from South Australia. With your birds in the flight when you are feeding all this soft food, do you find they get fat with all this extra protein. Some hens tend to be very greedy and I am concerned about the fat issue.

Warren Wilson: Have you ever seen any bird that does exercise get fat.

Rick Watts: Everyone keeps their birds differently. I have large outside flight which are 9 feet square and my birds are out all day and every day except when I pair up in November. I encourage birds to be active. Your birds can be active in an outside flight by you just hanging up branches in the flights or seedling grasses whatever. The birds will fly onto them and get exercise. In the UK there are a lot of birds that never get off the floor, hundreds of breeders have birds like this – and to me that indicates something is wrong. I do not like seeing birds on the floor but if at the end of the day if you have or want good quality livestock you have to roll up your sleeves and get into it. Birds will not gorge all day long on soft food and if they do then obviously they are not getting the nutritional value from the grains you are providing.

If you feed the soft food early evening then in the morning you rinse the dishes off for the afternoon feeding they will not gorge all day. Feeding protein is extremely easy by spending five or ten minutes on the grater or a processor preparing your soft food and it is done. It is all about getting your birds into a routine.

Marcel Buhler: Just getting back to Reinhardt Molkenteins birds – he has been breeding birds for over fifteen years now and it gets very hot and I believe as I have said before the feather must be in the birds to produce it.

Question: *At a forum last year I asked a question about grit – I had stopped providing it in my aviary as I found birds were dying. What is the panel's opinion of feeding grit?*

Rick Watts: I think grit is one of the most important things you can feed your birds as it helps grind the seed. If you don't provide a good grit then a bird's gizzard suffers.

I will not feed crap grit as it is dusty, it will give your birds fungi infections and if you have fungi infections you have got illness in the birds and that is only from the dust, yeast infections etc. I think grit is a must.

Warren Wilson: I haven't fed grit in over five years. I use FVite which comes from Rob Marshall in Sydney. If the birds don't have access to natural grit like concrete floors etc then you must feed a supplement that has the same effect hence the FVite. You have to help the birds digestive system otherwise you will have more problems than they can handle. Many years I sent some grit to Rob Marshall to be tested and the content on that grit and it was fifteen times higher than the level of bacteria than should have been there. From that day onwards I have never bought a bag of grit since but you must feed them an alternative. They can't survive without assistance to grind up their food. Even if you put a rock or a brick in the cage, they will get desperate enough and will grind that up. There is more bacterial content in grit than there is in soaked seed so you have to be very careful that it is contamination free. Some people get grit from the beaches and don't even wash it and in that case there is a really good chance that it is contaminated. Bacterial infections are caused by rising yeast levels and when those levels rise, you are on your way to an outbreak in your birds.

Question: *Sue Adams from South Australia: In South Australia we get a Broken Hill grit. It is a red stone and it is supposed to have granite etc in it.*

Warren Wilson: To be sure, take the grit to your vet and ask him to test it for bacterial content. It costs between \$30 to \$50 to test the grit and it is well worth it.

Editors Note: a very interesting and informative lecture and I thank the five gentlemen concerned and again, my heartfelt appreciation to the Budgerigar Council of South Australia for granting me permission to record the forum.

