

In Memory of Clark R. Bavin

by Gary P. Lilienthal
Boston, Massachusetts

It was with great sadness that AFA learned of the recent passing of Clark R. Bavin, Chief of the Division of Law Enforcement of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior. Over the years, Clark had many dealings with AFA and its representatives in areas of mutual concern to aviculture and the Fish and Wildlife Service. Many of Clark's decisions were extremely difficult when it came to dealing with exotic avian species and, in every case, he attempted to understand the meaning and ramifications of his department's actions as they affected aviculture and exhibited a willingness to listen and understand the concerns of the aviculturists. In several instances, Clark and his staff sought the input of AFA representatives as to matters affecting aviculture. AFA's last contact with Clark was at the U.S. State Department at the March 1990 briefing on the Recommendations of the Cooperative Working Group on the Bird Trade at which time Clark committed his Department's efforts to the realizations of the Recommendations of the Cooperative Working Group. The avicultural community's condolences go to Clark's family and his associates at the Division of Law Enforcement in Washington. ●

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Understanding the British Exhibition Budgerigar

by Jeffrey Attwood
Stock Gabriel, Devon, United Kingdom

A great deal of misunderstanding has arisen regarding the British exhibition budgerigar. This is particularly true with respect to breeders from other countries who have obtained British stock. Our own fanciers, who have limited experience with the long feathered, so-called "power birds," are appearing at shows and exhibitions and then walking away with the leading awards.

I know many of the breeders who have obtained these birds are enjoying limited or no success in the reproduction of these types of birds, yet when the birds reproduce, the offspring are in many cases inferior to the adult stock. This leads to the breeder believing he or she has been "ripped off" in respect to the original stock purchased.

I am not so naive as to believe unsatisfactory stock is sometimes supplied at exhibition prices. Such stock often gives poor results. However, the poor offspring can be the result of a lack of experience. For this reason, I have chosen the subject as the basis for this article. I want to, in some small way, attempt to put the record straight.

A Look at History

To understand, we must look into the history of the present day exhibition budgerigar. We must examine where and how the notable changes have taken place. Top class British budgerigars of today in no way resemble the Warbling Grass Parakeet (*Malopsittis undulatus*), illustrated in Gould's lithograph of some 150 years ago. The birds have changed so drastically that the Australian Parks and Wildlife Department put forward a submission to the effect the birds were genetically different from the wild type. That was sufficient to block the importation of British stock into Australia. These writers cannot be criticized for their comments. Many breeders of pet class stock have mistakenly believed the birds were/

are a different species due to the existence of different chromosomes.

It was about 1840 when the first consignment of wild budgerigars arrived in the United Kingdom. Between that time and the year 1924, very little was done with regard to selection of type, other than the production of colors quite different from light green found in the wilds of Australia.

The "Budgerigar Club" was formed in 1925. Late in 1927, the name was changed by royal request and patronage to the "Budgerigar Society." The new Society membership consisted of many established and internationally respected livestock breeders, with the objective of improving the budgerigar to a determined standard, with the establishing of established varieties.

In the early 1920s, few of the budgerigar varieties we know and admire today were even to be seen. I believe the formation of the Budgerigar Society was the first step that, in later years, led to problems that I will go into and explain later on.

It is interesting to note, in 1927 an exhibition of budgerigar light yellows, a recessive variety, has now all but disappeared from our show benches. This species was the predominantly popular species. During this period of popularity (1930 to the early 1940s), many of the new mutations evolved. But as the yellow declined, the rate of mutations slowed considerably. Thus, over the past 30 years, only the dominant Pied and Spangle have been fully established.

The Longflight Appears

During the early 1950s, the "long-flight" mutation made its appearance. Breeders began to see characteristics never previously observed. The most notable change was, of course, the exceptionally long wing carrying additional flight feathers, as compared with the wild budgerigar.

These added feathers, combined with a general increase in overall length of feather loading, exceptional depth of mask, size of spot, together with an apparent width of head and body size presented a dramatically different looking bird.

Exactly why these changes came about has not been determined. I believe the changes may be a natural evolvement of the species due to intensive breeding. A further element may have been due to the severe climatic changes existing between the species' natural habitat in Australia and the severe winter temperatures in the United Kingdom.

The longflight mutation created great interest and excitement in the United Kingdom. The birds were much sought after by breeders and the species was soon found on the show benches. It wasn't long until these special birds were penalized by a decision of the Budgerigar Society general board. The birds were banned from competition.

Despite the ban, the birds did not disappear altogether before their genes had infiltrated the British stock. I feel this situation led directly to many, if not all, of the birds seen in the United Kingdom today.

Also to be noted is the fact that at the time the "longflight" occurred, the number of budgerigars in the United Kingdom was limited due to the thousands of birds that were eliminated during the years of the Second World War. This was due to lack of feed, supply of which was, at best, severely limited. At times, adequate feed was totally unobtainable.

It is easy to understand that only the very best exhibition birds survived and the longflight soon infiltrated most of the desirable and sought after studs.

The Feather Duster

By 1962-63, the "feather duster" or "mop" began to make an appearance. I consider these birds to be a direct extension of the "longflight."

Many theories have been put forward to explain the "feather duster." The favorite theory involves the pairing together of buff or long feathered birds over several generations. I totally disagree with this theory. Through my own experience, I have formed the opinion the feather duster came about by a modifying recessive gene. Or, if you like, a mutation directly allied to the longflight and the gene now required in some form

in both parents to produce the feather duster. Exceptions do sometimes appear. "Dusters" do turn up, apparently from only one "affected" parent, which would also indicate the gene is similar to the crested variety, where the determination of inheritances is also one of confusion.

First, as I opened this article, I referred to selection for type being the first step to bring about breeding problems.

We must remember that, together with the breeders of exhibition canaries, the budgerigar breeder is different from most, if not all of the other sectors of the avian fraternity. These two sections alone predominantly pair their birds by selection for exhibition type rather than by choosing birds for breeding who themselves have come together by natural selection. To overcome this "artificial" selection, it is of the utmost importance that the breeder allow sufficient time for pair bonding to take effect before introducing a nest box to the breeding pen or cage. Sometimes this bond will just not form and rearrangement of the pairing may prove necessary. I have found a minimum period of three to four weeks together in the breeding pen before introduction of the nest box will greatly improve the number of fertile eggs.

Second, it must be remembered the budgerigar, together with the other similar grass parakeets, is gregarious, a flock bird who feels secure and happy when surrounded by others of the same species. It is usually stimulated by both sight and sound and therefore an environment for breeding where it can both see and hear its other companions besides its direct mate will be most beneficial.

I have therefore found that where a building or timber shed is kept exclusively for breeding, with no other flock birds in the aviary or flight cages adjacent and in sight and sound of the all wire breeding cage simulating a controlled colony system is most beneficial.

Cage Size

My cages, which have proven optimally successful, are 24" x 18" x 18", using 16 gauge 1" x 1" reinforced wire mesh. Such aviaries will ensure that the birds' heads will not become entrapped, while still preventing escape of the birds. I also leave a space of two inches between cages to prevent interference.

Special Equipment

I use a microphone and speakers to transmit the sound of aviary birds to the breeding room for additional sound stimulation at the beginning of the breeding season when pairs are few.

Third, I believe it to be most important to recognize and accept the nature of the structure of the present day "power bird." In my opinion, the term "power bird" is anything but powerful. Many of the exceptionally long feathered, desirable birds are lethargic and prove to be subject to rapid weight increase. Every physical structure which sets them aside from the fine feathered, near-to-wild type bird has to be accepted as a recessive characteristic. Otherwise, our show benches would be filled with these wonderful, large birds and the small cousins would be in the minority.

If this fact can be accepted, it is again obvious the factor for quality, i.e. long feather, must be present either visually or in a split form in both parents. It is, therefore, essential, when obtaining birds of these bloodlines, that they must be mated to their own kind. In a nutshell and to prevent in depth lengthy explanation, I have found the pairing of opposites, that is the mating of a long feathered, buff, large cockbird preferably not more than two years old to a smart, medium long feathered hen, not too large in size, but herself bred from a cock of the very desirable proportions, to be the most successful mating. That is to say, the cock is showing visually the desirable points, and the hen carries them in a hidden or split form. At least these smaller, finer feathered hens show an eagerness to reproduce and do lay eggs, something so often sadly lacking in their long feathered, buff sisters.

Finally, it is essential that these buff, lethargic birds are given the benefit of flight exercise and stimulation and a constant supply of edible branches and seeding grasses to keep them active. A low fattening diet, avoiding the likes of oats, groats and Japanese millet from the diet is a must.

In conclusion, when obtaining stock, attempt to purchase young birds from progressive, constantly successful studs willing to release birds closely related to be recognized, successful individual birds and winning lines.

This article is based on a talk given to the delegates at the American Federation of Aviculture meeting in Phoenix, Arizona in 1989.