

Something New? The Lutino Red-rumped Parakeet.

by Roger Bringas, North Hollywood, CA

Being born and raised here in Southern California, I have had so many wonderful chances to meet and associate with some of the finest and most experienced aviculturists in this country, and perhaps the world. Our wonderful and normally hospitable weather here in the Southland allows for tremendous opportunities for those who wish to establish outdoor aviaries, as well as semi-tropical gardens.

My initial schooling in aviculture came from spending countless hours with Mr. Tony Lopez of San Fernando, Mr. David West of Montebello, Mr. Paul Schneider of Riverside, Mr. & Mrs. Harold King of Arleta, and Mr. Gordon Hayes of San Pedro. I also had the pleasure in my youth to have met on various occasions Dr. Jean Delacour, Mrs. T.M. Towne, Mrs. Rudkin and Mr. Bernard Roer to name but a few. In some large or small way, all of these truly knowledgeable people had an impact on my life and had much to share with a naive and ignorant 16 year old who was never hesitant to ask questions.

Diplomacy was another concept I learned immediately, as one had to be very careful regarding who's name was mentioned at which camp. Yes, there were heavy politics, I learned, even in the bird business.

Here in the "Golden State" we have the privilege of obtaining a driver's license at the age of 16. The third of six children, I was not able to truly pursue

my passion of birds until I had a means of transportation whereby I could go and visit the aviaries of established breeders. Wasting no time, I was first in line at the Department of Motor Vehicles on my 16th birthday to avail myself of that same privilege. Thus, I shall always be extremely grateful to both of my parents who were quite permissive in allowing me the use of their cars (for hours at a time), and for being more and more generous concerning my reclamation of the backyard for building more and more aviaries.

I incorporated the above brief history into this article for two reasons.

First, I believe that it's important to acknowledge and remember the accomplishments of the many pioneers of American aviculture to whom I think we now owe a great deal.

Secondly, it's worth mentioning that when certain mutations arise, it's not always easy to determine the proper name for an odd or new mutation color. Consequently, many of the experienced "old timers" were themselves guilty of using and perpetuating incorrect names.

Identifying a mutation and naming it accordingly, isn't always as easy as it seems. Let's take for example some

Photos by Roger Bringas



A pair of Adult Red-rumped Parakeets, the more brilliantly colored male on the right.



Adult male Red-rumped Parakeet. Note the pure whites and the bright yellows set off by the fiery red rump.

now common Cockatiels. It wasn't that long ago that lutinos were called "albino." They looked white, they looked like an albino, but did they fit the definition? Of course we know the answer

now. And how about the pearl? This, too, is a mis-named mutation as it is actually an opaline. In fact, this entire subject of proper nomenclature deserves an article in and of itself.

I bring this to the readers attention because there seems to be some confusion regarding two Red-rump mutations. The most common Red-rump mutation is the mis-named *yellow* Red-rump. It is sometimes confused with the *lutino* Red-rump which is new and exceptionally different in color and much more uncommon.

The so called *yellow* Red-rump is in fact a cinnamon mutation. The bird is sex-linked and its reduction of melanistic pigment reduces its color making it seem more of a yellowish. Thus the name "yellow" Red-rump which, although descriptive, is incorrect.

The *lutino* Red-rump is similarly sex-linked, but it is void of all melanin and its colors are extremely sharp and well defined.

My first glimpse of a lutino Red-rump came when I was on a trip to Australia and New Zealand. Although true lutino Red-rumps had been in existence for some time in Australian aviaries, I didn't see one until the mid 1980s while in Sydney. I was struck by the strong contrasts of deep yellow and clean white that the cock birds especially held. Added to this, was the brilliant and vibrant "red rump" making it one of the truly spectacular color mutations I had ever seen.

From Australia I traveled to Auckland, New Zealand where I told a breeder friend of mine how taken I was with this new mutation I had just seen. He told me that he knew a small breeder not too far away with the same mutation. We visited the breeder and I was shocked to find the conditions that these delightful birds were housed in. The aviaries were small, dark, and damp with earthen floors. The birds were on a pure seed and water diet and the breeder reported that he would raise about as many babies as he would lose each year and that he wasn't getting anywhere with these birds. He felt that they were just too weak and that they were a mistake of nature.

It took a great deal of persuasion on

my part, but after pleading my case to this New Zealander for over an hour about why he should allow me to have a start with this mutation, this "mistake of nature," he finally, begrudgingly agreed to part with two lutino hens.

Somehow the birds survived the import and quarantine process, and upon release I had my veterinarian give them a thorough examination. It came as no surprise that the birds were plagued with intestinal parasites and were also suffering from a strong bacterial infection. They were very much overweight, so much so that they were not able to fly up six feet from the floor of their aviary to their perches. They were immediately put on a restrictive low-fat diet consisting of sprouts, fruits, and vegetables, and medicated for their specific needs.

I then placed them in a large aviary which gave them plenty of sunshine and exercise, and in a few months their overall health and appearance improved dramatically. The two hens became much more active, flying from perch to perch with robust bursts of speed demonstrating strength and agility.

I have found Red-rumps in general to be fairly easy birds to work with, and had no trouble in pairing both hens up with strong, vigorous, normal cock birds. It was very important to me to choose the best mates possible for these hens, and I was careful not to mix the cinnamon or "yellow" line into these true lutinos. I separated the hens from each other and after a week or so I introduced them to their new mates. Both pairs bonded immediately and I noticed the cocks feeding the hens within hours of being introduced.

The next spring, one pair produced two progeny, and the other pair produced six. Being a sex-linked mutation, only the cock birds resulting from these matings would be "split" or carrying the lutino gene, and, of course, all of the resulting hens, since they couldn't be split, would be only normals.

One of the two from the first pair was a male, and therefore split to lutino, as were two of the second pair's six. Armed with three split cocks, I believed that I could establish this mutation with just a little luck.

Rather than pairing the split cock birds to the original lutino hens, I decided to outcross all three of them to unrelated normal hens. My goal was to produce several bloodlines of strong birds from which I could build a good foundation of lutino stock. Again I was careful and selective in choosing the largest and most prolific lines that I could find. This doesn't guarantee that one will always produce better birds, but it's the best way I know on hedging one's bet.

Working with birds to selectively improve one's line, one must consider many variables such as size, conformation, color, fertility, clutch size, nesting, and feeding habits etc.. When pairing birds, especially new color mutations, it's financially tempting to take short cuts and breed lutino to lutino in this case, or blue to blue, or albino to albino so as to produce 100% of the desired color the fastest way possible. Too much inbreeding takes place, and rather than strengthening the line, the resulting birds become smaller and weaker.

Some of the European breeders I have seen in Belgium and Holland are unfortunately doing just that. Pairs of lutino Red-rumps are mated lutino to lutino and "egg factories" are set up. In some cases hormones are used to encourage more egg production and all eggs are fostered under other less valuable pairs. All too often, the resulting offspring will be smaller, weaker, and less productive. Many of the weak birds which don't breed will be wholesaled out, or sold for a low price to bird dealers. The dealers not concerned with reputation will in turn export the birds to another dealer or importer in another country, and finally some unsuspecting individual here or elsewhere purchases a questionable bird. Perhaps this may be the reason why the European line of lutino Red-rumps has gained a poor reputation.

The American line of lutino Red-rumps is now firmly established. They are large, beautiful, strong birds which have been a pleasure to work with for several years. I hope this article clarifies the difference between the "yellow" and the lutino Red-rumps, and that they will bring as much joy to other aviculturalists as they have given me. ➤