

## **SPEAKING WITH NIGEL TONKIN**

It is three years since I last interviewed Nigel for our magazine and yet he doesn't look a day older. It must be his clean living life style.

***Carol:** Nigel, when I interviewed you last, you told me your birds' feeding programme consisted of giving them a product called Budgie Starter, mixed with three hard boiled eggs, three cups of sprouted seed to three cups of Budgie Starter. You also had separate containers of Plain Canary, Jap millet, white French millet, red Panicum, two cups of sweet corn, bandicoot Oats with added Garlic or Combi oil, Mineral Energy and striped Sunflower. Has anything changed now?*

**Nigel:** I now add six hard-boiled eggs instead of three. I add Ginseng to their water for three days of every week during the breeding season. I have noticed a few surprises since using Ginseng, birds that appeared infertile before are now filling eggs. The birds appear more alert and noisier. I also have a mixture I obtained from Frank Silva in the United Kingdom named Silva 1 that I am trying. This may well be contributing to the previously mentioned positive results. I add this mixture to my soft food.

***Carol:** You also told me the basis of your birds had bloodlines consisting of Endres, Molkentein, Williams and Mannes. Is this the same story now?*

**Nigel:** Basically the same. The Mannes influence is still very much there. This year I had a much later start to the breeding season but I still managed to breed 170 chicks and there are already 50 chicks 2002 rung. (At time of writing it is only January).

***Carol:** I have been told that you are selling quite a number of your birds. Are you retiring from the fancy?*

**Nigel:** I had considered to but no just cutting back. I want time to relax with my wife and grandchildren. I want some true family time. My wife has been wonderful over the years by helping with the feeding, entertaining guests but unfortunately the politics scared her. I intend to keep ten pair of adult birds and ten pair of youngsters.

***Carol:** You stated last time that you were concentrating on Spangles, Normals, Cinnamonwings, Opalines, Dominant and Recessive Pieds. Have you increased these colour varieties?*

**Nigel:** To assist my club in club challenge shows, I have been breeding some Black Eye Selves. I have also paired a dilute Light Green Cock to a Black Eye Hen to see what comes of it. I also play with Clearbodies as I feel it is imperative to breed the new varieties to pre-empt them especially if you are writing a Colour Standard on them.

***Carol:** I noticed that this year at the National Show in Hobart, the National Judges Panel are having a session open to the public on Clearwings. I feel this is a wonderful idea and recall raising the same item a number of times at meetings. What made them decide to go with it now?*

**Nigel:** In Adelaide in 2000, we had a session on Cinnamon Yellows and Greywing Yellows, which was very well received. From this Alistair Home from Tasmania thought it was a good idea and suggested in 2001 that there should be an annual forum covering

different varieties and aspects at each National Conference. Clearwings are the first cab off the rank and we hope it brings some uniformity to judging of this variety.

**Carol:** *Do you think it would be a good idea to invite an international judge to judge the National Show sometime?*

**Nigel:** I feel it should be encouraged. They accept us through the World Budgerigar Organization and we should reciprocate. I know they would appreciate it. Jean Painter, Alan McCauley and myself have all judged overseas (there may have been others). I had the great honor of being the first Australian judge to do a Budgerigar Society Show in England – I have also judged the Swiss national and I am judging in New Zealand shortly.

**Carol:** *What was it like?*

**Nigel:** The Swiss show was daunting due to the language barrier and their procedures are quite different to ours, it was still a great pleasure. The U.K. show was very relaxed. I had a wonderful show secretary and stewards to assist me and combine this with excellent quality birds it was a pleasure to judge.

I had some difficulty accepting birds missing both primary tail feathers being accepted in second placing onwards. (Here we would disqualify them). The Australian National Budgerigar Council is trying to address this item via the World Budgerigar Organisation through the Judges disqualification clauses.

I must say that flecking was noticeable **due to the lack of it**. Such a change from our birds on the show benches. Frank Silva's birds stood out due to quality and size. The big difference was the depth of quality with the top breeders. The Spangles were very strong. I judged the Lutinos and was made to feel very welcome. The hospitality was great, and it was good to judge with so many international judges all looking for the same type of bird. Each country was taking the Mickey out of each other, which made for an unbelievable time.

**Carol:** *How did they judge the Best in show awards?*

**Nigel:** There was the full complement of judges doing them – sixteen in all. We were split into three groups, two groups of five and one of six. Each judge had to write on a piece of paper which bird they thought was the best – the bird with the most votes won. The groups were mixed for the next group of awards. Everything was very fair and above board. It was a two-day show with judging on the Saturday and public viewing on the Sunday. On the Sunday morning it looked like Myers at the after Christmas Sale – there were people lined up everywhere waiting to enter the show hall. Each person paid five pounds to enter.

**Carol:** *How do you think we can attract juniors back to our hobby?*

**Nigel:** I feel we have to go to modern technology. Make the websites more humorous and excite them to join us. Maybe through schools we could encourage the use of budgerigars to cover topics like genetics. Each State Body should go out to encourage the hobby at primary and secondary school levels. Maybe school tours to aviaries during the breeding season. I have been asked many times if schools could tour during the

breeding season and up to now I have declined. Now I feel the hobby is more important than Nigel's birds and now that I am cutting back I will probably agree to the tours.

**Carol:** *What are your hopes on this year on the show bench?*

**Nigel:** My Greygreens are coming through well, as are the Spangles. They will probably be too young for Hobart if they are strong enough to be selected that is. I believe that given there is such variables between breeding times in each State maybe the Australian National Budgerigar Council should consider making the Championship for two year old rung birds only. This gives owners the opportunity to breed with them prior to the National and if there is any misfortune at least you have some progeny at home. It is well documented that "English" birds take eighteen months to develop and obtain their full feather length so it stands to reason to consider this option. It will give each fancier the opportunity to present birds at their best.

Other changes I would like to see the A.N.B.C. make is to have a Public Relations Officer aside from the Secretary. Maybe also a promoter to co-ordinate national sponsorships.

**Carol:** *I believe the new Standard is being reviewed. Can you tell us any of the changes the committee may be considering?*

**Nigel:** The Black Eye Self's are being reviewed. We are looking into removing the "grey" cheek patch with no grey factor in it at all. The colour Buttercup Yellow would also be split into light, dark and olive. White would remain as is. We are looking at putting in the wording "Visual Opaline characteristics are not permissible nor is the intrusion of the colour grey" and if this is approved will remove problems of Grey Yellows in the Black Eye Class.

The Yellow faced combinations are also being revisited to assess if there needs to be changes in the Matrix to accommodate more or remove some of those combinations. The Pictorial is well advanced and should, when completed, give judges and exhibitors a better idea of the "Ideal". Something realistic.

**Editors Comment:** I attended a slide presentation given by Pine Rivers at which Nigel showed us some magnificent birds. The feather length and shoulder width was superb. One point Nigel make was to look at the distance between the cheek patch and the cere. The more distance you can get in that area the better the cap feather would be. Also another difference between the Australian Penalty and Disqualification Points and the World Budgerigar Organisation's is in relation to a deformity. Here any bird with a deformity is "not allowed". According to the World Budgerigar Organisation a deformity is merely a penalty.

The ANBC is looking into addressing this matter as well as the tail feathers or lack thereof. In Switzerland a bird can win an award whether he has one or two tail feathers. In Germany a bird must have two tail feathers. In the U.K. a bird with no long tail feathers can obtain an award between second and sixth placing.

I sincerely thank Nigel for taking the time to pass on some of his knowledge to us and I congratulate the Brisbane people who attended Pine Rivers social evening – the more you speak to other fanciers the more your birds will improve.

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