



PAIRING / BREEDING – G & D Winch

SOME SIMPLE STUFF

Number 1 Rule: The aim of breeding is to produce good numbers of offspring. That means that getting a result is more important than all other considerations that go into the pairing and breeding process.

- The majority of pairs you put down should have the potential to produce Normals. If not you are restricting your future breeding and you will end up in the ever so common position of: **“I JUST NEED A FEW GOOD NORMAL HENS.”**

- Preferably use birds that are 12 months old
- Breed your best birds at the start of the ring issue date.
- Preferably use an older cock to a younger hen or vice versa
- Always pluck or shave around the bird's vent
- Give birds at least 2 weeks in a same sex cage/aviary before pairing
- Match birds up in terms of dominance – an aggressive dominant hen may need a very dominant cock to get a result (see Rule 1).
- Check birds for body weight not just visual condition
- Try not to compromise when it comes to breeding condition (See Rule 10)
- Avoid strange pairing on the basis that you can rectify the problem in the following generation (e.g. Yellowface to Spangle or Yellowface to green series).
- Avoid pairing birds based on colour (e.g. To produce blue or even dark factor birds) Good birds don't have a colour!
- Try to pair up multiple pairs at once to allow for fostering if required.
- Try to limit hens to 2 rounds and maybe foster the third lot of eggs if possible. Otherwise you will continue to lose hens following breeding and be in the ever so common position of: **“I JUST NEED A FEW GOOD NORMAL HENS.”**
- Try to keep a stable environment in your aviary and breeding cages. This means a consistent system of doing things without constant changes.
- Avoid breeding birds that you have just purchased without first putting them through quarantine for a few months.
- Avoid buying a cock and a hen at auction so you can pair them up. If you don't have a good enough cock or hen of your own to put to a purchased bird, then ask yourself why that is? Are you working to improve your own birds' or are you just buying and breeding other people's birds?
- Overweight hens frequently become egg bound.
- Cere colour is not always a good indicator of breeding condition for hens but is usually an accurate indicator of condition in cocks. Cocks with a brownish tinge to their cere will not breed (can be a sign of testicular cancer).
- Don't put the nest box on until the birds have been paired for about 7 – 10 days.
- If the hen is in good condition and her eggs are clear it is most commonly the cock's fault. Young cocks in particular can be ineffective when mating, they usually get it together in time, however, a very small percentage never do. We have almost never had a hen not fill eggs when paired with the right cock bird.

- Aim to breed good Normals and / or dominants as your primary goal. Use these birds to improve a few select "lesser" varieties. Don't use the "good enough" principle when pairing Normals to your lesser varieties.

THE GOAL OF BREEDING AND PAIRING

The number one goal of breeding is to reach a point where you don't have to make significant compromises when pairing your birds.

What does this mean? It means you are able to pair up multiple pairs of birds where one of the partners is not heavily compensating for an obvious deficiency in the other (e.g. pairing a bird with small spots to a bird with large spots). There may of course be minor compensations/compromises (e.g. If one bird has slightly greater width of mask than the other). When you reach a point that you are only making minor compromises in a large proportion of your pairings then you know you are really getting somewhere. Then you can start to focus on improving specific traits (e.g. colour intensity or markings)

OUR PERSONAL PREFERENCES IN PAIRING

- In a large portion of our pairings we would like one bird to be either Cinnamon or at least split Cinnamon (if variety allows).
- Preferred colour pairings are: Greygreen to Grey, Greygreen to Blue, Greygreen to Green, Grey to Green, grey to Blue.
- Least preferred colour pairings: Sky to Light Green and Sky to Sky. Why? Because the feather can be too loose and too soft in the offspring, especially if combined with Cinnamon.
- Favourite colour pairing – Greygreen to Blue. Why? Because it will produce almost every colour and if you do it enough you will be able to continue to do it and still produce every colour even if you breed Greygreen to Greygreen.
- One (preferably both) of the birds in each pair must have good body size, substance and weight. Don't pair lightly built heavily feathered birds, they will not have the endurance to survive the season.
- Avoid pairing two tightly feathered birds. At least one of the pair must have buffy feather.
- Never double up on significant faults (e.g. big wings, hinged tails, small spots, toes forward on perch).
- Where possible, at least one parent must have feather direction, depth of mask, width of skull, large spots, shoulder, correct wings, length and correct outline (not necessarily all in the same bird).
- If the first round is clear, allow them to foster some eggs from another pair and raise some chicks. They will be far more likely to breed in the second round.
- Breed the best pairs/varieties at the right time of year to allow them to be shown (relative to ring dates). Put down experimental pairs at times in the season when those birds will never be shown as young birds (due to ring dates).

WHEN YOU GET IT RIGHT!

If you look in the nest box and there are three outstanding chicks from the first round **you need to Maximise the outcome of this pairing**. You do this by finding all brothers and sisters to the Dam and the Sire of that particular nest and pair them in the same combination as the original pair (visual features are no longer so important as you know the genes are going to click). Then push the original pair to 3 rounds by putting down fosters to take excess fertile eggs and/or the eggs from round 3. Now with fostering and a few more pairs down you may end up with upwards of 20+ chicks from this combination to go on with the following year. This is how you can develop the necessary gene pool to start line breeding more intensively on the qualities you want or need.

Breeding is a numbers game and by using this strategy you can rapidly increase the rate at which you can improve your birds. There are years where you make no progress. There are years where you produce only a few quality birds. If you have a few quality birds to go on with the following year there is an inherent risk that they also will only produce a few quality birds to go on with the year after that (2 years' time). The reason being is that those few quality birds may not breed well or at all the following year and may not produce the quality you would expect. You may also want to show those few birds, which keeps them well clear of the breeding cages. If you identify a quality nest and maximise the number of offspring from that combination, then it significantly increases the probability of getting a result from those offspring the following year – simply due to numbers. It takes the risk out of pairing up a few good birds when you have 20 quality birds to breed with. If you put 5 pairs down to breed, some of them at least will produce outstanding offspring. This then informs the best way to go about pairing the other 10 birds.

THE PERFECT SCENARIO

In a perfect world you have 2 – 3 pairs of birds produce outstanding offspring in their first round. If you are able to maximise these pairings as described above, you then have outstanding offspring that can be paired together the following year. Of those offspring some go to each other (outstanding to outstanding) and some go out (outstanding to outcross). The year following this you have cousins from each and they can come back together. In this way you are well on your way to line breeding and creating your own lines. This is a much more successful method than breeding other people's lines together and hoping for the best.

This method is intensive and a lot of hard work than randomly pairing birds either visually or based on genetics. The advantage is there is a much greater chance of success year after year. Those years where you don't progress are far less likely. You now have some direction and enough birds from the lines you need to make it happen.

In most aviaries the story is typically the same. A breeder may put down fifty pairs over the course of the determined breeding season. The majority of them just produce birds of similar or lesser quality to the parents and a few nests are outstanding. It is what you do with these nests that makes the difference. You still need to breed the other 45 pairs because they will produce a random selection of quality birds that can be used as outcrosses.

This method does 3 things:

1. It provides direction and fast tracks your progress towards high quality birds.
2. It creates a genetic pool and allows you to work towards line breeding.
3. It increases the pre-potency within your birds.

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Thank you Glenn & Damen