

Interview with **Kevin O'Callaghan**



Kevin has been kind enough to take time out of his busy working and family life to answer a few of my questions. Kevin has always been a true gentleman and I thank him for being a friend.

Question: How long have you been breeding budgies and how did you start? More importantly, what has kept you in the fancy?

Kevin: I have been keeping budgies for forty years now. As a kid I had mice, Guinea pigs, Tropical fish, then my I got interested in Budgies so dad built an aviary and off we went to Johnston's Avairies and bought 5 pairs. About 5 years later, when I was at Uni, I ventured into Show Budgerigars, joining QBS.

I have really enjoyed the hobby as I always had an interest in genetics and breeding livestock. I have always been blessed by people who have assisted me. Herb Heath, Merle Melrose and Bill Silvertand were excellent in encouraging us newcomers way back in the late 70s and 80s. Becoming a judge added another dimension to the hobby and has really kept my interest levels high.

Question: What do you feed your birds in the way of seed mixture, soft food etc. Do you throw any branches, grasses etc into the flights?

Kevin: My feeding is quite simple due to demands which are a higher priority than the birds. My basic seed mix is 4 parts Canary, 3 White French Millet, 2 Jap & 1 part Red Panicum. The breeding room mix is 5 parts of this mix and 1 part Hulled Oats. The breeders get Silverbeet or endive every morning, then grated carrot in breadcrumbs each evening. I do like putting branches onto the balcony in the aviaries.

Question: Do you give any preventative medication and if so, what is it and how often and why?

Kevin: Prevention is the secret. I use Megamix or Aviclens in the water. Once a month for 3 days I use Amprolium 200 and occasionally Carlox. The birds are wormed every 3 or 4 months. During summer or the non-breeding season I usually treat the birds with Doxycycline. It must be noted that I treat ALL my birds (finches, neophemas, and parrots) with the same treatments at the same time.

Question: How many birds do you have and what colour varieties are they?

Kevin: At present I would have about 300 birds as I've had a big year. The birds have bred well, I've been trying to establish a new variety and I accepted an invitation from Treva Turner to buy a share of the Cox stud of birds. For these reasons I extended the time I had birds in the breeding room.

Question: You have been very successful both in North Queensland and at National Level. I have been doing some homework and found out some of your success at National level over the past few years. This includes in

2003 Blue 9 & 12:
 Greywing 2 & 13
 Lacewing 13

2004 Spangle 6th

2005 Grey 9 & 11:
 Greywing 7 & 10
 Cinnamon 14:
 Opaline 4:
 Opal AOSV 11
 Hens 14

2007 You judged so could not show

2008 Blue 8
 Greywing 6
 Opal AOSV 13
 lacewing 12

2009 Green 12th
 Greygreen 7th & 8th
 Blue 5th & 10th
 Greywing 11th & 12th
 Cinnamon 6th
 Spangle 7th

2010 Greywing 4
 Spangle DF 3
 Opal AOSV 9
 Dominant Pied 9

2011 Greywing 17th

2012 Greygreen 14
 Blue 4
 Greywing 6
 Cinnamon 1
 Spangle DF 12
 Opaline 18
 Yellowface 11
 Spangle 5

I hope I haven't left any out.



With so many varieties it must be hard to keep improving them so we will concentrate firstly on the winning Cinnamon from this year. What is the pedigree of this bird and how long have you had the line.

Kevin: It is so nice to say that this bird is from my own line. There is not a brought in bird for at least 6 generations. The line could be traced right back to the imports from Doug Sadler in the first syndicate.

Question: Are there any siblings of this magnificent Sky? Has this bird or any of the siblings bred and if so what are the youngsters like?

Kevin: I had 2 outstanding sisters to the cinnamon but one died before going to nest and the sister was dead in the nest 3 days after I paired her up. The yellow faced cock that came 11th at the ANBC was a nest mate. He has bred one round of youngsters before the ANBC and they are well above average. The cinnamon cock has missed at both attempts but is enjoying a couple of months off before I even think about using him again.

Question: How do you try to keep the Cinnamon markings strong and is there any variety you do not mix your cinnamon with?

Kevin: I tend to focus on type and feather first, and find that the markings are OK provided I don't use poorly marked individuals in any pairing, irrespective of the variety.

Question: At what age do you pair the cocks and the hens and when do you pair up and finish?

Kevin: I prefer them to be about 10 months. I like to pair up in late July, provided the birds are ready. I won't do it this year as they (and I) haven't had enough of a break!

Question: What is the main feature you are looking for in your birds now and how do you go about embedding it into your birds.

Kevin: I have focused on maintaining length as well as improving the head features, particularly the direction and length of feather on the face. I have really tightened my lines. This was accelerated by having Nigel Tonkin cull my birds in May 2010. This was purely on visuals as I had not had a definite cull in the previous few years. I have kept my lines tight since then.

Question: How closely would you breed your birds and do you pair up visually or by pedigree. What sort of records do you keep (computer, books etc).

Kevin: Until 2 years ago I had not had any success in tight line breeding, i.e., Mother to son, etc. However I have done this in the past 2 years with much better results and with a better understanding of what to look for and the warning signs to be aware of. I



have gone grandfather to granddaughter, then took a son from that back to his mother. The chicks are consistently good. I still normally like to use cousins, aunties, etc, provided the feather and physical features are matched and suitable. I have used a computer recording system but it was short lived. I have all my records in written form but hope to go to computer to back these up in the next couple of years.



Question: What is the size, material etc of your aviary (sizes of flights etc) and can you describe the breeding room for me (breeding cage construction, nest box etc.

Kevin: I have 4 flights: 2 are 3m X 1.5m, which are my sale/sorting aviary and an odds and sods flight for birds that may have been sorted for orders or for Auctions. The other aviary is divided into a 1m and 3.6 m flight that are 3.6 m long with a 1.5 m balcony along the front.

The breeding room is very modest being an old tool shed that is 4m long and 3m wide. There are

4 double wooden stock cages and 18 double wire breeding cages. Nest boxes are all internal.

Question: Do you fly any other birds than budgies? Is so, what are they and how many?

Kevin: I also keep Mulga Parrots, Princess Parrots, Western Rosellas, Neophemas (Turks, Elegants in Normals and Pieds, Blue wings and Scarlets), some finches, mainly Gouldians. I reduced my finches and sold my canaries as I did not have the time to keep them. As it is I have 10 flights and 17 suspended flights apart from the budgerigar flights!

Question: What do you put on the base of your nest boxes?

Kevin: Apart from a false bottom I use dusting powder and pine shavings.



Question: Do you trim the birds feathers when you pair up and if so, how heavily?

Kevin: Yes, and heavily. When I remember I re-pluck before the second round of eggs is laid.

Question: How long do you wait after pairing up to put the nest box on and why?

Kevin: Usually about a week but for fosters then the box goes on straight away to get them laying ASAP.

Question: How do you prepare your show team - For example for the Nationals, when would you start and how do you do it.

Kevin: I am relatively slack with this and sometimes only catch birds a day or two before a show. With the Nationals I get birds out a month before to prepare for the Club Selection Show, then the Zone Show the week after. Birds are treated for Worms, Cocci and Trik.

Question: With your employment as a teacher how do you find time to do so many birds. Who looks after them when you are away judging?

Kevin: I have had to reduce the number of birds I was keeping, as well as reducing the varieties that are kept. Fortunately my wife Rosemary looks after them when I am away, which is fairly frequent with school camps and Missions Trips overseas. Friends in the Club give a hand as required.

Question: There are a few judges now in North & Central Queensland – how is the fancy travelling up there? Are there many interested fanciers and what can you do to encourage more?

Kevin: We are struggling to increase membership numbers, and with only 4 Clubs in the Zone it is difficult to keep in touch with the tyranny of distance. It is 13 hours drive from Rocky to Cairns!! Our birds sometimes have to make this trip before heading off to the ANBC Show. Members are offered assistance but often don't want to accept this. The meetings are tailored to involve all members through having lectures, discussions, Table Shows where all members vote to decide the winning exhibits (these receive a cash prize).

Question: What made you become a National judge and do you enjoy judging the Nationals?

Kevin: I was trained in both North Queensland and by the SQBBA Judges Panels and really enjoyed judging I was confident in the training I received by people such as Bill Silvertand and Henry George so it seemed a natural progression to sit the National Exam at the Gold Coast in 1992.

Question: If you had to change anything in the Nationals, what would it be?

Kevin: I like the idea that all birds attending the ANBC Show are benched. I do prefer the idea of 2 birds per class with an extended class schedule. I do believe that the number of birds needs to be limited to reduce the pressure on the Host State/ Zone in providing Show Cages, Stock Cages, etc. Having a set of cages that goes from Zone to Zone should be considered.

Question: What is the biggest problem appearing in budgies these days and what can we do to combat it?

Kevin: Probably the shortening of the length of the show bird. Obviously judges must continue to judge to the Standard with consistency.

Question: What is your honest opinion of flecking and what to do about it.

Kevin: Flecking is a penalty. When judged properly flecked birds have to be exceptional to win or have little competition. I don't see many heavily flecked birds on the bench these days.

Question: On a personal level,

- a) What is your favourite food*
- b) What is your favourite drink*
- c) What is your favourite sport and name of team*
- d) What sort of music do you like*

Lemon Meringue Pie
Coke (in Moderation!)
AFL Lions
Modern Gospel and
Songs with meaningful lyrics



Left: young birds bred this year. All birds showing good strength in the head, mask and shoulder areas.

I sincerely thank Kevin for taking the time to answer my questions.
