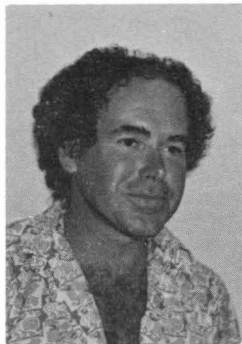




# agapornis acres

by Lee Horton



**AGAPORNIS PERSONATA**

**THE MASKED LOVE BIRD**

Lee Horton

Before beginning this article on the Masked Love Bird, it is with pride that I announce the hatching of a new bird to American Aviculture. I have been fortunate to raise the first Albino Peach Face Love Bird. The bird is in excellent health, and it is pale lemon yellow in color as anticipated, not pure white (cf. A.F.A. Watchbird Vol. II Num. 5 pg. 13).

The parentage itself is the most interesting part of the story. The father, a green/albino (i.e. split both blue and Lutino) is mated to another hen in a colony of Blue Birds (approximately 11 pairs). An explanation is difficult, however, I am sure all of us have had some similar experience. The male, as far as I knew, was mated to a blue hen in the aviary. In their first nest she hatched two green birds and a red eyed bird that died in the shell. This bird would have been Albino, if it had lived, since it had white down. The hen was sitting on a new clutch of eggs when I noticed in a nest box on the other wall of the aviary a new hatching. The blue hen in this box had, as I now realize, also mated to the green/Albino male and it is from her that we hatched three babies, an Albino, a Lutino and a Blue.

Genetically the Albino and the Lutino are both hens, the Lutino hen is also split Albino. The Blue bird has a 50% chance of being split Albino if it is a MALE. If it is a hen, it is then a normal blue.

Not to belabor the point, I will now proceed with the original intent of this article — the Masked Love Bird. In a future issue I will hopefully go into a more technical analysis of the Albino.

The Masked is a member of the Eye Ring series of the African Love bird. The

four consist of the Masked, Nyassaland, Black Cheeked and Fischer's. All four types in the Eye Ring are very closely related and will interbreed freely.

The Masked is a free breeder and is only second to the Peach Face in popularity. They are dramatic in color, the face and head is black with a white skin area around the eyes. The beak is brilliant red. The neck and upper breast is bright yellow which diminishes as it circles the back of the neck. The remainder of the bird, i.e. the lower breast, wings and back, are green but deeper on the wings and back. A small area on the lower rump is violet blue. This all together combines for striking color and in turn a deservedly desirable bird.



Entrance to aviary for African Love Birds at Agapornis Acres.

The Masked Love Bird builds the most elaborate nest of all the Agapornis. There is an entry chamber which leads to a lower chamber in which the hen lays her clutch of eggs usually numbering five or six. The nest box, itself, is about the same size as that used for budgerigar. They will build their nest out of almost any material offered. We use palm fronds as they remain green for a very long time and this in turn helps keep a high humidity which is beneficial in the hatching of the eggs.

The Masked, like the Peach Face, can be bred in pairs or in colonies. In colonies it is always important to provide extra nest boxes to help eliminate fighting. The hens will kill each other over a favorite nest.

The strongest hen will normally end up with the so-called preferred nest and the next-strongest the nest nearest to it. It is also a helpful hint to place the nest in the area of strongest light, but never in direct sun.

The Blue mutation of the Masked Love Bird occurred here in California many years ago and now is well established. In fact it is even more reliably bred than its green relative. The Blue Masked is a lovely color of blue with a white neck and upper breast. It also has a black face and head, a white eye ring and a pink bill. This mutation is strong and has bred well for many generations. It is, therefore, to no surprise that the Blue Masked has been bred to Blue Masked with excellent results. This is perhaps in direct connection to the fact that the birds were cross bred to normal green for strength from the beginning. Today this cross breeding is no longer necessary, in fact, so many greens were crossed bred to the blue that it is almost impossible to find a pure green. I should point out here that the Blue is recessive to green and is, therefore, bred in the same manner as the blue peach face. To my knowledge all the mutations of Masked to date are genetically recessive.

In the last year or two many wild caught masked Love Birds have been brought into the United States. Hopefully breeders will keep some of these birds pure and not cross them to the blues. It is also interesting to note that the wild caught birds that have been brought into the U.S. have a much better depth of color, especially in the Black of the head. Over many generations, we



A colony of Black Masked Blues also showing one Black Cheeked.

seem to have lost some of the clarity and depth of color. There is also some suspicion that the masked and fischer's were crossed bred many years ago and that there are few true masked left. When purchasing masked love birds always pick birds that are dark masked. A sure sign of a hybrid (that is of possible fischer background) is if the mask just above the nostrils is rusty or brownish in color, also just behind the ears there will be rusty coloration instead of near black. It is a



*Black Cheeked.*

wise aviculturist who avoids such birds as purity of color is important especially if you are interested in breeding these birds.

Another variance in color is a very small area just below the bill. It is reddish in color where most birds are pure yellow. This is noticeable in most groups of masked birds. In Enland they even advertise red necked masked as a desirable feature and charge a higher price for such a bird. Most people seem to think that this is a natural variation in the masked love bird and through selective breeding one could breed birds with larger areas of red coloring. It is my personal opinion that the Black cheeked crossed to the masked would produce this coloring as the Black Cheeked has a salmon patch just below the bill. I have personally bred hybrids between these two and my theory is that years ago some Black cheeks were crossed with Masked and, therefore, there is some Black cheeked blood in some of the Masked, causing this reddish color. I am not entirely against hybridizing but there must be a definite purpose and it must be done in an orderly and controlled manner. In a future article I will write on this in detail explaining some of the programs that we have here undertaken.

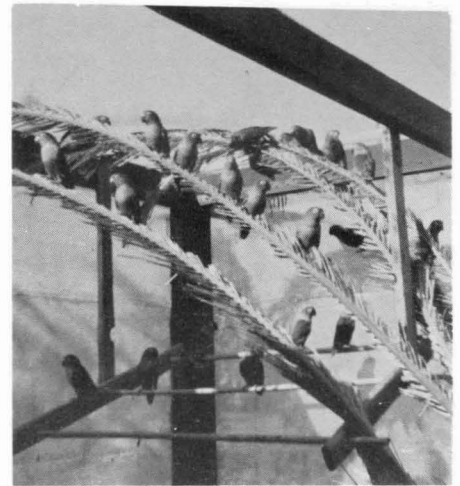
Another beautiful mutation of the Masked Love Bird is the dilute yellow. This bird originates in the Orient and has never been established here in the U.S. We recently were fortunate enough to acquire four additional dilute yellows to add to the original one we had raised

over a year ago. At the same time we also were fortunate enough to acquire two dilute whites (a combination of Blue and Yellow). It is our hope that by crossing these birds back to wild caught greens and our best domestic Blues that we will be able to establish these lovely birds in our breeding colonies.

The dilute yellow is light yellow with a slight green suffusion. The bill is bright red and the mask is pale rosy brown. In the blue form (dilute white) it is white with a blue silver suffusion. The bill is pink and the mask is a pale silver.

Other mutations have occurred but none have been established. Pies have cropped up but never been reproduced, therefore, leading us to the belief that it was a feather deterioration. Lutinos have been heard of but no real evidence has been ever shown to my knowledge of their existence.

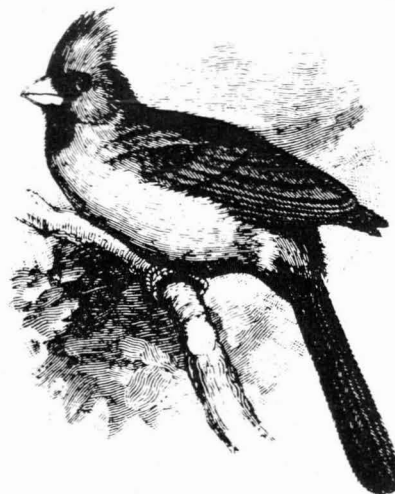
The Masked Love Bird is a perfect aviary bird and many aviculturists now have sound breeding programs to improve these birds. In past years many young have suffered high mortality in the first eight months. Many drugs have been tried to no avail. At this time no complete solution has been found. It is the opinion of a few veterinarians and a few aviculturists that this is prob-



*Fischer's Love Birds*

ably caused by a disease common to chickens and other fowl which is passed from parent to chick through the embryo of the egg. Through the cooperation of the state labs who are now testing these birds and programs using recommended drugs, we soon should be free of this problem. When we have more definite results, I will report them to you in detail. Through better and more scientific programs, plus the advantages of the new wild caught blood, I am confident we will be successful in maintaining these beautiful birds for future generations ■

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