

INTERVIEW WITH BRUCE WILSON & PHILIP HOADLEY FROM THE WILSON/HOADLEY CLEARWING BREEDERS STUD

Keith: Firstly, Bruce and Phil – How did the partnership form and when?

Bruce: In the late 70's, 79 I think. Phil and I also went into business together. Birds were our secondary interest and then slowly became the first interest and then we've been mates for twenty eight or twenty nine years. We were the first partnership in Victoria - the first partnership recorded and we had a lot of trouble trying to form a partnership. The bureaucracy was terrible, we had to have separate rings at one time and all that stuff. In the end we changed to one ring code.

At the beginning, we used to cull all the birds every year from both aviaries, put them up in pairs and select a pair each until we ran out of birds. We did that for probably fifteen years, twenty years, and then we realised we were cutting our throats by culling then halving the birds, so we started specialising in some of the varieties as individuals – I continued with Clearwings, Clearbodies and recently Inos.... I used to do the Lacewings and Black-eyes.

Phil: This is my second round of Black-eyes. I tried to get rid of them. I got sick of them. Like everything these days, you do it for the club, so we're back onto Black-eyes, Danish Recessives.

Bruce: Basically we got rid of the Fallows. We used to have good Fallows. That's when we used to split them every year and in the end we ended up killing ourselves really.

Phil: Yes, it has been quite some time; it has been quite a journey.

Keith: Clearwings

Bruce: The Clearwings - I can tell you a wee bit of a story about Clearwings. When I first started, my Dad used to breed budgies in Edinburgh when I was a kid and we used to take them to shows. To be honest, I didn't like it then, I seemed to get a lot of cleaning to do.

Then when I was in my mid-twenties, I bought a couple of budgies from the pet shop and I formally joined a club in 1972 or 1973 – Peninsula Club. That was the first variety I started breeding – Clearwings, I was really breeding them for a rainbow bird as I was trying to breed Greywings, Y/F, Opalines and Cobalts – all that stuff. I probably had them like that and I passed them to Phil. Phil took some of these birds, split up the birds and I also gave some to Ronnie MacNamara in Melbourne and I really didn't breed Clearwings again until 1980 .My wife Judy is keen on them, she likes them.

We went to an auction, Kelwin Kakoschke auction, that was in the mid 80's and there was a Y/F Clearwing there that Judy said she wanted to buy ,she had seen it the night before (which she did.) It costs us \$300 for a Y/F clearwing (at the time very expensive) when we took it home and bred it with blue birds it bred crap. For about a year I bred a few birds from this cock, but they were ordinary. I thought I'd try it with a Green hen and it bred magnificent Clearwings. It was an old South Australian single factor yellow face and it threw a real vivid yellow wing on the green series clearwings. From there I've built the Clearwings up and kept them going. That was the foundation, but really, probably since then I've tried everything imaginable. Usually we put dark green hens for the splits each year and we now have a line of them, their spots are smaller. Basically, with Clearwings, when you put in a good variety wing one, you get a second generation one with a reasonable wing.

Keith: You mentioned some other varieties that you are flying, Black-eyes. What other varieties do you fly?

Phil: Recessives, no more Fallows, and we have Spangles, of course. Like everybody else, you like them or you don't like them. Cinnamons, most of the Normals, Opalines, Pieds.

Bruce: I tend to keep the more blue birds and Phil keeps the green birds. Except in the Clearwings and Clearbodies .

Keith: With your Clearwing matings, do you prefer to put Clearwing to Clearwing or Clearwing to Split?

Bruce: Both. What I don't do is use the second splits. So the dark green hen to Clearwing, any splits that come from these pairings, I never use.

Keith: There are some many mixtures effecting the Clearwing now by diluting the cheek patches and body colour, what's your view on these birds winning on the show bench?

Laughter!!!

Bruce: It's actually hard because you're trying to create a bird, you're trying to keep a variety. What we've done over a lot of years, with our shows in Melbourne, is take all the options to shows...we have clearwing good type birds, we have a good clearwing variety of bird, we have a clearwing composite, we usually take one of each. So it doesn't matter what the judges see or even how we judge them, I generally judge the composite bird as the best one. One that's a really good one but is a bird with dusty wings, as distinct from a very good variety bird that is crap type. If we were in our aviary, I could show you all these kinds of birds as we have some birds that are really good looking but they are ordinary variety. We have some really good variety birds but they are lesser type, so we keep aiming for our perfect wing with good type.

Phil: Don't use Cinnamons with Clearwings, absolutely. Don't use Opalines.

Keith: How do you try to improve the wing colour whilst keeping the cheek patches violet?

Bruce: What I do is I keep dipping into the good variety clearwing birds. These ones with the cheek patches that you are talking about. I would call "limey bred" from – dilutes.

People think using limeys for the wings is the improvement but it is not necessarily the right way. I'd say the first time we bred one I think we called it a limey (long before the imported dilutes), it was basically a dilute Clearwing, or a bright Black-eye almost.

We thought, for breeding Black-eyes or Clearwings it didn't fit. I reckon if you look at Black-eyes, Clearwings and Greywings, and we've done that pretty often, at club meetings and things, the very best Black-eye type and the very worst Black-eye and the one in between, which you end up showing. The worst Black-eye looks the same as a "limey" type Clearwing. And the worst Clearwing looks like the bottom end of a Greywing. So they are almost like nine birds in a row or feeding into each other and I think when you bring these "limey" birds into the Clearwings you lighten up the cheek patches, you start taking intensity out of the body, even if it helps the wing a bit. You can pick the birds that have a diluted hue about them.

Keith: So basically what you are saying, you don't use dilutes?

Bruce: Oh we do, we use it some of the time but I think like everything you have to keep selecting. If I ended up with Clearwings with cheek patches, washed out, I would get rid of them and just keep building back again.

Phil: You also have a line, Bruce, with a very clear wing. In general, by breeding the variety for type you get the composite. When you breed the composites together, you get some of them again, like a quadrella almost.

Keith: It is almost like breeding Fallows, there is a lot of waste – just selective breeding.

Bruce: Yes.

Keith: What varieties would you **not** put to your Clearwings?

Bruce: Cinnamons, Opalines. I have never put Dominants in them. I always use Normals. Normals or these "limeys" or whatever you want to call them. And dark greens, I aim for dark greens and I go hens instead of cocks birds in case they are split Cinnamons. We have had a lot of controversy with Cinnamon Clearwings. Birds from other breeders have won our shield in Melbourne with Cinnamon Clearwings.

Keith: Who in the partnership decides on what varieties to keep?

Bruce: We don't have certain rules. If Phil wants to breed chickens, I'll let him and we share the costs of our partnership. We buy the seed together, we sell birds together. We've got a joint account for the money. We never fight over the money and we never fight over the birds. We don't have a difference of opinion.

Phil: Probably the only two ones would be that I don't really want to have any Clearwings and you don't really want to have any Recessives.

Bruce: The rules that we had when we first started, we wrote down things that we were going to do and we kind of did that. If Phil wants to buy something, we'll do it and vice versa and we talk about this stuff a lot and how we will do things. We probably rate as much as anybody with experience. We don't put boundaries on each other. It is almost like a marriage. No it's not like that.! We do not get in each others face and if Phil wants to do something its fine, over and above all that, we socialise all the time. Our wives get on, we go on holidays together. We've got caravans. We do all that.Phil is very silent at the moment, he's usually the one who does all the talking.

Phil: I don't disagree with anything that Bruce has just said. The birds themselves, we probably have no Greywings or no Crests and that's by choice. Other than that, if there are any birds in the aviary that I have in my place that can benefit Bruce, they go to Bruce's place, and if there is something at his place that he wants me to try, we just swap them around. The partnership is as open as the aviaries. If we need something, that's what we do.

Keith: Sounds a good idea. How many rounds would your pairs have each year and do you foster?

Phil: How many rounds? I'd only let the hens feed two rounds. I might take three rounds of eggs if I have a clear round somewhere along the line. Do I foster? Yes, I do. I don't put any specific pairs down to foster, but if I've got something that I'm really desperate to have, I get rid of whatever is in the nest.

Keith: How closely do you pair relations and do you go by visual, pedigree or both?

Phil: I would go by both. Visual and pedigree. I don't like getting too close. I never put brothers and sisters together .

Bruce: Generally, we mate the related families, the families are all inter-related. Apart from the Recessive families, I have about 5 or 6 Clearwings families and they do link and you create what you want, same with the Clearbodys. Regarding rounds, I have some birds I take

4 or 5 rounds. It may sound brutal, or whatever, but if the birds look alright and I've got full eggs, we give them to ones with clear eggs and when the full ones are coming, I just let them keep coming. Phil is a bit sparing on the hens but I'm certainly not hard on my hens and I tend to use them a bit younger than Phil does. What it does, is over a couple of years, you tend to pick up a generation.

Keith: What is your feeding programme for your birds? What sort of programme do you implement as in seed?

Bruce: That is identical. We do that the same. A seed mix of 60% canary. We have tonic seed that we mix grey sunflower with it, some hulled oats and millet spray. We used to soak seeds. As the years have gone on we've found that with wet seed we were getting bacteria and things like that, so we've gradually moved away from it. Silverbeet, I give silverbeet ever second day and Phil sometimes gives it two or three times a week other times religiously but depends on work some of the time.

Phil: The only other thing that I'd do differently to you in the greens, I use carrots now and Bruce doesn't use carrots. I don't do it for any specific reason other than they chew it and they then get orange on their face. And I use Fennel, that's the main thing.

Keith: What, if any additives, do you put in your water?

Bruce: None. We used to put that yellow stuff - Ornithon. It used to start smelling yeasty. I think I stopped it before Phil did and what I thought, is that the water is Melbourne is pretty good. I think the main thing with water is the regular changing of water, keep it clean.

Keith: It is not the same water they make the VB out of, is it?

Phil: Bruce does not drink VB so you don't snore. I'm the beer smellier.

Keith: They take it out of the Yarra because the Yarra flows upside down.

Phil: It certainly does, but I still want a beer, I still drink it and I don't care.

Keith: Do you use preventive medicines?

Bruce: No. Again that was a thing we didn't do. Probably about fifteen years ago, people were saying you should worm the birds every year, you should use Baycox three times a year and all that stuff.

I thought you wouldn't take medicine yourself if you were not unwell, why would you take antibiotics three times a year. The main thing that we do with that, is that we quarantine birds. Even when we're swapping them back and forwards.

What we used to do, we used to swap them easy, but Phil's birds used to have different bacteria to mine and we would quarantine them in different breeding cabinets, in the other room or something. And I reckon that using preventive medicine, you are taking away the value if you need it, that's the way I think.

Phil: I stopped it the same time. I just thought it made the birds more vulnerable to picking up viruses or diseases and you then had no where to go when you had to medicate them. They drink good clean water and when they get sick, they'll get looked after. I mean we've had some sick birds over the years at different times and things that come completely unexpected, canker all over the birds and all that stuff, coccidiosis in the birds, mega was the worst one we had, just after the import of birds, we bought medicine for that from a vet at Albury. He was the only one who had it at the time. I'm not saying it's of much use, but it

fixed our birds at the time. So we've probably had all the diseases. I think one has to always be careful with their husbandry. When I take baby birds out of their baby flights, I introduce them to the adult birds and gradually they become a common flock so they all have the same resistance and helps keep the strength in them.

Keith: Can you describe your aviary – how you have it set up?

Bruce: I have a brick building that was at one time my garage, but it is not my garage now. It is split into two, I have a roller door on one side and I have a room on the left hand side where I keep my seed, quarantine, show cages, championship stuff and all that. Then I've got a breeding room, which has 55 cabinets in it, I've now reduced that to 36. (Timber cabinets) I have outside nest boxes and on the other side of the garage my roller door lifts up and I've got a 1" wire front and then the back door of the garage I can open up so that the air flows through and I've got three outside flights that are attached to the garage and the birds can come through a hole which I shut at night. The flights if you look at them head on I've got two small flights on the right hand side, one at the bottom and two on the left hand side. Some times during the year, the whole lot is open. At this time all the birds become a common flock therefore common bacteria. Last year, when I decided 55 boxes was too much, I dedicated one of the flights to the Clearwings, I put eight wire cages in there and I breed with eight pairs of Clearwings, I put the other Clearwings in the flight and they can go outside and come inside whenever they like. The success rate has been considerably higher than I have been having for a long time.

Keith: So it is basically colony breeding but -

Bruce: No, no, they are in wire breeding boxes.

Keith: Yes, but you have the other Clearwings flying around them.

Phil: Bruce does not actually colony breeding but he puts a cage in there and if he sees a pair mating themselves up, and the mating suits him, well then they go into the wire cage.

Bruce: The only problem I've had is some of the hens go a little bit stropy. Actually one of my really good Clearwing cocks was attacked by a hen. So if I see an aggressive Clearwing hen, I put her back into the general population and just let it fly with the other birds.

Keith: So what size would your shed be approximately?

Phil: Probably 24' x 30' something like that.

Keith: 24' x 30' shed, and then it is all divided up.

Phil: Hot running water, a sink and a dish washer, air purifier, hand dryer.

Keith: Phil what is yours.

Phil: Mine is not as elaborate as what Bruce's is. I have a tin shed that I use as a breeding room, all coupled up together. I have four flights that are 16' long and 4' wide. I have two flights that are 4' wide and 4' long which I throw problem breeders in and I run about 48 breeding boxes. We have power and water to it, electric timers, night switches. We made a decision probably a long time ago that we couldn't go up at night after work because we both used to work long hours and we wouldn't get home until 8, 9 10 o'clock and you still had to feed the birds so it was imperative that they were powered and with an air purifier.

Bruce: Phil was underselling his aviary by saying that it was a tin shed but the aviary is strong. When Phil built the aviary, the idea then was that people liked long flights for the birds flying and his flights are huge. There are four in a row with a passage way and the two flights in the middle actually joins onto the tin shed at the back and the shed is on two levels.

Keith: Which way do your actual aviaries face, and is there any specific reason. In Queensland we make sure that we don't have our open sides facing the west because of the western sun which is very very harsh. So we always make sure we don't have anything on that wall.

Phil: I built mine in the area that my wife allowed me to have in the backyard and I took no consideration at all whether it was east, west or anything else. However, if I did it again, I would think about it differently, and that's more for my benefit than the birds.

Bruce: We probably don't get the weather that you get. Our big thing is to be sheltered as well, so that it doesn't end up with an ice box around it. Phil actually has got a verandah around his tin shed on which he grows passionfruit. So if you look at his aviary, it just looks like green stuff. Also when I close my hatches, it just looks like a building, a silent one but when I open the hatches – boom.

Keith: In the past few years, you have been quite successful with your Clearwings in the Nationals. You've attended quite a few. What do you really enjoy mainly about the Nationals every year?

Bruce: I think in the beginning, or for me anyway, we thought it was a good way of going on holidays, that was the starting point. I don't remember the first Nationals we went to, probably about twenty years ago. A couple of times, Phil and I have gone on our own when our wives didn't want to go. I think the Nationals started making us take a break and we used to take our holidays then. And then we started meeting the people. I think that the comraderie between the people of the different States is good, I think like everything some of them are bastards. They probably think the same about us. When you have a common interest, it is easy to talk to people.

Phil: As Bruce said, we used it as a time away, because our wives get along so well, for us to all get away, and made us go on holidays. From the bird aspect of it, I think the competition side of it is great. I don't enjoy losing too much, but you have to accept that and the people you meet, it is the only time you would normally see them in twelve months. Although, neither of us are real sociable, we try to be sociable enough so we can always go back and say "Yes I know that guy", even though in twelve months time I may not remember his name, you can at least acknowledge each other and by the time the week goes by, you are enjoying each others company. I'd hate to see the competitive spirit disappear but the common interest that we all have, it gives us all some thing to sit around the table and have a chat.

Keith: How do you think we can encourage fanciers into the hobby and keep the ones we have? At the moment, we are finding it very very difficult to get younger people into the hobby and I think it is all over the place now. As I've said before, if you can get younger people to breed birds on the internet, you'd have memberships coming out of your ears? They don't want to get their hands dirty in breeding livestock. Is there any secret to it? Do you have any ideas?

Phil: I don't think there is a secret to it, I just think unless you can find a pill to keep all us old fellows alive for another hundred years I think it is a hobby that is going to be in trouble. Young people don't seem to have interests in anything other than electronics. You try to

encourage your own kids, as I have, to breed or be interested in budgies, and I get told I'm just a silly old man and "why would I want to do that". My son has no interest in it. I'm not sure that our hobby is the only one that's in trouble, but I think that all livestock hobbies are in trouble and I have no idea how we can correct it, other than try to promote it as an interest. Something that keeps you out of the hotel, or allows you to go into the hotel without the wife getting too upset. I often hear that the expenses are a deterrent. I don't always agree with that cause when I started with budgies I was earning £5. So I think that although budgies are dear I don't think that's what turns people away, but I don't know how to encourage anyone to come back. In our own State we talk about it, and have for quite some years that it has been eroded. You can look around the table as we will tonight, most of us are over 50 at least.

Bruce: In our area, we used to have what we called the "Gippsland Shield Competition". We had seven clubs in that at one time. Quite often in clubs, people end up in the bureaucracy. A club will have a President or someone who has no idea how to manage people, younger people or things like that and they end up annoying people. Instead of being encouraging, they become a weakness. We had a club called Peninsula, near Frankston, Melbourne, and we had 140 members. It was a mixed club, finches, canaries, parrots, and one night about midnight we were putting all the stuff away and there was nine budgie guys down there and everybody else is gone.

This started annoying everyone – the costs of running a club like that. In the end, we actually set up a new budgie club, that was in 1983. Dandenong was the only club to survive, because it was all the guys that wanted to do it and we were careful letting new people join. We are kind of selective and point people in the right direction to other clubs, and we've kept a group of people together and the new ones that come in, start building up the same ideals, and then they bring in other people. I'm not saying it is the be all and end all but I think you have got to be selective who you associate with, albeit the same as anything else in life and whatever and I think that there is a lot of destroyers who come in and things disappear. They don't make any contribution whatsoever. They think they are going to make money or sell birds or something.

Phil: If you don't have harmony, you don't have a hobby.

Bruce: That's basically what I'm talking about.

Phil: If you have someone who is going to be a trouble maker, it is easy to end up having fifteen people fighting instead of just one person fighting, so we just really encourage people who want to breed birds and doesn't matter whether I'm poor and you're rich, we're just there to breed birds.

Keith: Ego is the big word. There is a lot of people there with big egos and they are the ones who destroy the fancy.

Phil: Yes. Of course they are. Once you start having an erosion like that, people talk about it and then the young people don't need the hassles. You don't want to hear it.

Bruce: Budgies are the thing, but it is also a social thing, isn't it. The guys in our club now, most of them, can move back and forwards to each others houses and aviaries for a cup of tea or something. I think that is the key really, having people you can get along with and keep bringing people in like that and so that it isn't a confrontation thing, it is a relaxation thing.

Phil: An example, Bruce, in the selections. Most times, the Clearwings from our stud are better than most others around, however, we've stepped back to let some else get a bird in.

Bruce: For the competitions, we put two birds in and they put one in. Except for the Young Birds Shield, we put the best three in then.

Keith: Is there anything else you would like to add to what we have already discussed?

Bruce: From my point of view, I've used budgies as a social part of my whole life really. I've worked fairly hard. I work in procurement. I spend half my time in negotiations. It is not an easy job. It's not a relaxing job. I think it is a great hobby if people try to harmonize with each other.

Phil: If we could find a way of curbing an ego, I think the hobby would thrive. Soon as you allow ego to get in the way of your hobby, you have a problem and it becomes not a hobby. You end up in defence all the time.

Phil: It is the spirit really.

Keith: Thanks very much.