

Interview with Neale Love:

Carol: Neale, can you please tell us a little about your history in the bird world?

Neale: I think it is coming up to thirty one years in the fancy now. It started down at the Gold Coast and through QBS at that time with Herb Heath's and Cliff Scroggings of the world and then I moved down to the Gold Coast Budgerigar Society with Andrew and David Wilton. Since then, I have just gone through the ranks as a hobbyist and then through the judges ranks and then the National judge rank. I have enjoyed the birds, the shows, and the company of people and generally that is what has happened.

Over the thirty one years I have seen some good things and some bad things occur with more good than bad. There are some great friends in the budgerigar fancy, just people you don't see except once a year at the Nationals and it is like you have never left them. I mean there are some pains but that is just a fact of life, but I am very happy with the fancy as it is, where I have come through and the help I have received along the way.

Carol: Who would have helped you the most in the beginning?

Neale: Probably Cliff Scroggings. I first went to QBS when they had their meetings in the Norwegian Hall at Newmarket and I thought to myself who are all these people. Then one gentleman came up to me at the start of the night and said "Hi, I'm Cliff Scroggings and welcome to our club". From then on, it was like a friendship as Cliff was always there. If I had a problem I would telephone him up and he was a genuinely good fellow. I have had some other people help me through the ranks but I think Cliff was the guy who was just gentle in his way, thoughtful and never pushy - just a real gentleman.

Carol: I was speaking to a person another day and I said I had never heard Cliff run anyone down - he was always polite and nice.

Neale: Cliff was always a gentleman. He always took time at a show to come up and say Hello and welcome you whereas these days with a lot of people it is always a bit of a rush on with life and genuinely life is a bit of a rush these days. There was also Herb Heath who was on his way out when I was coming in. There have been a lot of elderly breeders who always helped me out but Cliffy was the main one.

One strange thing that happened was as you know I am a fireman and I was at a car accident down the Gold Coast many many years ago, the car was in a drain that was flooding. There was a young bloke in the car who was very badly injured and we had to cut the back of the car open and pull him out the back window.

After all this, one day I was at a show and I was talking to Cliff and he was telling me they had experienced some bad luck with his son in a car accident on the Gold Coast. I said "Cliff it wasn't a white Holden ute was it" and he said "happen to be it was". I said "well Cliff you had better pat me on the back as we got your boy out that night". He just gave me a hug and he thanked me.

Bill Silvertand was another help when I was going through the judging ranks as was Henry George. Like yourselves you helped me out when I had a bit of a hairy three year period at the start of my judging and people were always there offering support and telling me everything was going to be fine. There are some really good people in the hobby all the way through.

Carol: I found we can't always be on top of the game when judging. I found I went through an eighteen month stage when I thought I just was not switched on enough and I personally feel you just have to ride your way through it.

Neale: I totally agree. You are probably the first person who has said that to me and I agree, it is reality. You can go to a show, or not go to a show for a couple of months, and just within yourself, you feel things are just not right; you are not on your game.

You will go into a class and instead of being totally positive and straight up and you hit the classes running and you go one, two, three but instead you find yourself thinking I am not that confident today, there is hesitancy and things like that. You have to ride those things out or else it will get the better of you and you will end up being more negative than positive and a judge has to be able to walk into the hall, be positive and nail it. It can be a very scary feeling to doubt yourself, and I have seen other judges going through it who won't admit it and when you ask them why they have given certain awards then they aren't confident. You know they are going through a down period yet they are not going to tell you.

Carol: You have had representatives at different Nationals, would you like to give me the rundown.

Neale: Over quite a few years, I have been lucky. I got second in Hobart in 1995 the Opaline. It was placed first for quite some time, but unfortunately the judge, Harry Cooper changed it to second at the last minute. I have had Opalines, Recessive Pies and Cinnamons in and I have been very proud of that achievement. My aim is to breed a National Winner and the icing on the cake would be to breed a Recessive Pied Winner. I had second in the Recessive Pies in Caloundra which was a huge buzz and the bird that beat me was a worthy winner.

Carol: What is the biggest problem with Recessive Pies these days?

Neale: My personal belief is people are not game enough to take two steps forward and one step back and that maybe with all varieties. Being a Recessive, people are not going to commit themselves to breeding with quality Normals in particular the Dark Greens and Dark Blue series birds just to improve them and give you the first round splits.

I believe that people shouldn't wane from using Opalines, although I know it will give you a dirty appearance but if people use them correctly and use the right birds like an Opaline Recessive hen showing spots, maybe darkness in the wing will give you a better bird next generation and maybe the generation after that. That is what a lot of people don't realise and that is when you are breeding recessive varieties there is a plan that should cover a minimum of three years probably five years.

I have recessives breeding now that I have no thoughts of actually showing as they are down or dirty but they are showing exceptional head quality and depth of mask etc and I will utilise those features over the next few years and I believe the good recessive will come out with depth of mask, size and other features like that. Unfortunately in South East Queensland the breeders in particular aren't game enough to use good quality Normals and to put them into a Recessive Pied. A good big budgerigar with depth of mask even though it may have dirty wings should win the day, people get hung up on the fact that it should only have 10% to 20% wing markings and disregard the fact the birds that have the right wing markings have narrow heads.

Carol: But how heavily should you penalise a bird with excessive wing markings?

Neale: In particular cocks, very heavily. Going back to that bird in Caloundra, it was a dark wing bird showing flecking, good depth of mask and things like that. There were a lot of birds in that class that were lacking in the budgerigar outline but on the show bench I would knock a dark winged Recessive very heavily but you still have to balance it out with the budgerigar itself.

If there was a little pinheaded bird with 10% to 20% winged bird up against a larger dark winged bird I would go for the latter as it would be a better budgerigar. It will lose points in the colour and markings area but pick up more in the type.

Carol: How would you suggest people improve the wing markings if they have some that are too heavily marked and others with practically no markings at all - would you put them together?

Neale: I am not a believer in putting recessive to recessive as I feel it should be to split. I prefer to breed some quality splits then breed a nest of all recessives as it just gives you more numbers to work with.

If you are dealing with two birds of quality it is the same as with any other variety, if your birds you are utilising are of no quality then why use them. But if you have two recessives that are of quality and in preference that the cock bird is lighter in markings and doesn't have the Opaline as such, I give them one round and look for the quality to come out. They would be my first line and then put the Normals into them and try to breed the markings out of them.

One of the hardest things to get out of the Recessive Pies is the flecking. BY utilising the Opalines or the good quality Normals, in their background is usually flecking although they may appear to have clear caps. Unfortunately that is one of the hazards of breeding Recessive Pies and the determination to get the improvement in size and the correct markings. You have got to select lines that have the lightness in the wing and utilise them for their stability.

Try to use good Dark Green hens, I am a big believer in the dark factors like Violets, Cobalts, Dark Greens etc as they are more striking. You get a beautiful Dark Green Recessive Pie and the

contrast between the dark green and the bright yellow is magnificent.

If you have a motley coloured Recessive you have a tendency to just walk past it, but if you have the strong contrast it catches your eye and it says "look at me". That is part of putting a bird in the cage and making the judge say "I don't mind that" or "I like that bird" or "it has a nice width of head" etc - it is all about showmanship. Breeding recessives in the beginning is usually easier with the light colours and the quality is usually easier to obtain. It is a long term plan.

Carol: Do you think the heavier marked wing is more dominant over the lighter marked wing?

Neale: I think it comes down randomly. I think it comes down to the Opaline. I do breed a lot of Cinnamon Recessive Pies as well as they are acceptable in the standard. Any of the wing varieties like Opalines has a tendency to darken the wing but it is a matter of utilising those Opaline cock birds or Normal over the Opaline hens that will produce the darker wings. If you have a plan you work with it but along the way you will get a lot of rubbish but with this variety they are pretty birds and will sell well at pet shops. For a serious breeder of Recessive Pies that is a serious hassle as you have so many throwaways unfortunately.

Carol: Do you do anything different to most people in the breeding room in regards to feeding?

Neale: I am a very strong believer in feeding greens along with carrots. I make up a pate of Egg & Biscuit Mix, carrots and silver beet and feed that to them once every couple of days. I was never a great believer in feeding sprouted seed as I thought there were too many hassles in relation to the Queensland heat but I was tutored by Bob Smith and the way he does things I have found that it is easy for me to make up just enough to give them straight away.

I also give a little protein powder but I have never been a great believer in that sort of thing. If the birds are full and I check the chicks about 7pm to 8pm and they are asleep with full crops then I am quite happy.

Carol: Do you put anything in their water?

Neale: I have used the Marshall programme over the past five years in which you flush the birds out and then hit them back up with vitamins when they need to be boosted but I am still not totally convinced that the vitamins are being absorbed back into the bird. I don't think we will ever find that out.

Carol: I think that is the same with humans as statistics say Australians have the most vitamin enriched urine anywhere in the world

Neale: I had a virus recently and the doctor asked me what I was on. I told him I was on Fish Oil tablets along with Multi Vitamins. He told me I could throw the multi vitamins away because all you are noticing is the colour is coming out when you go to the toilet. This surprised me as I give my birds vitamins once a week on a rotation basis.

I have noticed a change in sound in the bird room once you have given the cleanser and then the vitamins and then fresh water. There seems to be a vitalisation of the birds but I live in the country where there are birds around anyway.

I mix my own seed due to the price of seed. I got onto a farmer and he grows the Millets and the White French and getting the Canary from another supplier and mixing it myself. I give equal parts of White, Jap and Canary and I throw in a little bit of red Pannikin as I am good friends of Donny Harper and Brian Walsh and they use a lot of red Pannikin.

Carol: Red Pannikin is a nice sweet seed and we give it to our chicks in the nursery cages.

Neale: Yes it is. As we go through the warmer months I cut back on the canary as I believe they are eating more of the White and the Jap in that time. Because the seed has been poor lately and I could not get any seed of my farmer, I purchased a commercial mix and within three or four days, I noticed by birds were going backwards. I prefer nice clean seed which I mix myself and the birds are going okay with it.

Ever since I moved from the Gold Coast to Cooroy I have noticed the birds have not been breeding the numbers and I put it down to the cul-de-sac we live in and the birds not getting enough sun until about 8 to 9am and the aviary is not what you would call a "design aviary". It was designed as a Granny Flat for my two boys if they wanted to stay home but they left the nest.

I run fifty five breeding cages - two thirds are wire construction and the others are cabinet ones which double as holding cages with spacers in the middle. I have only just put in the cabinets in the past few seasons because I was not getting the results in the wire cages so I opted to try the cabinets.

In my 6 x 6 metre breeding room, I run wire cages on one wall, cabinets on the other and because the size is strange for a breeding room I have suspended frames down the middle that I hang wire breeding cages off. It is far too many cages to care for with too much work. I am really thinking about changing it as numbers are not the game it is quality. There will be big changes happening in the aviary over the next couple of years.

Carol: Just going back to your Normals when you said people should be using Normals to put to their Recessive Pies. Unfortunately I feel there are not enough good Normals around these days - what are your feelings on this?

Neale: I do agree but a lot of people have the thought that when you say Normal then it has to be a blockbuster or it has to be a bird that has to win a Normal Class. Over the past ten years when I go to an aviary, a sale or just a visit, I will go and look at birds and particularly take notice of Normal hens in particular because they cannot be split sex-linkage.

You should be looking for features like a bit of width in the face, so you can't see their eyes, depth of mask. I have often said to people in our club to go out and get themselves some good Normals to breed up a family. They say but there are none around and I reply by saying there are some around but you have to use them like building blocks. Don't think you have to spend \$5000 or so on a bird - you should be looking for certain features and slowly build up.

Look for a Normal with depth of mask, width of face, reasonable length and if you can purchase a Normal that has two out of the three then you are doing really well. If you can get one out of the three then you have to have a mate with the other feature to bring it through. As I said before breeding birds and any variety is not something that is going to happen overnight. A lot of people have had success overnight but the following two or three years they have plummeted.

Carol: I feel fanciers have to build up a genetic pool over a number of years so those features are embedded into them like a double factor.

Neale: You have to compound those good features - you have to keep putting them in. I remember many years ago, I was talking to a gentleman who had just got the English birds in and he was winning left, right and centre on the show bench purely as a result of the line in imported in. Then the line started to fail a bit and he was concerned and I pointed out that he was losing the mask on the youngsters but he wouldn't believe me.

I told him he had to get depth of mask back in and he attended an auction with me but he said there was nothing there that would suit him as he had better at home. I pointed out that he didn't go there to buy a better bird than he had at home, he was there to buy a feature to introduce to his lines but he wouldn't have a bar of it. You know within two years he was gone out of the hobby. He wasn't winning so he got out. It is very important to pick up features and utilise them into your line. It is the only way you are going to succeed. You will never be able to afford to buy a bird that has everything in it.

Carol: Can you discuss your views on present day judging?

Neale: Over the past two or three years being President of the SQBJA there has been a big insight into the judging in South East Queensland where we have some really good judges but a lot of them are not learning as they are going. I believe they are finding they are not improving, or not taking the bird on or varieties of birds on and thereby improving themselves as a judge.

They are reflecting what is in their own aviary or what they are happy with. I really believe certain judges in our number needs to go out to a top breeder. Go out to Henry Georges aviary, have a look and ask Henry to put up ten or fifteen of these top birds and to keep refreshing yourself. Keep on doing it.

We go to shows and there are probably only half a dozen really good birds and judges are not getting enough exposure to top quality birds. The biggest thing I learnt was when I went to England and attended a number of shows and I got an imprint in my head of what I should be looking for.

Carol: I remember the first time we went to England in 1985 and we were blown away with the quality over there compared to the little Aussie birds we had here. We had little seven inch wonders with really fine feathering and looked like a thin pencil. Two days after our return we had to judge a special night at ABS club and Keith and I were in big trouble as there wasn't a bird here (in those days) that were half the quality of what we has witnessed in the UK and I found it impossible to get my eyes or brain into gear.

Neale: I understand where you are coming from. I went there during the transition time when the English birds were coming in but our Judging School tutors were used to the Australian Old School birds. They were trying to teach us a bird had to appear to be clean and sleek with nice yellow feather but I wanted the English bird. I came back from England and had a few arguments with the older judges trying to get them to adjust. Over the years the older judges have either adapted or dropped out of the judging scene.

The judges have to be refreshing themselves all the time - have a look at the preselection birds, attend the Nationals and take note of what is winning there. Sometimes only the good birds come out for the Preselection and you must spend time looking at their features. Don't be set on a particular style all the time. Look for the feature like the depth of mask, the lovely capping, the lovely crease in the eye so you have a lovely fold through the mask.

Take the budgerigar in for all its positives and not all a birds negatives. We have a few judges who are looking to put birds down rather than putting them up and that is rather frustrating. You know yourself, when we are standing there doing a class, there are some judges who bolt in and say that one is out and so is another one and I always say "hold on and let's have a look here". Generally speaking the right bird will come through.

Carol: I was discussing this with Garry Menzies yesterday when he was judging and I was his penciller that the variety content in birds these days makes judging very difficult as whichever way the judges goes he is wrong. We are getting a big bodied bird with a little head or a big headed bird with short keel and body and unless we can do micro surgery we are wrong. If you put up the bigger headed bird you are accused of being a "head

hunter", if you put up the bigger bodied bird than you have a "pinhead" winning. A judge cannot win.

Neale: I don't think we will ever win, we may have a draw but never win. The breeders know within themselves the faults of the birds. When I said earlier the judges should go look at some quality birds, I also think breeders should look at them. A lot of people get themselves so hung up on certain birds or certain lines that they cannot see past them.

Take for example the Mannes birds that were coming through Robert Manville. Those birds had the shorter body but lovely big head and mask but a really short keel. Then you had the Pilkington style bird which was a longer bird and had the nice head but it was also generally a flatter head so you had people saying that was the bird we were seeking and if the judges didn't put them up then the judges were wrong. Unfortunately the fanciers were not reading or understanding the written Standard which does not look for a flatter head.

Carol: I honestly believe there is more variety in style of birds we have up in front of us now than there ever used to be.
Neale: There is and also I think there are a lot of birds coming from interstate because it is so easy now to contact fellow breeders by phone or email and fly birds back. There are different lines coming into our area as people are buying pairs from these interstate breeders. Before too long that particular style of budgerigar takes over the aviary and before too long it is on the show bench. If it is not looked at by the judge the way the breeder wants it to be viewed well we as judges are in the bad books straight away unfortunately. If the exhibitor gives you an opportunity to explain why then the judge has done his/her job. Hopefully the education will filter through.

Carol: Yesterday there was 180 birds at a show and yet in the Novice section there were at least 15 to 18 birds without a white iris ring meaning the birds had to be disqualified. We used to only get it with the Spangles but yesterday, we had Normals, Cinnamons and there was even a Crest without one - have you any comment on this?

Neale: I could probably guarantee (and I am sticking my neck out here) a lot of our exhibitors have the Standard but I doubt if it ever comes out.

Carol: Talking to a few of the exhibitors about the lack of iris ring and having to be disqualified, some of the responses was "well they won last week". I explained that it is a matter of circumstances with different lighting in halls etc.

Neale:

I believe also that when you are judging you should have a pattern and stick to it. My practice is always to have a look at the cage first to see if the drinker is in the right position and the perches are in the right place and then go into the bird. I start at the tail by seeing if it has one or two long tail feathers. I make sure the correct colour ring and then I make sure it has all its toes.

What I am basically looking for is the complete budgerigar so as I move up I am looking for the iris ring, looking for undershot beak etc. I don't believe exhibitors are looking as intensely at their own birds.

Keith: Many years ago when we went through our judges school in 1978/9, Len Tucker taught us the 3 F's. Feet, feathers then face. You start out at the feet, work your way up to the face via the feathers. I feel if exhibitor's follow the same 3 F system there should not be as much controversy on the bench.

Neale: That is what I was always taught. You have probably seen me when judging young birds in particular my head will be going down and working my way up the bird. I tell exhibitors that when they have birds in the show cage getting them prepared for shows, make sure you know the birds you are entering. Make sure it has all its toes, has the correct ring, hasn't got a split ring on it etc.

If exhibitors do that they will pick up a deformed foot or missing toe and then they will leave this bird at home and keep him for breeding. I believe there are a few exhibitors around who put these sort of birds into shows to test the judges and we have been around long enough to know that.

Keith: You have been the President of the Judges Association for a number of years now and you are doing a great job. You have just taken on President of the SQBBA as well - do you think you are trying to do too much at once and where are you getting all your enthusiasm from?

Neale: Thanks Keith - great question! IN regards to when I took over the Presidency of the Judges Association, I just had a feeling that we had been going through a bad patch and there was not a lot of rapport with the exhibitors and we had lost a bit of ground. I thought it was time to go in a different direction and point out that we were no better than others, we were exhibitors like everyone else and the only difference was we had been tutored and successfully passed a judges examination. I thought there needed to be a person who enjoyed the birds still and wasn't caught up in the club atmosphere in Brisbane. I was not considered to be a "special" breeder or anything like that: I am considered a person anyone can telephone:

Over the past two or three years I have received a lot of phone calls from exhibitors or clubs asking about certain judges or judges decisions and I am just there to liaise. I thought we had to be accountable to the fancy. When I was considering taking on the Presidency of the SQBBA I soul searched for quite some time. I want the fancy in South East Queensland to be a family or part of a group of people, who are interested in the budgerigar first, then their clubs and the people within these things and not their own self interest. Probably I thought I could talk to more people and have a good response to them. I didn't think it was going to be a burden as I am the type of person who can get on with the majority of people - I am no better than anyone else - I wanted to bring the fancy together.

I honestly believe we need to be one solid team that will do better on the show bench, better at the Nationals etc. It is not an ego thing, I am just happy to represent the fancy. Realistically I am only the chair person of a group of representatives of other clubs. I am there to ensure the meetings are run correctly and the things that need to be mentioned are considered.

Where do I get my enthusiasm from? I think it is because I know there are a lot of really good people within the South Queensland fancy, some really good people and some really good fanciers who are there for their club and are important of being part of it. I may be naive but I think we can all come together and have a strong team and we will do really well.

But we have to look at our Novice and intermediate breeders and help them and may be look at our Open breeders and see if they can contribute more and not just be there saying well I did this or I did that in the past. I believe there are a lot of Open breeders who need to pull their heads in a bit and look at where the fancy put them not the other way around.

Carol: How can we get more people interested in judging?

Neale: I believe we should take a little bit of the uncertainty out of becoming a judges and get people who have the knowledge and ability and ask them irrespective of who they are or what they do. Tell them we think they would become a good judge, give them the confidence and encouragement and give them something they can work on.

As you know we issued a lot of invitations to become judges recently and the result was seven interested and now it has filtered back to three persons interested. This three are good candidates and should go through without a problem. I think we need to be more practical with our learning process. I believe we have experience and knowledge with our present judges that we should be able to bring these people up to a good standard and be very capable senior judges in the years ahead.

Carol: There is too much criticism of judges and that is the biggest deterrent. Why should anyone subject themselves to those sorts of conditions?

Neale: Carol you are so spot on with that comment. I think if the judges who we have got and they are really good and admit any mistakes they may make and be helped along by fellow judges it would help. If you are unsure of something when judging ask a fellow judge for assistance after all we are all the same, we are all human. Just go around and talk to a fellow judge and say "look I am having a bit of trouble with this class can you please come around and give me a bit of assistance" and that fellow judge should have a bit of decency and keep it in house and just say "no problems, maybe if we do this or that" and get you through it. We don't want the situation of the judge being asked to assist saying "How silly is that" and then blabbing it to all who would listen.

