

Speaking with **Bill Kirstenfeldt**

Bill won two National classes this year with the Lacewing and the Australian Golden Face so on behalf of every fancier, we congratulate Bill on this magnificent achievement.



Carol: Thank you Bill for taking the time out to speak to me today. First of all, how much land have you got here?

Bill: $\frac{3}{4}$ acre. It is long but not wide. I wanted $\frac{1}{2}$ Acre and a square block but usual story, you cannot find what you want. We have been here 8 $\frac{1}{2}$ years now.

Below: inside the aviary with flights on the left and breeding cages on the right.



Carol: Your aviary is a colourbond construction and what size would that be?

Bill: It is 9 metres by 5 metres and the flights are about 8 feet high. I have it set up into four flights which comprises two larger ones in the middle with smaller flights on the ends. The middle ones are set up to take the young birds so it will have 80 to 90 birds in them with 40 birds in them normally and the sale birds at the other end.

Carol: Now I noticed you have the drip water bottle system in place in your flights, can you tell me why you prefer that method?

Bill: I prefer them as it doesn't matter what happens on the outside of the bottle, the water inside them is still clean. The birds land on the bottles and they mess on the bottles but it

doesn't matter if the bottles are really filthy, the water inside them is still clean and healthy. They put the point of their beak in to bring their water down and you haven't got a worry about anything being contaminated. I have used them for many years but it has only been since we have been down here I have to stop using them sometimes because of the humidity here. With the birds hopping on and off them it does make the drops come out of them sometimes. When we were in Emerald previously, it didn't matter as we had drought for 11 months of the year so the drops dried immediately.

When I first arrived here I lost 50 birds in the first couple of months from Ecoli. I always have sand in the bottom of the aviary but when I did it here the sand was obviously contaminated and the birds got Ecoli. The other thing you have to watch is if you buy shell grit – In Emerald I would buy a bag of shell grit and it would be just about dripping it was that wet and I would spread it out on a tarp for three or four days, you knew it wasn't going to rain, it was about 40 degrees so when you gave it to your birds it was perfectly dry. It doesn't happen here as with the moisture in the air, the shell grit sucks it up and the next thing you know you have sick birds again. What I am doing now is on the floor I have 50/50 beach sand and lime. Plus they get some pebbles. With the red sand I use, it is river sand which is rather coarse and I sieve that. I use the fine stuff to go in the cages and the course stuff I give them with the shell grit. I don't care who says birds don't need shell grit I will argue with them all the time. They need it to keep their gizzard working.

Carol: Val, your lovely wife has just joined us and I am wondering Val if you have anything to do with the birds at all?

Val: No.

Carol: So your birds don't have access to water they can swim in or dip in?

Bill: Yes they do. One of the things I found was that when I use Vitamin D Breeder in a larger dish the birds love to bathe in it. So when I give them Ivomec now, I put it in the bigger dish with the Vitamin D in it. Then when they swim in it they get the Ivomec on their feathers which kills any bug they may have around. I probably give them once every couple of months.

Carol: We water our birds differently as our birds have access to not only their dish of water in the flights but also they have swimming water every day and they love it. Our birds have access to the swimming water every day regardless of the season.

Bill: And have you noticed that if you leave the water there for a while, they will only drink it. They like the fresh water to swim in. The wild birds do the same. You leave a water dish out for the wild birds and as soon as you clean it out and put fresh water in it, the birds are down.

Carol: Your seed mixture – do you mix your own?

Bill: One, one and one. That is one Canary, one French and one Jap. Every second or third day they get another mix which consists of four scoops of hulled oats and another mix that Mel makes up which consists of Red Pannikin, Safflower, Linseed and extra Jap. I also mix up Soya beans, Budgie Starter, salt and Canungra Grit. I also put some of that mixture in the finger drawers. The other days they get greens which I grow which Val grows.

Carol: See Val you do participate in the birds. You mix the alternative food, you grow the greens. As they say behind every successful man there is a good woman.

Val: I can ring the birds, and feed and water but I only do that when I have to otherwise I would get saddled with them.

Bill: She had to do it all when I was crook.

Val: Yes I managed to let about thirty out of the flights into the main walkway and there I was trying to catch them.

Bill: She would come and visit me in hospital and say “well I caught another three or four birds today”.

Val: I put seed and water out for them so they were fine.

Carol: Is your aviary double wired on the outside?

Bill: No it isn't. Since we have been down here, we have heaps of Mickey birds and one thing they do well is that they chase the Hawks. The worse thing is that they chase the finches so now we get no wild finches here.

Carol: So you only have the budgies – you haven't branched out into any other birds?

Bill: We had about 45 to 50 different coloured finches plus quails. But some days I was working 17 hours a day and I was leaving home and arriving home in the dark and it just got too much. It got to be never ending. At one time it was good as I was sending finches down to a dealer in Sydney and I was sending down \$1000 lot at a time and I thought that was wonderful but it just got too much. I had plum head finches and they were popular down South.

Carol: Do you feed cuttle bone?

Bill: I do Carol but when I first got here I used to go down to the passage and collect them. But John McAllister told me it gets fireweed on it and I had a lot of trouble when I first came down as two or three times I lost about 50 birds each time and I couldn't work out why. I now have a mate who collects it from up the beach at Caloundra and it is nice and clean. I don't believe in hosing them off as all the minerals come off them. I also make my own nibble blocks.

Carol: Is there any other additives you put in the water?

Bill: Vitamin B3 breeder. I am a little old fashioned in my ideas as I use the Apple Cider Vinegar and the red cordial.

Carol: But the red cordials these days are different to what they used to be as they are not as red as it used to be.

Bill: I use Golden Circle and when you look at the label of ingredients this is a good one. I have always thought that one of the main things we give birds is Citric Acid and this cordial has the acid in it. The dosage depends on the mood I am in but to 2 litres I would add 20ml

of cordial. I would leave it in there for a day and give it about once a week. I give it to them to keep the crop clean and healthy. I don't get many sick ones and I put that down to that and the vinegar and acid as there is nothing in the crop to cause them problems.

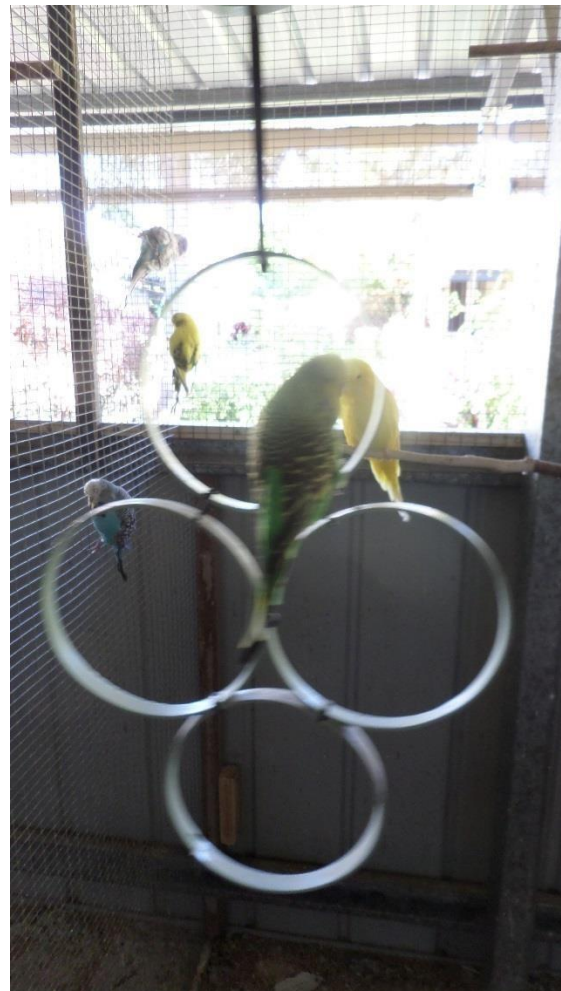
Carol: Mind you, we don't hear much about sour crop these days.

Bill: No and hopefully that is one of the reasons why.

Carol: Do you give any other food as in soft food?

Bill: No only that vitamin mix I mentioned earlier. I try to stay away from anything that may have mould on it. The last time I had lost birds I started thinking it may have been mould on the hulled oats, I didn't prove it but I stay away from the oats, until I get a fresh bag.

Below: Inside the flights, Bill has sawn off circles from the ends of plastic pipes for the birds to amuse themselves with.



Bill:

Carol: How long have you had birds?

Bill: How long is a piece of string? About sixty years ago, my father had an old army mate who bred them and he bought me a green one, a blue one, a yellow one and a white one and

we took them by train back to Glen Morgan and when the box arrived the white one had disappeared but it wasn't anywhere in the wagon which was strange and you know I cannot remember if those birds bred. But seriously I have been breeding them for about 44 years. The way it started off again was when a few of my mates and I were walking through some Sorghum hunting pigs and we got to one end and didn't find any and we were walking back bored stiff and it was drought time and these wild budgies just kept flying in front of us like a big cloud and I said I might get a couple of babies out of the nest and start breeding them again. So my mate had a shotgun and he fired the shotgun and I rescued a couple of birds that came fluttering down with broken wings and I nursed them and they started breeding for me. After that I was hooked.

I have studied the books and I bred different colours and everything was fine until a policeman by the name of Dan Turnbull came to town. Dan had been winning all these shows in Toowoomba with his "show" birds and once I saw them I knew I had to have some of them. I have been at them ever since. I started showing birds and I remember I entered two Recessive Pies who were Father and Son and got first and second. But then I got very busy and didn't go back into Rockhampton (where the shows were held) as it was a fair way to travel for about five or six years at least and in the meantime the English birds had been imported.

Anyway I decided to show my birds at a show as I thought they were looking alright and at the show here are these big shaggy headed things in the cages looking back at me and I had to start buying new stock then.

Val: I remember one show we were travelling down to – we had the two boys in the back seat and we were travelling along the highway with all going well. Now you have to remember that Bill was a truckie and he prided himself on being able to tie good knots. Anyway this day we were driving along and all of a sudden we heard this loud noise and there were all the show cages bouncing along the road after having fallen off the roof rack.

Bill: Thank goodness there were no birds in them but the cages were in pieces so that night Val's brother and I spend the night drinking booze and putting these cages together as they just exploded when they hit the road. We had to touch up the paintwork but that was my first experience with nylon rope. I had another experience with nylon rope – it was when I was out fishing my boys and we came across a deep hole so we decided to put the anchor out. Pete (my friend) said the anchor rope wasn't long enough so being the knot expert, I tied some plastic rope to the anchor rope and dropped anchor. We were sitting there and someone said "the anchor isn't holding" but I said "Don't worry it will pull up shortly". Next thing I realised the anchor rope was slack and we had lost the anchor. That made two mishaps with nylon and I have learnt since.

Carol: How many birds have you got flying at the moment?

Bill: About 300.

Val: Still!!!!

Carol: There is an auction coming up, don't worry.

Bill: Only ten birds in each one though.

Carol: So what varieties do you have down there?

Bill: Normals, Opalines, Cinnamonwings, Lacewings, Clearwings, Gold faces, Yellow faces, Spangles.

Carol: Do you find you have trouble keeping that many colour varieties going and improving?

Bill: It makes extra hard work but I like the odd ones. I nearly sold the Gold faces a couple of years ago but then I thought no they are the only birds that are called Australian. They are the Australian Gold Faces and we have to work on this variety. It was only when the English Yellow Faces came out that everyone forgot about the Australian Gold Faces and it was the same with the English Pies. When they arrived, everyone one forgot about the Banded Pies. Surely out west somewhere there has to be someone who has been breeding Banded Pies for about 40 or 50 years and I would like to get some to kick start them again.

Carol: You have your Australian Golden Faces and congratulations on winning the Australian National Champion in this class and the Lacewing this year – how are you trying to improve them the Golden Faces?

Bill: What I actually do is the same with the Clearwings. I breed one or two of them to a good Normal each year to get the colour and the size. I put him in with a Violet Mauve hen who isn't as good in type as some of the others but she is definitely a Violet Mauve as I want to get some more colour into them and hopefully the babies will grow up to be a bit reasonable.

Carol: So you go out to a Normal and I take it you have another pair mated the same way and you bring s single factor from each nest together, do you?

Bill: Yes that is the plan. You have to remember to pair up the two best birds again as you don't want to go backwards and usually the single factor bird is a lot better than the double factor.

Carol: but visually the single factor is poor in colour which I just cannot take to after having the double factors years ago.

Bill: I agree you should be going for the colour. I had a single factor who won four awards last year. I am selling a Double Factor who is not as good in size but a hell of a better colour. It is a slow process. I have mated the Australian Champion mated to a Goldenface Opaline Grey Dominant Pied hen who has lovely big feathering but the eggs are clear. I need her because those birds that went to the Nationals are not as big as the parents and I don't want the quality dropping back more so I need the big hen to increase the size. Her sister who is an Opaline Cobalt is flying around but she is not as good as the Opaline Pied. Because the smallness is such a dominant feature it is a slow process to improve them as you have to go backwards to go forwards when you are concentrating on colour and size.

Carol: Your National winning Lacewing – can you tell me the background of her please?

Bill: She is from birds I have been working on for years and years. They are actually from a half-brother to half-sister mating and there were four good hens in that nest. Every one of them drops their wings including her and I thought well she won't get anywhere because of her wings but Jamie Wright tells me she hopped up on the perch and held her wings beautifully. I have had outcrosses in the Lacewing line. Going back a few years I had a Cinnamon Greygreen Hen from Gary Watson who produced some good offspring.

Carol: Do you think you paired them up too early after returning from the Perth Nationals and not giving them enough time to recover?

Bill: Quite possibly. The Lacewing looked like she was ready to mate so I put her down but she has been clear so I think I will have to take her out of the breeding cage or she will just go to fat. One of the sisters has two Lacewings and a Normal, the other one is with a Cinnamon Greygreen/Lacewing cock but they have four black eyed chicks in the nest. They may be nice cock birds but that is not what I was after.

Carol: How many other representatives have you had in the South Queensland team over the years?

Bill: The first one was in 1993 was a Lacewing cock that didn't get benched. Then I achieved 5th at Caloundra 2006 with a Recessive Pied, I had a Clearwing in 2011 that came 16th. I had another Recessive Pied that came 13th or 14th.



Carol: So this was your first National win and you achieved the Double Banger with 2. Were you surprised?

Bill: I was surprised with the Golden Face as I didn't think it was big enough. I thought if the Lacewing stood up and lifted its wings that I would have a good chance. The clearwings I got 6th and 9th but I thought the Clearwing hen would do better but she was beaten by the much larger bird.

Carol: The winning Clearwing wasn't that badly coloured. It definitely wasn't the worst winning Clearwing I have seen and it was a very solid bird.

Bill: I was told he was a lousy bird but in the photo I thought the first two weren't bad at all.

Carol: What are you hoping for in the future at the Nationals and how many National Shows have you been too?

Bill: The light above to look down on me. I have been to four I think. Gold Coast, Rockhampton, Yeppoon, Caloundra. It is too cold in Tasmania so I won't be going there.

Carol: How do you think we can encourage more young people into the fancy?

Bill: As far as the birds go some of our auctions are an ideal opportunity to start off as some of the birds go for \$30 or \$40. You can get success straight away. Unfortunately these days

the kids are too busy pressing buttons on little games and don't know what the outdoors is. Plus they live in a big house with no yard. IT is unfortunate that even the kids we do get will give it away as boys will chase girls and girls will chase boys and do other silly things. But give them a break and later on when they have a child or two they will come back into the hobby. IT is as long as we have members.

Keith: I also think we have to make our meetings interesting enough to make people want to attend.

Bill: When we went to your meeting you had a heap of birds there and it was great. We are trying to get more birds at our meetings and you need to judge them as people learn. Unfortunately we have found that the parents won't bring the kids to the meetings and that is a shame as they would enjoy it and learn things.

Carol: We were speaking to a fellow fancier the other day discussing why he has not been having success lately and he had stopped doing things that he used to do e.g. Minerals in finger drawers. He admitted it was probably due to laziness but we are all guilty of it.

Bill: That is the thing to remember – if you change things too much the birds will go into a moult and it affects their breeding season results. If you make changes you have to do it gradually and if you want to introduce something new, give it to the babies as they will eat anything and everything. For breeders if you give them something different, they won't eat it. But no matter what you do, you do get good years and bad years no matter what you do. It is like superannuation every seven years it goes down the chute.

Last year I bred 350 birds which is pretty constant but this year I have only bred 93 birds and I have been going since the beginning of the year (now mid -August).

Carol: What is your fun variety to breed as I feel we all have to breed birds for the show bench but I also believe we have to breed our fun varieties? E.g. Keith breeds his Fallows and Melinistic Spangles.

Bill: In actual fact anything that is a good parent and doesn't give me trouble. The only reason I don't try to breed Spangles is because it is too easy and you end up with lots of Spangles. I do like breeding the Pieds.

Carol: Is there anything else you would like to discuss?

Bill: There is one thing I have been telling a few of our members and that is when you are breeding you get a cock bird and he will empty that water dish in a day and you get wet cages and nest. Well I have discovered that when you use Spark Electrolytes almost immediately the problem has cleared up. It is almost like they are trying to get electrolytes out of the water and if you add it, they are content just to drink their usual amount. I don't think you will find a bird with a wet nest down there now. I give it to them for five days and have had no problem. Since giving them Electrolytes I no longer have to deal with wet smelly nests.

Carol: Do you have sawdust in the bottom of your nest boxes:

Bill: The sawdust I am using now is Red Gum as I believe the pine shavings are not as good as you don't get pine trees with hollows in the bush. I get the Red Gum shavings from the mill at Wamuran and the shavings are untreated. One side effect is the Red Gum does cake up the ring a little more than pine but you just keep your eye on it and clean the ring when it is soiled. One problem with the rings this year is the colour as we had black last year and purple this year and it is hard to distinguish one from the other. I can't find my current rung ones easily.

Carol: Do you fly your hens and cock birds together?

Bill: Yes I do. I never used to but I don't know why I changed my mind except it would give them more exercise chasing each other around. I don't think it has created a problem. I put them in the breeding cage and they usually lay eggs within a week or so.

Carol: How long would you leave a pair of birds mated together if they did not lay eggs?

Bill: Probably about a month but there is always the exception to the rule. I would then wait for her to moult in the flight and then when ready I would mate her again to see if there was any improvement.



Above are some young birds in Bills flights just coming through their first moults.
