

# Feather Tales

By Don Denny and Larry Day  
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**B**udgie breeders throw the terms “yellow” and “buff” around like everyone knows what they mean and everyone agrees on what they mean. Not so. We don’t always agree on what they mean!

The terms “yellow” and “buff” come from canary breeders and refer to types of feather structure and appearance. Yellow is a hard and shiny feather; buff is a softer feather, not as shiny and in canaries the feather is usually frosted in white, the color does not go to the edge of the feather.

But as budgies have evolved what is considered buff and yellow feathering has evolved too. What we call yellow feather today has little resemblance to what was called yellow feather not that many years ago.

The terms have lost some of their usefulness. Even today with other factors in feather to consider, such as length and width and softness, some birds have wider, looser, softer, duller-colored feathers and some have tighter, shinier feathers. What makes the looser, buff feathered birds that way? Denny has plucked a lot of body feathers in his day and is convinced that it is the size and amount of fluff near the base of the feather shaft that makes the bird appear loose or tight.

One thing for novices to consider is that rough, loose, shaggy-feathered birds (no matter how big) seldom win on the show bench. Novices tend to think that they have a super bird when they raise one like this. These birds are seldom in show condition. While they might occasionally win a top novice placement, they often do not make the top bench. This leaves some novices thinking that judges are prejudiced against novice birds — no, just against untidy, loose, rough-looking birds.

Day was only at a few shows when he observed that what was needed is a bird with tight, shiny body feathering

and longer, looser feathers on the head — yellow body feather and long buff head feather. Easier said than done, by far.

So, is the novice going to get the correct type of bird just by mating buff to yellow feather? No! Feather types blend and re-segregate at future generations. A medium feathered bird is probably going to be medium feathered all over. You need the genes of the birds that top fanciers have been striving for — the buffer head and yellower body. So you either buy the birds with the characteristics you need, or buy their close relatives and breed a lot until you get what you want.

Okay, what other feather characteristics are important and why?

When buying birds cheap off sale tables or cull pens, try to get a good breeder with little outlay (this does not work every time — but you have a better than average chance). Denny looks for exceptionally wide-flight-feathered birds, especially the fourth and fifth flights from the outer longest flight. This trait is often, but not always associated with breeders that breed bigger spotted, better quality young birds. For a bird to be capable of having big, round spots, it must have a wide feather to carry the spot. This characteristic is a hold-over from the original long flight syndrome of characteristics that went to make up the modern budgie. But do not get wide-flight crazy. A lot of good matings have been noticed to have a wide-flighted bird mated to a normal-flighted bird and some good matings have no wide-flighted birds.

On the modern show winner, feather direction - placement and length - called “directional feather” by some, on the bird’s head has most everything to do with the overall look of the bird. We could go into a long, wordy description, but it is best that you go to a lot of shows and stare at a lot of winners. Ask questions of champions about why they believe one bird’s head is better than another — develop your eye!

But now you have to go and try and breed one yourself. As Day says, “If it were easy, everyone would be doing it!”

We have some suggestions.

Go to top aviaries and ask to see the parents of the big winners. Look at the mother of the best show birds and best producing birds. This can be truly educational. Very few will be big winners. Some will be “nice”, not quite up to win-

ning hen status. Others will be quite “yellow” feathered. Budgie breeders Bill Novickas and Larry Day used to have the “\$10,000 education” for novices that visited. There were four hens — each having bred champions, grand champions or top producers. No one wanted to take them home, they were not good enough. But they were all “well bred” and related to many winners.

One of the best-headed birds Denny ever bred was a huge yellow-faced chick. An intermediate breeder had come by a few months before the mating was made that produced this bird and berated Denny for being a champion and having such a cully, small, yellow feathered hen in his aviary. This hen was the daughter of a Best in Show winner and of course, became the mother of the good-headed yellow face.

One last potentially helpful hint about feather. Once Larry Day had his choice to borrow one of 25 imports. They were a medium looking lot — not bad, not good. Day looked at them several times over a period of six hours. At first and second and third glance he was not going to borrow any of them. Then he noticed one hen that showed a tremendous throw. When she rolled her head it grew almost three times as large, then tightened back down into an average looking hen. The hen was basically a yellow feathered hen, but with world class length of feather on her head that only showed when she blew, which was not often. She produced Day’s flecked Best in Show winner who won despite her flecking. A prominent English judge declared her among the best hens anywhere.

So good luck. Don’t sit at home all of the time. Develop your eye. And study good management. You can’t progeny test your breeders if you don’t get any progeny. ➤



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