

## Talking with Jeff Attwood

Whilst in the United Kingdom recently we had the pleasure of staying with Jeff & Jenny Attwood who made us feel very welcome indeed. We cannot thank the Attwood Family enough for their hospitality and friendship and for the kindness extended to our Grandchildren especially by their son Jim towards our grandson. Whilst there, we posed some questions to Jeff in relation to the so called “new mutation” that people are talking about.

Keith: Jeff we have been hearing a lot about a new mutation that has occurred over here in the United Kingdom and I am wondering if you could tell me a little about it please?

Jeff: I don't know that it is a new mutation rather than a new feather form. As you say there is a fair amount of talk going on in Australia but there isn't that much talk going on over here in the same frame of mind. What I can tell you is that where these birds originated from, they are under tremendous pressure to sell birds as everyone is trying to buy their birds or from people who have already sourced their birds. The only thing I can say is that I judged the Lancashire & Cheshire show about six or seven years ago now and on that particular occasion I saw four or five Normal cocks, mostly Greys and a couple of Greygreens, unfortunately flecked so they didn't make huge headway in their classes as flecking is considered a major fault in the U.K. But they were definitely different.

The penny didn't drop that they were that different as I thought they were just exceptionally good birds - you don't get a long time to view the birds as your colleagues are anxious to get home especially when we live such a long way away from that area. But I could see there was something different but as I said, the penny didn't drop at that time.

A couple of years ago at our BS club show, a gentleman by the name of Fagan who has since sold his birds out had a stud of birds based on the stud of Huxley & Marchant, which incidentally were the people who bred the birds I saw in Lancashire a few years earlier. He had a grey cock, which wasn't the biggest bird I had seen in the world, but it had such a huge amount of attention at the show. It was the best Intermediate Adult bird in the show. As I said it wasn't the biggest bird but the head formation was totally different from anything that I could remember ever seen before other than the birds I had seen in Lancashire.

At that time, I hadn't tied up they were from the same source. What I had discovered later was that this chap Fagan had been buying birds directly from Huxley & Marchant and also going to a guy named John Wilson to buy birds and Wilson had a stud based 100% on the Huxley & Marchant line. I looked at this Grey, which was causing a fair amount of attention, as the structure of the head was totally different from anything we had seen before. It not only had tremendous width of skull but there was a huge amount of frontal rise and it came from the back of the head – so it wasn't just from the front – but from the back of the head.

It gave the appearance of huge amount of feather at the top of the head, tremendous width as well as tremendous frontal rise which is different to birds we are seeing in England at the

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present time. These days you see tremendous rise but don't show the width so when you see the two together it is quite awe inspiring. Anyway it didn't win a huge amount of awards as it wasn't big enough but it definitely caused a stir.

A short time after that, it would have been last Summer, I was judging a show at Bristol which is about 100 miles from home and a lady by the name of Margaret Dark exhibited a Cinnamon Yellow Face Grey cock and it won Best Young Bird in show and I looked at this bird and could see this head feature. I had a word with Margaret and asked her if there was any possibility that this Young cock went back to the bloodlines of Huxley & Marchant. She asked me why ask that and I said "the feature on the head that I have only seen on birds that I have noticed come from this direction" She stated it was funny that I should ask such a question as the father of this birds I purchased from Huxley & Marchant last year. Then the penny began to drop that there was something different happening.

Then we move on to last years BS club show which was in September and Huxley & Marchant actually exhibited for the first time at this show. Regretfully their birds were in the most terrible feather condition and although they caused huge impressions with the birds they didn't win any awards but other people did win with their birds. Dennis Spruce who is a new Champion and had bought out the complete stud of John Wilson who right out of the blue and to the surprise of everyone sold his complete stud of birds to Spruce twelve months earlier. Dennis Spruce showed only the young birds he had bred from the Wilson birds and he wiped the floor. He won more with his birds than anyone had ever cleared in the past fifteen years and the runner up to the young birds was bred by Les Martin and that was a young Grey green which is exactly from the same stud of birds.

If you look back into the history of the budgerigar and I once did a lecture on the History & Development of the Budgerigar I showed how the bird had developed since the Budgerigar Society was formed in 1925 and it is quite clearly to me that there is a gradual change in the birds and the full cycle seems to occur every quarter of a century – every 25 years – and that at the end of that period the best way to describe it is that every a newcomer to the fancy can see the difference and that has been going on for about the last 75 to 100 years. The previous big change was with the Joe Mannes birds from Germany. His birds caused such an impact with their size, length of feather and changed the face of budgerigars for the last twenty years. Unfortunately from my own experience as well as other peoples, they do bring a lot of problems with missing flights, missing tails, tumours on the wings and tails and whilst they have been a very impressive bird but bring a certain amount of problems that we didn't have before. It would seem to me now that the bird has moved on again.

I don't think it is from anyone being particularly clever to make that move, I think it is just being the fortunate person to have the stud of birds where that move took place. The Expertise comes in to recognise when that move takes place and having the knowledge to breed from that bird to produce more of them. You have seen what I have got out in my aviary, you have seen their quality and you have seen the young Grey which I bred out of the

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Huxley & Marchant cock which was supposedly going to the pet shop as it wasn't considered good enough. You have seen the quality that I have bred and it is not just a flash in the pan it is quality across the board as they are all carrying those same head qualities. So if it is the same thing that people are talking about in Australia then they are the birds that are coming from the stud of Chris Huxley and Alan Marchant who come from Stoke on Trent and again the evidence seems to be true to type as there are other people who have purchased birds from them in quite large numbers who are also breeding in quite large numbers of very good birds of that type so they seem to be very dominant for that feature.

Keith: So it hasn't actually come from South Africa where some people are saying it comes from?

Jeff: I think where the misunderstanding comes from is this. If you go back some years and I was there about twenty years ago, there was a guy named Manakini who was an Italian who was a prisoner of the war and who stayed in South Africa at the end of the war. He was breeding Budgies in Cape Town and he had a new type of bird evolve. It was a long feathered bird with a tremendously long tail and they were very sought after – Fred Sherman was one and Pat Devere who probably has the second best stud of birds in South Africa – were all acquiring these and some did come over to England via Bryan Biles but I think that was too long ago to be the ones that made a difference. I stayed with Reinhardt Molkentein who lives in Pictoria just outside Johannesburg, two or three years ago and he has got a wonderful stud of birds – an absolutely superb stud of birds – and some birds have been sent to England but because the arrangements you have to abide by to bring the birds in are so stringent and costly, very few people have been able to take up on them. You can't just import birds.

The arrangements are that you have to be a resident in South Africa for a minimum of three weeks so you need to take a three week holiday, go to Reinhardt's at the start of your holiday, select your birds, he will then put them through the quarantine process and box them for you, meet you at the airport on your return and take them back with you. But it is such an expensive arrangement with the costs of getting there in the first place plus accommodation etc.

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All I can tell you is that Huxley and Marchant have been breeding birds for a very long time and had a very impressive stud for more than ten years and somehow or other this feature has evolved. I visited them back in last Summer when I was speaking at the Trent Valley meeting in the Midlands and the feature is very dominant in the stud and my guess would be that it has evolved in the stud they have and it is spreading around the country with people purchasing birds from them and now people are coming from the Continent wanting to purchase those birds with the feature. If it is the same mutation that people in Australia are talking about then that is where I feel it is coming from.



Above: A Huxley & Marchant bird



Above: 5 week old chick bred by Jeff  
Note the strong head & mask features.

Carol: Besides the head feature, is there any other difference in them?

Jeff: Not really – the only thing I can say that makes a great difference is that they don't seem to come with any problems. No visual problems like lumps and bumps, no flights or tails missing, They seem to be in pretty good order. The head quality is just unbelievable a totally different type of feature that I have seen before.

Keith: When we were over last time there was talk about changing the BS Standard to include spots on the Dominant Pieds because at the moment your Standard is the same as ours saying they can have any number missing. Did the amendment to state they must have spots get approved.

Jeff: Well, I was on the General Council when this was being discussed and because of the World Budgerigar Organisation and the Agreement we had between countries they decided to set new Colour Standards for all the varieties and each of the Council members was asked to put their views forward. I served on the Colour Standards committee and we discussed

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spots on the Pies for a long time – a huge amount of discussion went on- one side of the Standard wanted the bird to have six evenly spaced spots on all versions of the Dominant including the Clearflight or the Banded Pies.

Some of us thought that was not a good move. We thought the standard should say the bird ideally should have six evenly spaced spots but this can vary and will be left at the discretion of the judge. The reason I say this is if you set a Standard for the Dominant Pied to have six evenly spaced spots or it will be severely penalized, you end up with a hell of a lot of wastage. If you can't show them you have two options, either sell it or bin it and it makes a huge amount of wastage which discourages fanciers from breeding them. If you leave the door open and say a breeder can show a bird albeit with one spot, two or even three spots missing and leave it to the discretion of the judge. At least then, the judge has got discretion and if he/she has an absolutely stunning Dominant Pied in front of him and it is a long way ahead of the rest of the field but it only has one spot, he may say "spots missing but that is the best bird in the field and I will put it up". It gives exhibitors a bit of hope.

Keith: My feelings are that you cannot control where the Pied markings are going to come out on the bird therefore you cannot control if the pied is going to be in the mask area and take out any number if not all the spots.

Jeff: Exactly what we say – it is a random feature and you cannot control a random feature so therefore the breeder should not be penalized. Every other variety of bird you see whether it is colour, whether it is shape, size, size of spot etc can all be controlled by the breeder to adjust it, but you cannot change anything on a bird that is a random feature – that is just nature. The only thing I have found and I would not say it is 100% but it does help and you can look at my Pies in the aviary, generally speaking people who concentrate on Dominant Pies and my friend Brian Sweeting is one of these fanciers, if you have been breeding them for a number of years the actual pied effect runs up into the face of the bird eventually that is when you end up with no spots on the bird.

What I have found is that if you take two of the mismarked Pies and pair them together you will end up with 100% Dominant Pies with 25% being Double Factors which are easy to spot as they look a little like Recessive Pies you may even get the odd eyed Pied. If you pair the Double Factors to Normals you will get 100% Single Factor Dominant Pies and usually they are so much better marked. So you can reverse it to a certain extent.

Keith: I have been speaking to fanciers here, especially Maurice Roberts on my last trip over and mentioned how more and more of our birds in Australia in all varieties are lacking the iris ring and Maurice told me he hadn't noticed the problem as he would consider it to be nit picking.

Jeff: I agree with what he was saying. I have noticed it myself and the bird develops a brown eye – they actually have a pupil with a brown background. Yes I have seen that but if you look

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clearly at a bird you can still see an iris. Well, I would agree with Maurice to a certain extent as it is a factor you cannot control. Take human beings, we all have different coloured eyes and maybe this is a factor evolving in the budgies. It doesn't make it a lesser bird does it and I feel it is nit picking. Okay you have varieties that need a dark eye like the Dark Eyed Clears and the Recessive Pies they need a dark eye.

Keith: This clear eye started off with the Double Factor Spangles but has not spread through almost all varieties.

Jeff: I cannot understand it with the Double Factor Spangle as I feel there is more chance of that occurring in that variety because of its background. Take it that if you put two Spangles together, you will breed a Double Factor. It is fairly well recognised the Spangle evolved through the Dominant or Recessive Pies so when you bring two together and they double up on the inheritance features there is every chance that could happen. For things like that I think you have to start jumping on people who make mountains out of molehills or else you end up in an insurmountable situation. What are you going to do? You can't breed it out – you just have to judge what is in front of you and if someone is going to put a bird down because it has the wrong colour eye other than if it is a Recessive Pied or a Dark Eyed Clear then it is pretty sad.

Keith: Over with us, if a bird doesn't have an iris ring when the Standard says it should, then the bird is disqualified.

Jeff: Who thinks those sort of things up. What I would say is this – when I sat down with the Australian Council to discuss the use of the Swenson Paddle. Without causing any insult to anyone, I thought what a petty carry on. There was a person on the panel who wanted to know "well how many paddles do we use in a cage, we could end up with five or six?" To me it is really pushing the limit. You know over here, Tom Swenson who came over from Scandinavia turned up with a paddle and it worked brilliantly so what happened? Every judge who was adjudicating with him, drew an outline of it, made some and started judging with it. It spread like wildfire. The BS didn't tell the judges they couldn't use it and it has worked brilliantly. It really does help steady down a wild bird. But come over to Australia and it really is a big issue. It is the same with irises on birds is it really such a big issue.

Carol: The problem comes when the standard states a bird requires a white iris ring.

Jeff: Then perhaps the time has come when they think about rewriting the Standard and state that you may find that it is not the case in all birds.

Carol: What the verdict on birds that have two forward toes and another that runs along the perch.

Jeff: That is what we call "slip claw". It is penalised as it is classed as a deformity.

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Carol: Our Standard states that it should have two forward and two rear toes. If a bird has a slip claw and you work the bird and it brings it forward then the bird can be awarded but if you work the bird and doesn't bring the toe forward, then it is disqualified as a deformity.

Jeff: I think I had better not comment on that. What I ask is "Has it got four toes? I think as long as the bird is complete then it should be fine. It would be different if a bird had a twisted leg – entirely different – we will penalise a bird with a slip claw and I say we but I have seen birds win club shows with a slip claw but nobody really gets out of their pram about it. I really think you are making a rod for yourself as you are causing yourselves too many problems. The other think you have to remember is that you are putting a hell of a load on your judges. You only have a certain amount of time to judge a class; it is bad enough looking to see if a bird has the correct coloured ring on let along without looking for all these faults. How long are you going to give a bird to see if it puts its leg back or forward? It is the same as a bird that is running up and down the cage. If you have an eye for a bird, and you can see the bird is complete and in condition and the bird is a cracker why not put it up? If you don't in the afternoon the bird is sitting proudly on the perch ahead of the others and makes the judge look like an idiot. You only have limited time and anyone with a scrap of sense would run a bird with a slipped claw second or third. You see here you are not allowed to write anything on the cage sticker other than "wrong classed" or "disqualified" .

Keith: At home we can put notes like "twisted toe" or "see Judge" which helps the exhibitor.

Jeff: And that is only right. Every country has its own silly quirks.

Carol: How do you think the English birds are going now as two years ago when we were here you thought all the birds that left the country due to importation had a severe effect on the quality?

Jeff: Did I every say that? In my opinion the big drop back in English birds went to is that we forgot the Opaline. The Opaline and the Cinnamon Opaline especially the big flecked headed Cinnamon Opaline hens and Opaline hens. That is where the quality used to come from and we had them in abundance and we put them across the Normals and keep the youngsters that weren't too flecked and they are the ones we went on with. That is where the quality came from. I guarantee that if anyone can get their hands on decent Opalines and put them across your stud you will see a difference straight away. But the English forgot that little lesson and it used to be edged in stone that Opalines were the basis and suddenly they disappeared and never came back.

These days are Opaline and Opaline Cinnamon classes are negligible with very few good ones about. Having said that English birds have picked up tremendously and they have gone forward a lot, there have been one or two specialist breeders and they are spreading across the country. Mind you there are birds with problems as well, you hear people talking about

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their birds having tumours, feathers missing, tail and flights missing that never grow, but the birds are definitely picking up.

At the BS Club Show last year, you could see a huge difference and for the first time in a generation fanciers are coming across from abroad again to purchase English stock. I would say there has been a definite improvement in quality. Where there hasn't been an improvement is in the number of breeders and we are losing the number of breeders yearly and they are top breeders. It has really bombed out.

Ours is going so bad now that the structure of English budgie keeping commenced with the coming about of the BS and then you had the area societies. We used to have eight area societies that were all formed between 1928 and 1950. But many of them are in decline now especially three of them. On the 28<sup>th</sup> March we have the Western Counties AGM, now the Western County covers a huge area we cover from Lands End all the way up to Bristol and Swindon – a huge area – and within that area we probably haven't got more than a hundred members and we cannot get people to fill the office positions and there is every talk that the society is going to collapse as we haven't the support to keep it going.



Above: two cocks from Jeff's aviary. I sincerely thank Jeff for giving up his time for this article.