

Two Versions of a White Ringneck

Photo by Dale R. Thompson



A beautiful mutation known as Creamino is a visual Turquoise Albino.

This unusually patterned mutation is a sex-linked, two-year old male Whiteheaded Grey Indian Ringneck.



Photo by Dale R. Thompson

Yellow-headed Ringnecks, the Truth

by Roger Bringas, North Hollywood, CA

Decapitation comes to mind when I think of the three uniquely different Yellow-headed Indian Ringneck mutations. Until the egalitarianism born of the French revolution, the accepted rule of law was that persons of distinction were decapitated and the riff-raff hung by the neck until dead. Royalty and persons in positions of prominence have always been treated differently by society and a rare mutation colored bird was a highly prized commodity given and accepted by the most elite.

Genetically speaking, the Ringneck tribe are "persons of merit" for they are genetically decapitated. One set of genes affect them from the collar up, while others work from the collar down. The demarcation line for the executioner's ax and for the genetic differentia is the collar of distinction that all Psittaculids have. We can see this quite clearly on Slaty-heads, Blossom-heads and Plum-heads.

Green, yellow and dilute shades of green are often a common point brought to issue by people interested in color. To be green, a parrot has to have the black pigment known as melanin present throughout the feathers. Without it blue cannot be produced and then we would be left with basically a yellow bird. The easiest way I have been able to explain this concept is to think of what colors make up green; blue and yellow or $G = B + Y$. If the blue is absent we have yellow (lutino) $Y = G - B$, if the yellow is missing, we have blue. If both blue and yellow are lacking, we have white (albino) and you can figure out the math. So melanin is a very important pigment. With lesser amounts of black we notice such color variants as cinnamon or fallow wherein the green is lighter in color than the normal and

appears "diluted" or, in some cases, wishy-washy.

The different colors existing throughout a bird are explained by a differential deposit of melanin. Melanin is not deposited evenly over the body and in psittaculids the collar, the decapitating zone, is one of the determinants. There is naturally, innately, genetically in the Normal Ringneck far less melanin directed to the head. Quite often one can notice a bluish sheen in the nape area of a normal male, and many people comment on the difference in head and body color that their Blue Ringnecks have.

There are several genes which affect the deposition of melanin (in humans there are said to be at least five and by their proportions we get black, not so black, brown, light brown, tan and white races). Now if a gene mutates to reduce the amount of melanin to the feathers it will differentially "yellow" the *body* as opposed to the *head*. In other words, each and every mutation that reduces the amount of melanin will have more effect on the head than on the body. The head area not having enough to start with, shows the effect of the robbery more than the wealthy (in melanin) body.

So Normal and Cinnamon Ringnecks have a lighter head. Still, some mutations take things a stage further and *take away*, like an impartial tax collector, an equal amount from the "melanin rich" body as they do from the "melanin poor" head. But in a case like this, the amount of melanin removed is *all* or *nearly all* of the melanin the head has. So the head becomes yellow and the body, although it has the same amount gone, still has enough melanin left to appear green, admittedly a lighter green. Thus we get Yellow-heads.

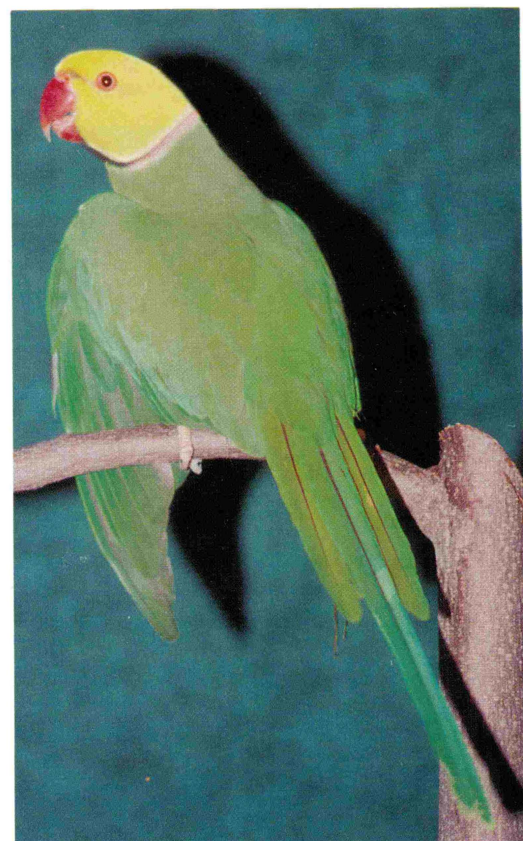
As I stated before, there exist three uniquely different Yellow-headed mutations. Two are autosomal recessive in their mode of inheritance and

are most rare. These are known as "Yellow-head Yellow-tail" and "Red-eyed Yellow-head" (also called "Buttercup" in Europe). The third and more common form is sex linked and is called "Cinnamon Yellow-head."

Because of the enthusiasm the Dutch, Belgian and Germans share when it comes to acquiring mutation birds, these highly proficient breeders are, unfortunately, the ones who name these precious gems of nature. I say unfortunately because all too often recognizable mutations are incorrectly and inaccurately labeled according to the "different" phenotypes they possess. Birds are given names which are truly odd and, sometimes, impressively ignorant, making the identification and nomenclature very confusing for most people. This is the subject of another article which I intend to write in the near future. But now I feel a brief description of the three Yellow-head mutations is in order

Sex Linked Cinnamon Yellowhead

The most numerous or common variety is sex linked and known as "Cinnamon Yellow-head" or "Lacewing." A sex linked mutation is easier to propagate than a recessive one thus explaining why the Cinnamon Yellow-heads outnumber all others. This mutation first came to Europe in the early 1980's and was immediately introduced to various other colors. Although it is a very nice pastel mutation, it is the least dramatic of the Yellow-heads because the contrast between the yellow head and the yellowish body is not strong. This particular mutation has quite a range of color due to the amount of melanin allocated to the body as described earlier by the effect differential deposition has. Initially, most Cinnamon Yellow-heads were a very light yellowish-green in the body with a good yellow head. At birth all Cinnamon Yellow-head chicks can be identified in the nest as they have red eyes and white toenails. As they feather, *both* the cock and hen are, indeed, yellow-headed and their once-red eye darkens to a dark plum color appearing almost normal. The neck ring in a mature cock is brown and red, the flight and tail feathers are cinnamon (light brown), the



The recessive red-eyed Yellow-headed is one of the rarest Ringneck mutations. Both sexes have the blood-red eye.



In the recessive Yellow-headed Yellow-tailed mutation both sexes have dark eyes but only the male has the yellow head. The female has the yellow tail but not the yellow head.

Photo by Sheldon Dingle, taken at the aviaries of Roger Bringas.

Photo courtesy of Jack Bastiaan

feet are light and the toenails are light brown. Cinnamon Yellow-head has proven to be an allele of Lutino and as a consequence, some Cinnamon Yellow-heads can produce Lutinos if paired properly and, to some breeder's great surprise, can be produced by Lutinos.

There have been listings and reports of a "Lacewing" mutation but I think that this will prove to be a Cinnamon Yellow-head which has Lutino in its background. A more pale or much lighter Cinnamon Yellow-head can arise when one breeds to produce a double factor mutation. This is not the most aesthetically pleasing bird to most people because the contrast between the head and body color is reduced more and more, but it's worth mentioning for the purpose of education. Because of the rapid rate which this mutation has been produced, nearly all the color combinations have now been established; i.e., "Cinnamon Gray-green Yellow-head", "Cinnamon Turquoise-blue Yellow-head", "Cinnamon Blue White-head" and "Cinnamon Gray White-head".

I imported my first such birds from Europe in 1986 and was fortunate enough to raise a Cinnamon Blue White-head the following year. For the time being, these are the correct descriptive names that these mutations deserve and I urge all breeders to demonstrate responsibility when advertising or referring to them. We don't need more confusion and if we call our birds "Silver White-heads" or "Pure Mountain Snow-headed Blues" we are only taking away from the hobby by adding more mystification to an already complicated issue of nomenclature involving simple genetics.

The Yellow-head Yellow-tail

The other two recessive varieties of Yellow-heads are in the opinion of most people, the most dramatic and beautiful due to the greater contrast between head and body color. They are also more expensive and far fewer in number. The Yellow-head Yellow-tail may in actuality be what we know in Budgies to be called "Harlequin" although it isn't recognized as such by the European breeding community.

There is a differential gene that is involved in the deposition of melanin to the head and the tail, but not the body. Therefore, we have exactly as the name implies, a deep yellow colored head and a yellow tail contrasted against a green body (darker green than a Cinnamon Yellow-head but lighter green than a normal bird). The feet are light in color and, unlike the Cinnamon Yellow-heads where both sexes have a yellow head, only the cock birds acquire their yellow heads at maturity, while the hens possess only a yellow tail. Young Yellow-head Yellow-tails can be identified when they fledge as they are easily distinguished by their lighter color, especially their tails.

I have seen nearly all the color combinations possible with this mutation and they are terrifically beautiful. The primary ones include the "Gray-green Yellow-head Yellow-tail", "Turquoise-blue Yellow-head Yellow-tail", "Blue White-head White-tail" and "Gray White-head". Very few, if any, of this mutation exist in this country. I imported a split and a visual back in the late '80's, but as luck turned against me, the visual bird died just after quarantine. I have the split and have bred it successfully in hopes of producing this mutation here in the United States.

Recessive Red-eye Yellow-head

The remaining variety of Yellow-head yet to describe is my most favorite and by far the most rare. It is the recessive Red-eye Yellow-head. This mutation is not only distinguishable by the beautifully deep yellow head which graces the cock birds from the ring up, but also by a magnificent blood red eye which both sexes possess and is specific to this mutation only. As in the other recessive Yellow-heads, only the cocks acquire a yellow head and the contrast between the yellow head and the green body is strong. Combining this with the allure of the red eye makes for a very impressive mutation for any fancier. Lutinos, Albinos and the other Ringneck mutations have a white iris. In this mutation the entire eye is red and is obvious and easily distinguishable after hatching. Hens, although never acquiring a yellow head, are easily recognized as they

are lighter green in color than a normal is and they retain their trademark blood red eye, light colored feet and and toenails.

In Europe the primary color combinations involving this mutation are still not complete. I have seen "Gray-green Red-eyed Yellow-heads" and only a very few juvenile "Red-eyed White-headed Blues." My first experience with this mutation came in 1987 after I spent several weeks in the jungles of India searching for various Asiatic mutations. Among Ringnecks I was fortunate to have found one cock Red-eyed Yellow-head and subsequently import it into the U.S. Two years later I acquired a second such bird from the same source which has allowed me to firmly establish this mutation. I have already combined this mutation with all the primary colors and am quite anxious to develop it to its fullest potential as I find it so fascinating.

There exists another mutation which will enhance and add more contrast to all of the Yellow-heads as well as many others. This is the Cobalt Blue which was derived from a true Dark Green bird which was bred back in the early 1980's. Fortunately for us here in the United States, this bird was domestically bred and will, hopefully, be available in the not too distant future. There is much we have to look forward to in the years to come as more mutations are occurring. And it will take the efforts of diligent aviculturists to develop and establish them.

I welcome any comments or questions concerning this article or mutations in general and am always interested to know if anyone has or knows of something different or new in any species of Psittacine. ➤

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