

# The Roller Coaster — Novices, Hang In There!

Part Two

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Continuing about things novices should hear, Don is convinced that the average novice does not go to enough shows.

They do not observe enough. Larry dogged Don and several other champions, show after show. Don said Larry was always "eavesdropping." He was, and still does!

You can be good at several aspects of this hobby and still not do very well. One area that many fall down in is management. They "look," but do not "see."

Management suggestions include:

1. Each day check every nest box. Tap on the box, run the hen out and take a good look at the condition of the hen, cock and any young or eggs. Observe them for a minute or two — each box.

2. Watch and look — learn to tell when a pair is not feeding properly.

3. Watch the cocks. After about 10 days they are the primary feeders. Learn to tell when the cock is not feeding well or not feeling well.

4. Don makes a habit of removing hens when the youngest chick is 21 days old (to know this you have to know when they hatched). At this stage, the hen is often more of a drain than a help. She also wants to be fed, but she can feed herself. Put her in the

flight (actually in a small cage first, then the flight). Now keep an eye on the young. If you do not think the young are good enough quality, re-mate the pair, which is easy to do at this point.

5. Now the \$64,000 question — how do you judge babies at this age? Experience. What can we tell novices? Keep looking. Unless you have paid an awfully big price, most of your breeding stock is going to look less than Top 10 in show. Larry's first novice leg winner fledged bigger than his father. As a rule of thumb, no pair is re-mated unless at least one of the young looks like it has breeding potential. Keep looking!

6. As a rule, buy young birds and especially young hens. The first thing to remember about any hen six months or older is that they will tell you when they are ready. So you have to keep watching.

Some hens that do not feed particularly well may later turn into good stock hens. We use feeders for these young hens whenever we can.

Having said that, many best stock hens have fed complete clutches of four babies when only six or seven months old themselves. Then they go on to have had over 25 fledged chicks when they quit producing at age four. So don't make too many excuses for

birds — good breeders, breed good.

7. How many people have bought birds and never inquired about diet, housing, lighting, ventilation, breeding cages, temperature conditions, breeding theories, etc? You can buy the birds, but you cannot buy the breeder. Advice is free. Don has seen people try to raise babies with mice running in and out of nest boxes, mites everywhere, poor lighting and almost no ventilation.

8. Most of budgie breeding that is not management or involved in watching how the birds act, is based on statistics. Larry tells people that usually one out of six or so average looking brothers is a first rate cock who will be a very worthwhile breeder. So if you tried five and they all produced garbage (which is not likely), try the sixth.

One person bought a start group of birds from Don. They received a bonus present, a four year old cock that looked small and very mediocre. This cock had already been paired to at least six of Don's best hens, producing birds that had hit top three hens at the Great Western show as young birds. To the best of Don's belief, the cock was still fertile but the recipient never mated the bird because it was "the smallest, worst-looking bird that he owned."

A very nice novice asked Don for a pair to start him on his way. He wanted Don to bring them to a show because Don lived a long way away. Don picked out a young bird, the son of his cock that had just won Best-in-Show the previous fall as a young bird. (The father was to become a 12 time Best-in-Show cock, front cover of *Budgerigar World* and father of eight Best-in-Show winners, six of which were Grand Champions.) He picked out a fertile-looking hen from a good pair. The novice was insulted. He said that he could buy better looking birds from anybody for \$75 a pair.

A champion showman with a little more experience heard about the pair and quietly paid Don his price. The next year, a young bird, son of that "cull," won top 10 at one of the biggest shows in America and later a descendant won All American. If it were easy, everyone would do it.

As legendary budgie breeder Bob Gilbert told Larry at one of Larry's first budgie club programs, "Blood isn't everything, it is the only thing!" ●

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