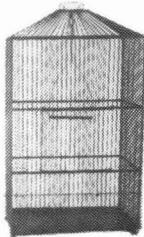


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Yesteryear's Comments on Canaries

by H. P. Macklin
Pacific, Missouri

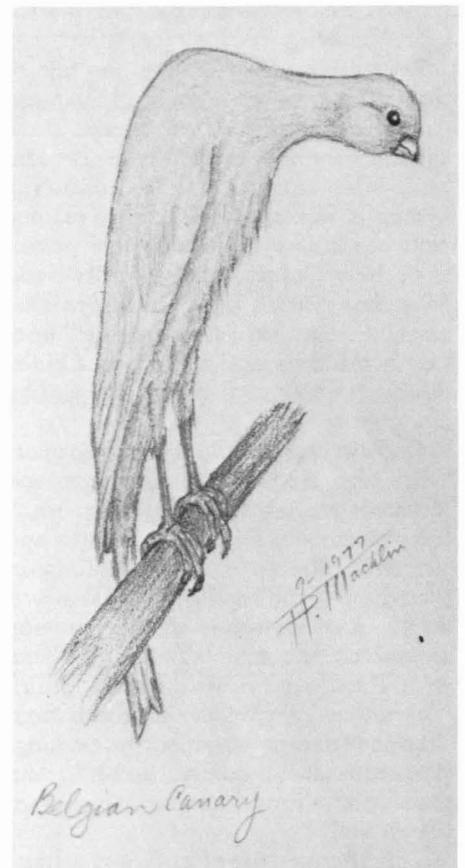
Part 1

Introduction: In browsing around an old second hand book store in St. Louis I came across a canary book printed probably around 1875, give or take a few years. The pages are brown with age and so brittle I fear by the time I finish taking excerpts for your reading, the book will be falling apart. The front page gives no date but does say, among other things: "The Canary Book. By Robert L. Wallace. Illustrated. Third Edition, Enlarged and Revised, with many new Illustrations. London." It is 5" x 8" and about 2" thick, so at best you will get only the more interesting facts set forth in those early times. I plan to start with the breeds of canaries of that period and jot down only items of real interest and especially if they are in contrast to what we do today.

Around 1875 labor and printing were cheap and this book abounds in endless instructions and thoughts of the day—something that would be cut short with present-day costs. Fortunately, I have colored plates, made in England, of canary varieties of that period; also the book has many illustrations which I will attempt to draw for each variety. Please bear in mind the use of the pronoun "I" refers to the author of the book reminiscing—unless it appears under "Personal Comment" at the end of each segment, which will be my pearls of wisdom. So, go feed the canaries and then come back to this magazine for some interesting reading on our hobby of yesteryear. . . .

"Varieties—The common Canary is a bird pretty generally known in most countries throughout Europe. In size and shape it is not much unlike a common Linnet; its colors are yellow, buff, green and green pied or variegated; it is admired chiefly for its song and may be met with at all professional bird dealers; but to those who are known as "true fanciers," birds of this kind are merely regarded as nurses for rearing the more valued and favorite varieties. Consequently they are considered of little value and may be purchased at a low figure, cock birds varying from 3s. 6d. each upwards, the hens usually being sold from 1s. 6d. to 2s. 6d. each, much depending upon the time of year and other circumstances. Probably the varieties most highly esteemed among the cognoscenti are those known as the

Crested Norwich and Belgian Fancy canaries, and next to these come the London Fancy, Lizards, Cinnamons, clear and variegated Norwich Fancy, Glasgow Dons, or Scotch fancy, Manchester Coppers, Yorkshire Fancy, etc., although many of these so-called varieties are artificially produced and are the result of crossing one variety with another in such a manner as to produce some totally distinct feature, differing in some material points from all known and existing varieties; but I need scarcely point out that it requires great care, judicious management and considerable knowledge and skill to bring about a phenomenon of this description, to say nothing of the time, patience and expense incurred. I will now proceed to describe the different varieties and to point out the distinguishing features in each class; the best method of crossing in order to produce these



H.P. Macklin's rendition of the old sketch found in *The Canary Book* by Robert L. Wallace. The bird is a Belgian canary of about 1875.

features; and to lay down a standard where the different doings of excellence may be readily estimated."

Belgian Canaries

"In my descriptions of the different varieties I will begin with that known as the Belgian canary, which as its name denotes, is a native of Belgium. These birds are bred there in large quantities and exported to different parts of Europe and America and several of our colonies. I have in various ways endeavoured to obtain some information bearing on the origin of these remarkable birds but without eliciting anything reliable; the oldest fanciers in Belgium seem unable to give any satisfactory account of them. I must therefore decline to hazard any remarks of a speculative or theoretical nature in regard to them and will simply treat them in the character of an established variety. This variety of canary has been known and admired in our country for more than 40 years and they are considered the nobility of the canary race. The principal recommendation of a bird of this description is its peculiar form, its large size and graceful and commanding contour. It is a large bird and is variously estimated to measure from 6½ to 7½ inches or even 8 inches in length, from the point of the bill to the tip of the tail; but few will be found to exceed 7 inches which may be taken as an average size. . . .

"Belgian canaries are readily acclimated in England and Wales, as also Ireland and Scotland; there is not a great difference in the temperature of these countries. . . . Belgian canaries are probably the most domesticated of all the tribes of the *Fringilla Canaria* and on this account they are great favorites with most fanciers.

The Belgians are naturally of a delicate constitution as a rule and appear to be predisposed to asthma and consumption, maladies not easily curable and which carry off the major part of them. They like warmth and if kept in a room where a moderate and regular temperature could be kept up during the coldest period of the year, they no doubt would thrive well and ultimately we may produce a race of birds more vigorous and healthy than those of the present day.

"Another drawback is the enormous price which prize birds of this variety usually bring, more particularly when you consider that the best and hardiest bird of its race would be completely "used up" if it were sent around to compete at every show during one entire season that it would be literally speaking, worthless for the purpose of breeding from, if it did not kill it outright. I myself have known as much as 12 pounds paid for a single



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bird, but I must confess that taking him 'all in all,' I have not 'looked upon his like again.' Great care should be taken of Belgian canaries during the moulting season as at this time more than any other they are likely to contract the diseases before mentioned. . . .

"In breeding selection I prefer the male bird to excell in the qualities which are most highly esteemed although good birds are often produced when the reverse of this recommendation is carried out, but in that case much depends upon the constitution of the hen. Few people succeed in obtaining good birds from moderate parents even when they are known to be highly bred; but with one good bird judiciously matched with a moderate bird known to be of good strain the best results are often realized.

I do not recommend putting nothing but show birds together as when birds are too highly bred their progeny are correspondingly tender. . . . Always contrive to pair your birds in such a manner that the one bird predominates in the opposite features to the other's, as by adopting this method you are pretty certain to get one or two birds at least which will inherit the peculiarities of both parents so blended that the result will, in all probability, prove highly satisfactory to you. It is usual to pair a yellow cock and a buff hen together, or vice versa, as the case may be. It will however, be found very advantageous to breed from two buff birds occasionally, in preference to a yellow and buff, as it tends materially to improve size, constitution and feathers of the birds. But it must not be repeated too frequently or it will produce coarseness. Some fanciers occasionally pair two jonque (yellow) birds together in order to produce finess but the produce are generally deficient in plumage. But a bird bred from two yellows and mated with one bred from two buffs, or better still, one bred from double buffs twice over—that is, a bird bred from two buffs and a second time mated with a buff, the produce of the last cross—very frequently breed the handsomest and best birds. . . .

"When you are selecting birds to breed from, it will be well to bear in mind that two-year-old cocks are preferable to one-year-old birds and their produce are generally stronger and more robust. In fact, I think it desirable not to attempt to breed from male birds that first season for they often fail to impregnate the eggs, or most of them, and it unquestionably weakens their constitutions which is a material consideration. I do not object to breed with one-year-old hens.

"A great many bird fanciers will tell you that Belgian canary hens are "odd

breeders," that is, bad nurses but they seldom consider how much they have themselves to blame for this apparent want of maternal affection. Their over-anxiety or curiosity frequently leads them to meddle with the birds during the process of incubation or shortly after the eggs are hatched; indeed I have known some men so foolish as to disturb a hen every 15 or 20 minutes whilst she was busy hatching; forcing her off the nest each time merely to ascertain whether she had hatched another egg. . . .

"It sometimes happens that the young Belgian canaries are weak and puny and have not sufficient strength to raise their heads for the purpose of receiving nutrition from their parents during the first 2 or 3 days after they are hatched. In the former event you must administer food to them in small quantities at short intervals for the first 3 days and if the mother appears to sulk and refuses to feed afterwards, they must be transferred forthwith to a foster parent. . . .

"Belgian canaries are capable of being divided into 8 distinct classes—clear yellow, clear buff, ticked yellow, ticked buff, evenly-marked yellow, evenly marked buffs, unevenly marked yellow, unevenly marked buff. Although it rarely happens that they are divided into more than 4 and sometimes fewer classes. The clears are almost invariably the best birds . . . Buffs and yellow cannot be shown together on equitable terms as the buff birds generally have much better advantage in size, etc. It is likewise a well established fact that the variegated birds are much inferior in points of merit to the clear birds. This is somewhat difficult to account for, unless we could believe that the progenitors of the last named were originally all clear yellows and buffs and that the marked variety are the result of a foreign admixture and that whenever the birds appear in the mixed plumage they inherit more largely the properties of this allied blood. . . .

"The points required to constitute a high class Belgian canary are as follows: A small sleek head, rather flat on the crown, well set, with nicely chiseled jaws, well formed beak, a full eye, a long slender neck, delicately formed and have the appearance of being chiselled and which should be gracefully curved downwards from the junction of the head to the commencement of the shoulders; the back, with an elegant curved line; the back should be well filled in. From the termination of the deflection of the shoulders to the back, the back as well as the tail should be almost perpendicular, with the slightest possible inflection towards an inner curve the chest should

be prominent and well developed in front, but flat on the sides; the waist long, small and finely formed with an inward curve towards the thighs; the legs should be long and straight and well set, with well made substantial thighs and good shanks and feet; the tail should be long, narrow, neat and compact and ought to resemble in appearance the shank of a pipe; the wings should be well formed, firmly placed and hung close to the body of the bird, the tips coming close to the rump; color and finess of feather are minor points but still must be considered. When a bird is in position he should stand quite straight on his legs with his head well forward and down below the line of his shoulders, the latter being well up. The chief feature to be observed is the form and general contour—the easy, majestic, graceful carriage of the bird—commonly called “standage”—this being most essential and an indispensable characteristic in a true show bird. There should be a decided appearance of hauteur in its manner and bearing.

**Standard For Judging
Clear Belgian Canaries**

Head 6, neck 7, shoulders 10	23
Back 10, chest 5, waist 6	21
Legs 8, tail 6, wings 4	18
Size 7, color 3, quality of feathers 3	13
Contour of Position	15
Condition	10
	<hr/> 100

“In judging marked birds I would allow ten points for markings, and as no bird is perfect, a good margin will always be left to work upon; consequently it is not necessary to give another table merely to distinguish the single difference, as in all other respects the one already given is equally applicable to the variegated birds as it is to the clear varieties.”

Personal Comment: Unfortunately there was no illustration in the book of the Belgian canary outside of one sketch. I made a drawing of this illustration which shows the Belgian canary as a bird with a neck just about at right angles with the body. The back and tail apparently should form a straight line, with the legs of stilt-like straightness also.

I don't know if the true Belgians are being bred today or not. I checked the sales columns and find only one listing, a "Belgian Malinois" which sounds Spanish to me. The fact that the original birds were very delicate leads me to believe the variety must be very rare today. It would be very interesting to hear, via these pages, from any one who has experience with the Belgian canary recently.

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