

MAURICE ROBERTS

Recently on a trip to the United Kingdom I caught up with Maurice Roberts in Cornwall. Maurice was the SQBBA's guest of honour at the 1999 Nationals held on the Gold Coast. He is a wealth of knowledge and is building up the Slate variety – the history is at the bottom of this article.

Carol: It is lovely catching up with you again Maurice. You are on the B.S. Colour and Standards Committee and you are trying to bring in new guidelines for penalty and disqualification points in the hope of obtaining consistency on the judging stands. Would you like to explain what the changes that are being proposed are?

Maurice: The C&S committee believe the major faults in budgerigars needs to be identified and penalised in an attempt to eradicate the ongoing faults in the winning exhibits in this country. It is hopefully being decided to introduce over a three year period commencing in 2009 that the following major fault birds displaying two major faults are not able to win a challenge certificate (that is a best in colour at a show – in the UK the shows have an award for the best in colour between all sections).

Effective from 2009, birds displaying two major faults will not be able to win a class or above. From 2012 birds displaying one major fault will not be able to win a show.

Carol: Now what do you class as a major fault?

Maurice: We have obviously got faulty that are common to all birds. Condition is essential. Long flighted is a directive that should be disqualified along with scaly face. They are automatic disqualifications. The major faults we are now looking at is one, flecking. It is defined as any dark mark, flecked or grizzled on the crown or frontal of the head. These markings should be penalised severely bearing the mind that the standard for every variety denotes the frontal and crown must be clear and free of all markings. In this country the people have been using all these terms "grizzled", "flecked", "heavily marked" and really it is all flecking and we have to get away from that. As an example the recessive pied – most of them are really flecked.

Opalescence is another major fault – this fault can occur in all varieties where the pattern and distribution of markings is as the normal light green and is defined as a visual overlay of body colour intruding on the cheeks, back of head, neck and wings which detracts definition of markings as depicted in the pictorial of the ideal. Problem with this I feel it comes from the Spangle. Ever since the Spangle was introduced they had a bloom at the back of their head and now that opalescence has crept into the Normals and very prevalent in some of the German imports.

Carol: I find that funny because I can remember the bloom being in the Australian birds long before the Spangles come to the attention of fanciers.

Maurice: Maybe you have greater knowledge on it in Australia then we have here but I know when the Opaline came around in the 1930's we didn't have any opalescence on the Normals in the 40's, 50's, 60's or 70's but we got it after the Spangles came about. It does detract from

the bird. I remember judging in Denmark and Holland, there are a lot of very good budgerigars but they have a lot of opalescence.

Another major fault concerns the spots – a bird missing two or more spots on a variety where six spots are required. There are a lot of Spangles winning in this country at present that haven't got a spot on them so they will be major fault now.

Carol: Do you go for the target or full spot on the Spangles?

Maurice: Obviously we would like to see the bulls eye. A bird devoid of spots will be faulted here. Flights is another major fault – birds with two flights missing on a wing will be one fault and a bird with more than two flights missing on the other wing will be classed as two faults.

Tail feathers – birds displaying less than two visual tail feathers as depicted in the pictorial Ideal. What we are obviously talking about there are birds with short tails. Obviously birds with the secondary under feathers look like birds with short tails and they should be penalised.

Carol: So in 2012 a birds with only one tail feather will not win.

Maurice: They will not win a best in show. Another major fault is deformity - a bird displaying any deformity, slipped claws, missing claws, twisted backs, any deformity. The others are inherent faults in body colour and things like that etc but the above are the major faults that hopefully we will be penalising in 2009 as judges.

Carol: What are the chances of that going through?

Maurice: Very difficult to say because unfortunately there are some people on committees with self interests. My opinion is that when you are on a committee to agree Standards for the county you should leave your own personal views or birds at home at home and you should be for the betterment of the fancy worldwide. Unfortunately some people will obviously have birds that are tailless or short tailed, birds with flights missing and people won't want them to be faulted.

Carol: How prevalent is it these days in England with birds that never grow their tail feathers?

Maurice: I would say 10% per cent now and it is on the increase. My feeling is because we are allowing it. I think it is the same as everything. If you stamp it out – it is always the bitter sweet to swallow but it is also the best sweet in the end. You take it full on, you attack it and then it is put to bed.

Carol: So you wouldn't have them in your aviary?

Maurice: Well I have got them in my aviary – I have birds with tail problems – but I am looking to eliminate it and this is why we have given a three year phase in period for the disqualification points. People have time to eliminate the faults.

Carol: With your judges, how many would you have and also in Australia we have different categories of judges as in Trainees, Cadets, Normal, Senior and National Judges. What categories do you have?

Maurice: We have over 200 judges on the panel. We only have two grades with the Budgerigar Society and they are subsidiary who are training to be on the panel and in this class you can

judge small shows. You have to do three years and nine appointments with top judges so you have a training session on nine shows over three years then you take an exam. There is only one grade when you come on the panel. Personally (and I know it wouldn't be everyone's opinion) I would like to see a grading system so the best people progress to be the top judges on the top scale. Because when you look at the BS club show and the top shows, sometimes the people who are on the panel do not do the best job and I make the analogy to football – if you are refereeing and you pass the test you would not be able to referee at Wembley first – you would have to do the village games first, then progress to town side, city side etc.

Carol: So how long have you got to be in the fancy before you can begin your training as a judge?

Maurice: It is about seven years and then your three years of training so the simple answer is ten years before you can judge. I am all for dropping the time because obviously some people are elderly when they come into the hobby and some people naturally have a good eye for a bird. I think judging is either something you have either got or you haven't. You can train people to do the administration side of judging but really someone's eye is something you develop early in bird keeping or you never have.

Carol: Now with your birds, what colour varieties are you concentrating on?

Maurice: Well the thing at present I am putting a lot of effort into my work. I should have retired four years ago, but I got promoted a couple of times and I am now in the top three percent of the work force in the fire brigade and there are over one thousand people working in it so my birds are a little stand offish at the moment. I am working with Cinnamons, Recessive Pies, Normals, Albinos, Lutinos, a few Lacewings and a few Slates.

Carol: We were talking about grizzling on the Recessive Pies before, your birds are very clear capped and you seem to be going out and really concentrating on that aren't you?

Maurice: I have been very fortunate to have judged in Germany a few times and seen some of the best German birds and a great breeder is Jo Mannes and when you look at the Mannes birds' structure he has developed the extension of the cap. The cap extends well over the eye and I have looked at all my birds now and I am looking for that yellow or white cap and as you have seen on all my birds, I have that extension of cap. I was very fortunate to breed a Recessive Pied with the yellow cap free of any markings and it was also fortunate that the bird reproduced well and by crossing the German Recessive Pied Lines to the Normals, the splits have the extension of the cap. Really, any bird that has any grizzling is eliminated.

Carol: Do you mate splits to splits or Pied to split?

Maurice: The thing is I am a great advocate of the Cult of the Budgerigar by Bill Watmough as it is still one of the best books ever written in my opinion and with all the varieties I keep I continue to dip back into the Normal Greens. I feel the Recessive Pied has made the advancement in this Country by pairing back into the Normal. I think if you kept them by mating Recessive to Recessive you would not have made the advancements. Recessive Pied to Normal gives you splits which you then mate back to Recessive Pies. Then in the end split to split. The disadvantage I have at the moment is the original cock I got is split Cinnamon so

I have thrown Cinnamon hens and being the purist that I am as I feel the striking effect of the Recessive Pied comes from the contrast of the Dark Green colour with the rich yellow or Cobalt/Violet to white. My feeling is the pastel Cinnamon colouring detracts from the contrast. I am trying to eliminate that by using Recessive Pieds hens that cannot be split Cinnamon back to Normal cocks.

Carol: With you Lutinos, do you pair Lutino to Lutino?

Maurice: With them I feel the way to improve them is Lutino to Lutino to improve colour. Really you need to breed your own good Opaline Olives as the best Lutino I have ever bred was from a Lutino cock to an Opaline Olive hen. You have to breed good dark greens to get your good Olive but you have to remember one thing. The secret is you have to engineer these things yourself as you cannot go out and buy a good Olive as no one will sell it to you. Engineer it in your own bird room so you know the pieces of the jigsaw and you know what the finished picture is going to be.

Carol: What about the breeding of your Albinos?

Maurice: Again, selective breeding but I am quite happy to dip back into Opaline Greys. Something if you look at Opalines and Normals in outline and blacked out all the body colour of both birds, the Opaline has a more pleasing outline as it has more curvature. I think the Opaline Greys paired to the Albinos will give you a better outlined budgerigar.

Carol: Now with your Slates – how are they progressing?”

Maurice: To be honest I need to pair more up. The secret of them is to keep them in the Sky-blue as you don't want them in the dark or double dark factors. The true Slate is the slate of sky-blue so what I should be doing there is keeping the normal sky to them as the Normal is better than the Opaline. They are sex-linked and very close to the Opaline. The chromosome for the sex-linked Opaline and the Slate is very close together so much so that if you link the Opaline and Slate together it is very difficult to separate them.

Carol: The difference between the Slate and Grey is the Violet cheek patch on the Slate and the grey cheek patch on the Greys and it has the Sky-blue colour on the rump with the grey body colour.

Maurice: Again I think the man who bred them in Yorkshire in 1935 named them the Slate as they resembled the slate tiles on an English roof. It really is a very good definition.

Carol: What is the feeding programme you use for your birds?

Maurice: The thing is I like to give them a balanced diet. I believe canary is the base of all budgerigar food and I give fifty percent canary: ‘When you think back to Bryan, Ormerod, Moss, a lot of them in the 1950's were feeding plain canary but you had the Spanish Mammoth which was a large seed but these days you cannot buy it because it is used in slimming aids. The other fifty percent is about thirteen different seeds. I use every millet you can buy, yellow, white, Jap, Pannicum, Sunflower, Niger etc and they are all mixed together.

Carol: Do they prefer one seed over the other?

Maurice: Budgerigars are habit forming in my opinion because if you buy a budgerigar from another aviary which is fed one particular seed well it will continue to eat only that seed in another aviary. The idea is to start babies on it.

Carol: What about green food or soft food mixes?

Maurice: I don't buy any propriety soft food and I believe you are spending a lot of money for very little. I use Scotch porridge oats as a base, add a little Weet-bix, some Fennel, carrot, broccoli, chives or bamboo shoots, whatever is available at the time. I buy three or four different varieties of vegetables and mix them in a blender. To that I add a little caucus and fishmeal and a French protein additive. Evert night it is mixed up a little differently and I think the birds appreciate that.

Carol: What is the cost of your seed in the United Kingdom?

Maurice: I buy seed by the ton through a syndicate we have which makes it very cheap. We buy canary for eight or nine pound (\$20) per 25 kgs.

Carol: What about additives to the birds water?

Maurice: Birds need water as they are seventy percent water themselves. They want fresh water. I occasionally add some Cider Vinegar and sometimes some Honeygar which is produced by an American which is a Cider Vinegar with honey and it is sweeter and the birds take to it readily.

Carol: What about grit?

Maurice: I feel the more grit you can give your birds the better. If I am at a show and see a different grit, I buy some. When I clean the cages out, I put newspaper on the floor and sprinkle grit on top and the birds go straight down to eat it. I don't put it in pots because I think they only eat about five to ten percent and the rest is wasted. The nicest grit is Sollaca which is a Belgium company name and they produce a coral grit which is superb.

Carol: We have been in your aviary and I noticed you have plastic nest boxes – what about moisture in them?

Maurice: I put a sheet of paper in the base of my nest boxes and that keeps the boxes dry. The birds are then on the paper and I replace the paper every other night. That way, all the droppings etc are removed every other day. I feel the nest box is where you get French Moults. I believe the virus is in the nest box.

Carol: I don't know because he had a breeder by the name of Bill Silvertand who passed away eight years ago. He used to breed a lot of French Moults so one year he had handed three eggs to us as they were laid, three to a chap named Ronnie Jones and he had the other four and those eggs produced the only French Moults we had in our aviary so in my opinion it had to be in the eggs when they were laid.

Maurice: that doesn't disprove what I was saying. The egg still touched the nest box bottom. It is a virus and maybe the hen carries the virus and I believe the nest box hygiene is the way to get rid of the virus. I put sawdust in the box for laying but as soon as the chicks are about

four or five days of age, I then put the folded paper in. I leave the chicks with the parents as long as possible but a word of warning. If you breed a good youngster it will always be the one, when it jumps out of the nest box will be a threat to the parents and the parents will kill it.

Carol: Do you put branches in the aviary?

Maurice: If I had more time – I think every success with budgerigars is time. If you put the time in you will reap the success. If I had more time I would go out and cut Hazel which is an English tree. Each year, the Hazel gets fresh growth and the enzymes in the bark helps stimulate the hormones to breed.

Carol: Getting onto your show cages – we have had a lot of discussion about the diameter of the perch sizes due to birds not gripping the perches properly. The diameter of our perches at present is 12mm and they want to increase it to 16mm. What is the size of the English show cage perches and how much are your cages?

Maurice: We have 12mm – I personally don't think we have had that many problems with birds not gripping the perch. A good show cage in this country you can pay up to thirty pounds for (\$70) but it is like a finish on a car.

Carol: With your show entries – are numbers up or down? And what is the membership fee?

Maurice: A little bit of an upsurge last year which is good and I don't quite know why. I think the BS club show moving from November to September helped a little bit. Most clubs to join are around the seven pound mark (\$16). The BS is about twenty pound (\$45) because you get a lovely magazine and it is value for money. Entry fee is fifty pence per entry.

Keith: We have notice that shows in our country, the exhibitors can watch the judging and here, if it is a two day show, exhibitors have to pay to go back into the hall on the second day.

Maurice: The majority of shows in this country is only for one day show but you are right in what you are saying with the BS show. You do have to pay to enter on the second day. The BS club show has a good system where if you enter twenty or thirty birds you get in both days free of charge. With the one day shows, if you are an exhibitor and not on the committee you would still have to pay to go in. I would like to see a change occur, but again I am one voice in the wilderness, but when I have gone to Denmark I noticed that all the people come in with binoculars etc and watch the judging which is on a raised stand. The people are allowed to ask questions on the class and the judge answers. They are communicating to people on the birds whereas in this country you are excluding them. It is a bit like a secret society. I think we need to involve people more.

Carol: We have noticed at home with the birds and ninety nine percent come from the UK that a lot of the Double Factor Spangles, Lutinos and even now Normals, do not have white iris rings when they mature. They are then disqualified as the Standard says these varieties should have a white iris ring and they are not conforming. Have you noticed that problem here and if so, what would happen to the birds displaying this fault?

Maurice: To be totally honest with you, I believe the majority of judges in this country would be looking at other features rather than looking at the eye. The only birds the judges would be

distinctly looking at the eye, if in question, would be Recessive Pied when looking for a plum eye. It is something that would be considered a minor faulty in this country. We are looking for more important things like flecking, condition, size, deportment, etc. But not eyes.

Carol: I have just had a thought – this is not argumentative. You would put down a bird that is missing two spots which more than likely is a temporary thing and yet you are going to put up a bird that doesn't have iris rings, which is not a temporary thing when the Standard says it should have them.

Maurice: The thing is we haven't really had a lot of debate about it. No one has written in and said birds with eye problems are winning and I would make the analogy to people. Some people have brown eye, some have blue, some have flecks in their eyes, different shades of blue – at the end of the day is it genetically the birds have different eyes.

Carol: I believe it is and if it continues, we will have the majority of our birds displaying no iris rings at all.

Maurice: Is that a problem?

Carol: I think it is a bigger problem than a couple of missing temporary spots. What do you do then, change the Standard to suit the bird again?

Maurice: It is a difficult one. You are probably right in what you are saying but it hasn't been addressed in England yet. As long as the bird has a good healthy looking eye than that is okay. We are not looking at the eye for faults.

Keith: Could it be that the bird has so many feathers around the eye, that it would be difficult for you to see the iris ring?

Maurice: Probably you are on the right track. If a bird has feather in the eye you would have to penalise heavily. To be honest with you in some of the halls we judge in the lighting is not that brilliant and to see what you are talking about would not be that easy. What would be interesting would be if we had a study on it, are the birds without an iris ring impaired visually. You would have to have a scientific study but it is one of those things we can learn from each other.

since it was re-introduced into the U.K. in 1992 by the late Cyril Rogers. This second revival was further enhanced by the introduction of the new **Rare Variety** challenge certificate issued by the Budgerigar Society at the commencement of the 2000 show season, catering for the Clearbody, Fallow, Saddleback and Slate. When both the Saddleback and the Slate were named in this new challenge certificate it was quite apparent that a new **Colour Standard** needed to be written for both these varieties. A Colour Standard for the Fallow had existed for a number of years and a Standard for the Clearbody has already been published in 1997.

The **Judges Panel & Colour Standards Committee** took on the task of writing Colour Standards for the above two varieties and were approved by the B.S. General Council in May 2001. This Standard was published and circulated to all Judges.

The Slate budgerigar has been around much longer than the Saddlebacks and their appearance was first reported in the period between 1933 and 1935. That is the period when different shades of the Grey were reported. We owe a great debt to the late Cyril Rogers for not only documenting so much history of all budgerigars in his famous book **The World of Budgerigars** but also for ensuring that the variety is still with us today.

His records detailed that the first Australian Dominant Grey (present day Grey) was bred by Mrs. S. Harrison of Murrumbeena, Victoria, Australia and the first British Recessive Grey was bred in 1933 by E. A. Brooks of Mitcham, Surrey.

F. S. Elliott reported (March 1935 Budgerigar Bulletin) that H.T. Watson of Bedford had in his possession a hen of a slatey blue colour. Mr. Watson obtained this bird in 1933 from a dealer but he had no records of its parentage. This hen was paired to a Cobalt White cock but bred two Cobalts only (cock and hen) before dying. The two youngsters were paired together but no slates were bred. Cyril also mentioned that the skin of the original hen was sent to him, which he kept for many years until it disintegrated. When he compared the skin, some years later, with Slate Cobalts he concluded that the skin colour was identical and confirmed that the Watson hen was in fact a **Slate**.

In May 1935 Mr. T. S. Bowman of Carlisle reported that he had bred a bird of a similar colour and called it a slate. This bird was bred from a Cobalt cock and a Skyblue hen. He further reported that he exhibited the first Slate in the AOC class at Dumfries in November of that year. Mr. Bowman further confirmed that his Slates differed in their breeding pattern from that of the two Grey mutations reported earlier. He further confirmed that his Slates were **sex-linked**. And that how the variety was established.

When the variety was well established it was discovered that the Slate form could exist in three depths of shade and in both the green and blue series and on all other mutations. During the sixties and early seventies the interest in the variety remained steady but with the popularity of the dominant Australian Grey it affected the Slate's popularity.

It was by chance that a young Dutch couple had visited the late Cyril Rogers in the summer of 1970 and on their return they obtained a suitable breeding pair of this variety. When the young Dutch husband was killed in a road accident, his sister took over the breeding stock and when she got married she passed on the only Slate that she had to Inte Onsman, a friend from Amsterdam.

The Slates virtually disappeared from the U.K. scene till 1992 when Inte Onsman sent two Slate cocks to Cyril to breed with. Ken Grey from Clacton on Sea reported that only one of the cocks was fertile and bred many chicks when paired to a Clearflighted Cobalt hen from Mr. Gray's stud.

Prior to Mr. Rogers passing away in August 1993, and while still in hospital, Ken Grey exhibited two Slate hens (an adult and a baby) in Mr. Rogers' name at the Specialist & Rare Variety Open Show. When Mr. Rogers passed away Ken Grey with the assistance of Dr. Margaret Young, Joan Denton, Ken Brock and Deamonn Mullee (all members of the Rare Variety & Colour BS) took on breeding programme to keep this variety alive and ensure its survival. Much of the credit goes to these fanciers that this variety is thriving again and also to that element of luck that the late Cyril Rogers shared with Dutch fanciers in that the variety left the U.K. just to come back from the same source many years later.

As mentioned earlier, and like the violet, the Slate can be combined with all colours in both the green and blue series and in all varieties but the B.S. have decided to

recognise the Slate Blue only. It is difficult to recognise them in the green series, but to the experienced fancier a Slate Green could look like a Grey Green but with violet cheek patches rather than grey. That is why only the Slates in the Blue Series were recognised. It is also better to avoid pairing them to greys, which can give the bird an appearance of a very dark grey.

Like the blue colour, which comes in 3 shades (skyblue, cobalt and mauve) the slate can too be present in three shades.

Because the Slates are included in the Rare Variety challenge certificate the order of priority as laid down by the Budgerigar society still follows. This means that Slate Pies and Slate Yellowfaces will have to be exhibited in the Pied or Yellowface classes.

When breeding with slates one will need to remember that the variety is sex-linked and improvement can be made rapidly if quality normals are used to improve the variety. I will advice fanciers who wish to breed slates to keep the variety to normals or opalines without mixing it with other varieties.

Pairings that are used as part of the sex-linked inheritance that affect slates are:

Cock	Hen	Expectation
Slate	Slate	50% slate cocks + 50% slate hens
Slate	Normal	50% normal/slate cocks + 50% slate hens
Normal	Slate	50% normal/slate cocks + 50% normal hens
Normal/slate	Slate	25% slate cocks + 25% normal/slate cocks + 25% slate hens + 25% normal hens
Normal/slate	Normal	25% normal cocks + 25% normal/slate cocks + 25% slate hens + 25% normal hens