

Interview with Troy & Joanna Smith

Carol: ***Have you always lived on the Sunshine Coast?***

Troy: Yes I have always lived around here at Woombye, and Jo came from Bli Bli which is about 15 minutes away.

Carol: ***You said earlier you have lived in this house about 16 years is that right?***

Troy: Yes I have.

Joanna: I moved in about 7 years ago.

Troy: There is still no ring on her finger



Carol: ***That is your problem.***

Joanna: There is an engagement ring but that is as far as it has gone.

Carol: ***So when are we doing the big thing?***

Joanna: Yes Troy when are we doing the big thing?

Troy: It depends on whether you ask me or her Mother. We will see how we go.

Joanne: Hopefully one day soon. It would be nice.

Carol: ***So you have been here 16 years and you say you built the aviary yourself along with the house practically. How did the aviary start out?***

Troy: It actually started when I met Joanna.

Joanna: I bred budgies with my Mum, and we had a hexagon aviary so when I moved in I wanted to breed budgies again, and we found a hexagon aviary for sale in the newspaper. We started with this hexagon aviary, then we bought an Absco shed and it grew from there and we got too many birds.

Inside the aviary: Notice the skylight to let plenty of natural light in:



Troy: So I decided to build a brick aviary and then it was extended again. I don't want to go too big. I know people who have 30 to 40 breeding cabinets, whereas I only have 12, and that is enough for us to handle. It all takes time to feed them, check on the chicks etc. as I like to try and look after them well.

Carol: ***I see you have the Mason jars for the seed in the breeding cages and that would help.***

Troy: In the breeding cabinets I have the jars and dishes. I like to see what other people are doing in their set ups and get a few ideas from them and try it myself.

Carol: ***I keep telling people that no matter how long you have been in the fancy you can always learn new techniques by visiting different aviaries regardless of whether you have been in the fancy for 10 months, 10 years or 40 years.***

Joanna: That is right as everybody does some things different to others.



Carol: A perfect example is looking at your nesting box with the safety box attached to it. I have not seen that design before and it may be a good idea for other breeders to trial. Can you go into the explanation of why you decided to make it?

Troy: Because I saw the idea somewhere else at Mark & Rebecca Fellows aviary, and they recommended it. So being a cabinet maker myself I thought I would make some up and trial it. I have had in the past, hens that attack their young as she

is trying to lay her second round, and this just may help protect the youngsters from the previous round.

Carol: ***We were discussing earlier in the day whether the safety part should be at the front of the box and first thought was that the safety part should be at the rear of the box so the hen can come straight in and lay her eggs.***

Troy: The reason for the safety part to be at the front of the box is that when the chicks are old enough they can just come out of the box into the breeding cage. I do worry about the hens going past the chicks in the safety part to get to the back part to lay her eggs, but apparently the hen doesn't bother the older chicks too much.

Carol: ***You don't have a concave in the safety box part only in the area where the hen is to lay her eggs.***

Troy: I just have sawdust, and believe the hen will go to the darker, deeper area to lay her eggs, but I am only just trialling it so I will see what happens before I put it out there

Carol: ***How long have you been showing your birds?***

Troy: That is a pretty good question and it would be some time now. We met Ken & Eileen Henricks who helped us out and pointed us in the right direction. It was through them we joined the Sunshine Coast Society and I have done a bit more travelling to look at birds than Joanna has. I have been to Melbourne, Newcastle and a couple of different places and met other people and I think that is part of the fancy as well, meeting different people and seeing and listening to them.

Carol: ***So are you going to the Nationals in Perth this year?***

Troy: No, not this year. We haven't made any bookings to go and I have never had any birds selected to go away before.

Carol: ***You have been winning a fair bit on the show bench these past few months, so you may have a chance.***

Troy: We will see how we go. Once I have an aviary full of decent birds I may consider the Zone selections.



Carol: ***So are you making your birds available for your club selection show?***

Troy: No, because I don't think they are up to scratch. The decent birds I have got, I want to keep and breed from. As I said, when I have a decent number of reasonable birds, then I may consider it. I have never even sold a bird, as I don't think they are decent enough.

Carol: ***You know birds still breed when they come back from the National shows?***

Troy: Yes I do know that. I believe Henry George leaves his birds for a year after coming back from the Nationals before he tries to breed with them whilst I know others who say the birds never breed when they come back from the Nationals.

Carol: ***Those birds probably would not have bred in any circumstances anyway:***

Troy: Yes that is probably true, but at the moment they are more important to me in the breeding room at the present time.

Carol: ***There are a few ideas floating around at the moment about birds being older when they go to the Nationals. E.g. in 2017 you show 2015 rung birds and not 2016 as would happen now. That way the birds are more mature, and you have had the chance to get a couple of rounds out of them beforehand.***

Troy: I think that is a good idea. It would be an even playing field for everyone. They would not be young birds as such but it is just a different way of looking at things. The birds would have a chance to mature but in saying that, I believe Henry George has won with birds about 7 months of age.

Carol: ***I think the biggest problem with birds when they come back from the Nationals is that breeders don't give the birds enough time to settle back into the aviary and the routine.***

Troy: That is probably right, as people want to knock some chicks out of them straight away.

Carol: ***Over the years who has been of the most assistance to you.***

Troy: I think that is a fairly broad range, as I said I take ideas from everyone. Neale Love and Steve Brooks have been very good to us. Neale has mentored me a fair way. I take information from everyone and then see what works for us. I don't want to isolate anyone or leave anyone out. I mean Mark and Rebecca Fellows have been very good to me over the past couple of years.

Joanna: We should say though that in the beginning Ken and Eileen Henricks were great when we started off. They made us feel very welcome at their home and helped us a lot.

Troy: I am trying to repay their help by helping out newcomers to the fancy now. I know I have gone to some peoples aviaries, spent some decent money, and only found out afterwards that the birds were only average and I don't want that to happen to other people. I want to try and help others.

Joanna: But we have met lots of lovely people, and made lots of new friends, and it has been great. Everybody is so lovely in the fancy.

Carol: ***I know what you mean, as when our two daughters were married we had over 30 bird people at each wedding as we considered them to be our friends. Just think of how many people you could have at your wedding that belong to the fancy.***

Joanna: Exactly – we could have a budgie show at the wedding.

Carol: ***Well on the 18th April we have a Lawn Show and we could incorporate the wedding in the back garden.***

Joanna: We could organise a Celebrant to do the service.

Troy: Gee I might have to turn up for that. Oh no, I will be at the Judges School on that day.

Carol: ***Getting back to the birds, what is the feeding programme you use in your aviary?***

Troy: I buy in the seed and I mix a bit of hulled oats with it for the flights. In the breeding cabinets I try and give them extra hulled oats, and I do a soft feed mix at least every second day, of wheat and hulled oats which I soak for 12 hours, rinse and then dry it for another 12 hours if not more. Joanna cuts up the vegetables.

Joanna: I cut up silverbeet, carrots, corn, beetroot and broccoli. I grate the carrot and cut the other ingredients finely.

Troy: I give them lots of other things like vitamins in the water. I give Marshalls Megamix about twice a week. I use KD Powder once a week. Once a month I try to give them some sort of preventive like S76 or Emprolium. I try to vary the product so they don't build up a resistance to the product. I give the birds some greens as well. I give them grasses and branches in the flights. Branches from gum trees, tea trees, eucalyptus etc. This keeps them active as well. I also give corn on the cob.

Carol: ***When is your birds' breeding season.***



Troy: I am fairly lucky I can breed most times of the year. I have the air conditioner to take the heat out of the aviary and it stays pretty stable in winter. I try to breed in March, April and May and then again in August, September, October. I limit the hens to only two rounds per season. I will never let the hens raise three rounds. I foster out and try to look after my birds.

Carol: ***Do you put any products in the sawdust in your nest boxes to prevent mite etc.?***

Troy: I use Coopex powder under the concave and the sawdust in the concave. I also spray some Coopex around occasionally. I also started to use F10 recently which I think is a good disinfectant

Carol: ***I noticed you are using the wire breeding cages and not wooden cabinets – have you always had the wire cages?***

Troy: No I did have cabinets as such but I probably didn't use them properly either. I find the wire breeding cages are easier to clean as I just pull them out of the aviary and gurney them. I know other people like the cabinets as it isolates the birds a bit more if you have a problem. I like the wire cages also for air flow especially in summer time.

Carol: ***I mean if a disease is going to spread it will as the breeder will not wash his/her hands after every nest box or bird is handled.***

Troy: That is exactly right. I also believe the birds have to build up some resistance to bacteria. You can be over the top with cleanliness and that does not help the birds at all. The birds have to be a little bit tough to a degree.

Carol: ***I noticed on your nest boxes that you don't have a wooden slide on the front, you have a metal one. Why is that?***

Troy: I have wood on some of them. The metal slides was something I was trialling but I think I am getting rid of them as they make the nest box sweat. I did actually start sealing each nest box with Bondcrete but again the timber didn't breathe and they were too sweaty inside.

Carol: ***You said you use some drugs as a preventative. Do you use Baycox or similar at all?***

Troy: I try not to. I have a fridge full of stuff like everyone else but I try to use it sparingly.

Carol: ***You have 12 breeding cages in your aviary, and three flights. Your aviary is off Metal and Brick construction which you have built. You have tiled floors and skylight. If you had to change something what would it be?***

Troy: I haven't got windows at the back of the flights. I would have the flights go out past the roof line so the birds have access to the rain more. I know when it does rain, they go out as far as they can and flap on the wire so I would like to give them better access to it.

Carol: ***You have a few different bloodlines in your aviary – can you tell us about them?***

Troy: I started with a bit of everywhere. I got a bit of Scoble – I got some birds of Ken Dunk when he sold out and those have been the main influence on my birds. Especially the Ken Dunk hen I got. Again I have just blended the birds I have acquired over the years and tried to produce my own bird line.

Carol: ***Are you looking for the complete bird when you purchase one or are you looking for certain features?***

Troy: I am always looking for the complete bird but it is like putting a puzzle together. There is always something you can improve upon.

Carol: ***How is the fertility in your aviary?***

Troy: I know you want to produce quantity as well as quality and I know I have had a bit of trouble with the birds' fertility recently.

Carol: ***I know quite a number of breeders had trouble with their birds' fertility last year.***

Troy: I had a little trouble. I had big trouble in September /October last year but in November/December I had a few come through so I don't know whether it is a timing thing or not.

Keith: I don't know whether it makes a difference or not, but for the past four weeks we have been giving our birds Calcihealth in their drinking water two days a week and we have noticed a difference. Now before that we had eight pair up and out of those pairs we only produced two chicks. Since starting the Calcihealth just before the second round started we have second rounds with the first few eggs clear but all the others are colouring up. We don't know whether it is the Calcihealth, the weather, the rain or what but Barry & Dianne McClennan and Glenn and Damon Winch swear by Calcihealth and their birds have fantastic fertility.

Troy: I try to make sure the hens are in good condition and I think it could be a combination of things like condition, weather etc.

Carol: ***I see you separate your hens from your cock birds.***

Troy: I do a little bit. It is just for myself actually. I have thought about flying them together as then the cock birds are always pestering the hens and when they get in the breeding cabinets they know what to do.

Carol: ***Do you do any show preparation with your birds?***

Troy: (lots of laughter). A little bit, but not as much as I should! If I have a couple of decent birds I will spray them a week or two prior to the show but I should do more. I think spraying them is a big part of the preparation. I don't get the time to get the birds used to the show cages. I have the family and work and I am always doing something.

Carol: ***I see you are flying Normals, Opalines, and Spangles and starting on the Clearbodies – anything else?***

Troy: Yes starting with the Clearbodies. I do have some Cinnamonwings but I don't want that to dominate the birds. I do like the Clearbodies but I want to build up the Normals. When you start out you like the pretty birds like the Recessive Pieds and Dominant Pieds but then I decided you need good Normals and I have spent the last couple of years trying to build up some good Normals. I also have some Opalines and then I will build up the Clearbodies.

Carol: ***What is your favourite variety Joanne?***

Joanne: I like the Lacewing but he won't let me have any.

Carol: ***Would you like a Lacewing Jo, I can give you one***

Joanne: He won't give me a cage to have a Lacewing.

Carol: ***I think if he expects you to cut up the vegies etc. and feed them occasionally you should be able to have a pair of the birds you particularly want.***

Joanne: Exactly.

Carol: ***Maybe as a wedding present, you could get a pair of Lacewings and your own breeding cage.***

Joanne: Now that is a great idea.

Troy: I know Phil Edgar breeds his Lacewings to his Clearbodies and it goes okay.

Joanne: Yes, we always look at them at the auctions and sales.

Troy: Jo does, I don't. Recently though I am looking at getting some Dominant Pieds I want the Dominant Pieds to add a little colour into the aviary.

Carol: ***The yellow Lacewings would add some lovely colour into it.***

Joanne: Yes beautiful bright yellows would look great.

Troy: Yes, but knowing the Dominants, Recessives and Sex linkage varieties is a bit daunting for newcomers to the fancy.

Carol: ***Yes but Lacewings are easy. You have a Lacewing cock and all the daughters are Lacewing. You have a Lacewing hen to a Normal cock and all the sons are split. Easy!***

Troy. (Avoiding the Lacewing subject says) I have always stayed away from the recessive varieties.

Carol: ***Lacewings are Sexlink! I think whether you have been in the fancy a few weeks or many years, breeders have to breed the varieties they like as well as the Normals to keep their interest up. I also think to keep Joanne's interest up, you should have some Lacewings. Troy, I believe you are participating in the judge's course that starts off in April.***

Troy: Yes I am. I figured that it may help me learn more about the birds and someone has to stand up and judge.

Carol: ***It can be fun. I think five or six years ago it was torture because you had a few loud mouthed people aiming arrows at people's backs but now the majority of fanciers are realising that judges can only judge what is in front of them on the day and they do not listen to the others.***

Troy: I reckon there is always going to be someone who disagrees with a judge's decision but that is how it goes. I will try never to knock a judge as they are doing their best and birds change from week to week. I used to umpire indoor cricket so I don't mind taking a bit of mouth sometimes.

Below: Parents to Nestfeathers on right: Head



is improving on the youngsters definitely)

Carol: ***Anything else you would like to discuss?***

Tory: I just want to make it enjoyable for everyone. Have fun with people.

Keith: How many junior members would you have at Sunshine Coast?

Troy: None at all.

Keith: They are the ones we should be trying to encourage into the fancy and stay in it. They may leave it in their late teens and early twenties, but they usually come back to it.

Troy: Yes you are right as I had budgies as a kid. You don't have to spend a lot of money to have birds but to afford decent birds juniors maybe struggling. So they need people to help them out and that is where I feel I can come into it and help them. We don't have many members in the Sunshine Coast and you would think there would be more people interested in breeding them. It is expensive to build an aviary unless you purchase a garden shed of some description which is quite suitable. It is good for young people to learn responsibility and to socialise with others.



Above left: a young grey green cock showing plenty of shoulder width impact and feathering the indoor flights are light and airy and the tiles make it easy to clean.

Carol: ***What are your thoughts on the combined Spring Show?***

Troy: I think it is a good thing to get all the clubs together with a decent amount of birds in each class. At the start of the year when we have about ten shows one after the other it is a bit too much and if we can limit the number of shows in September/October it would be much better for all. Rather than push people to support all the different shows, we will be limiting the number of shows and making it a big show which is great for family time. I am the first to admit I don't travel to many shows but I have my family. I would rather go to one big show and if your birds do well, you know your birds are improving.

Carol: ***On a personal level Troy: What sport do you follow:***

Troy: A bit of cricket, a bit of league. I follow the Broncos a little bit.

Carol: ***Your choice of Music?***

Troy: I don't really listen too much, just the radio.

Carol: ***What is your favourite food?***

Troy: Whatever Joanne cooks for me. And that is usually pretty good!

I sincerely thank Troy and Joanne for making us so welcome into their home and aviary.