

The Opaline

From the notes of the Late Cyril Rogers

Without a doubt one of the most popular forms of Budgerigars is the Opalines in their many shades of body colour. They are to be found in very good numbers at all shows and there is rarely a mixed aviary collection that does not contain a reasonable number of Opalines. The reasons for their popularity are I think due to their bright colouring and their sex-linked manner of inheritance. Most fanciers like birds that show brilliant colours and different pattern markings and at the same time are not too far removed from ordinary Normals and can be crossed with them. Their sex-linked manner of inheritance makes them easy to produce and improve in general quality. It is possible to found a strain of any coloured Opaline by starting with just one Normal/Opaline cock. Although of course progress can be achieved far more quickly if several Opaline and "split" Opaline birds are used for the initial stock.

Some new breeders may at first be a little puzzled by the way in which Opalines reproduce and I feel that the following should make their breeding quite simple to understand. They are sex-linked and this means that they follow the same method of breeding as do all the other sex-linked varieties. If an Opaline hen is mated to a pure Normal cock all the young they produce will be Normal in colour but all the cocks will be "split" for Opaline, the young hens being just ordinary Normals. Now if the reverse mating is made and an Opaline cock is paired to a Normal hen then all the young hens from this mating will be Opalines and all the young cocks Normal/opalines. The breeder will now probably wonder how Opaline cocks are obtained. If a "split" Opaline cock is mated to an Opaline the young will consist of Normal hens, Normal/opaline cocks and Opaline cocks and hens.

When an Opaline hen is mated to any coloured cock and Opaline chicks appear in the nest it is a definite sign that the cock bird is "split" for Opaline although this may not have been realised by the breeder. It is not possible to produce any Opaline chicks horn pairing an Opaline hen to any coloured cock that is not "split" for Opaline. The Opaline character operates quite independently to any other colour characters that may be carried by the breeding pair.

Add The Ino Factor

Sometimes breeders get a little confused when the Opaline character and the Albino or Lutino characters are combined as these latter mask any visual colours carried by them. It is possible to have say a Lutino Opaline Light Green hen which to the eye appears to be just a Lutino. If such a bird is incorporated into a stud, Opalines can be produced in later generations without the breeder being aware that the Opaline character had been introduced to the stock. Quite often other colours are brought into a strain through the use of Albinos or Lutinos and may not make an appearance until many generations later, much to the surprise of the breeder. As I have said many times before, an Albino or Lutino must be an Albino or Lutino form of one of the other existing Blue or Green series birds.

Now to get back to the Opalines which seem these days to be failing from the exhibition angle from several colour faults. It is not only desirable to breed fine bold well shaped substantial birds but they must also have good typical colour features. From what I have seen there seems to be three separate colour failings with Opalines of all shades. One of the most prominent of course is the persistent multiple throat spots which affects so many strains. The lack of a good clear saddle

has been with us for a very long time and there does not seem to have been any concerted effort to bring back birds showing the desirable clear saddle or mantle as it is sometimes called. The third fault is of more recent origin and unfortunately seems to be spreading through Opalines and on to other normal colours, I am referring to the head flecking. This flecking on the heads of any Budgerigars spoils the characteristic facial appearance and gives the birds an unbalanced appearance. I have spoken to a considerable number of breeders who have had flecking appearing amongst their young during the past few seasons and they all say that it appears to be hereditary.

When a flecked bird is paired to a non-flecked one the flecking can appear in some of their young but this is not always the case. However the flecking can appear in the second generation birds.

If this undesirable factor is allowed to spread unchecked through our strains of Opalines and other colours we are going to see far too many good birds spoiled by this defect. I know that breeders are going to say what can be done with good birds showing this fault? These birds can of course be employed in the production of Albinos and Lutinos where markings have no bearing whatsoever or they can be used sparingly to mate with unflecked birds and then using only unflecked young from such matings. The young from the latter matings should be watched carefully to see if any flecking is appearing, if it does then such birds should be taken away from the breeding stud. I know it is extremely hard to have to curtail the production of young from good birds but if it is only going to increase the number of faulty specimens it is far better in the long term to do so.

Multiple Spots

To get back to the multiple spots which disfigure the good facial appearance of any Budgerigar. Here again I feel that such birds should only be used with the greatest care as multiplicity of spots can spread quickly through a stud. I know it will be said that if the birds are not carrying too many extra spots they can be trimmed but I think this is a most undesirable practice. We know it is possible to breed birds with perfectly round clear throatspots and this is what should always be aimed for in exhibition breeding. Trimming may be an easy way out but it certainly does not cure the fault and the birds trimmed do not have that even smooth mask as is required for exhibition.

The question of colour and pattern with Opalines is to my mind extremely important and from what I have seen over the past few years not enough attention has been paid to these attributes. Periodically a well patterned bird will appear in a class and it is surprising how such a specimen stands right out from the others and attracts a great deal of admiration. I think that if a little more attention could be paid to getting the characteristic pattern of the Opalines nearer to ideal it would be well worthwhile. Good patterned birds can of course be produced by chance but a greater and lasting success can be achieved by careful selection of each breeding pair. Everyone knows it is not an easy thing to produce exhibition Budgerigars of any colour having all the features we desire for an ideal bird. If, however, attention is paid to all the desired features and not just specialising in one particular good point the object will be achieved. This applies to all colours but especially to birds where a colour pattern is also involved in the ideal standard.