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# Olde Tymer Gordon Hayes and the American Cobalt Indian Ring-necked Parakeet

*(The "piece de resistance" to a remarkable avian career)*

by Roger Bringas, North Hollywood, CA

I have travelled extensively in pursuit of rare and mutation-colored birds since my teens and have with great pleasure met many extraordinary men and woman all over the world—men and women who have contributed substantially to aviculture in their own unique ways. Having visited many of the private and public psittacine collections on four continents, it takes something really special to overwhelm me.

Overwhelmed I was, though, when I first saw the magnificently beautiful *American* cobalt Indian Ring-necked Parakeet. But, perhaps more extraordinary than the bird itself, is the man

whom this article is focused on — Mr. Gordon Hayes. In the specialized mutation-colored parrot world, he truly is a man among men.

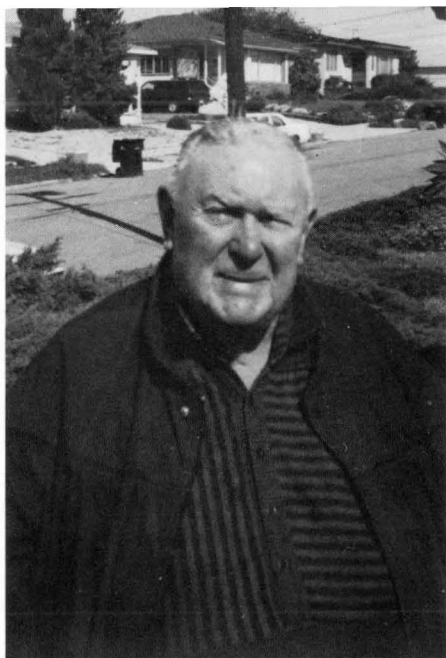
Born April 13, 1918 in Los Angeles, California young Gordon was special even at birth as he was born a twin. Having three brothers and one sister, he grew up during the great depression enjoying the simple pleasures of what his father's modest income provided during such difficult times.

At the age of eight, Gordon Hayes took an interest in racing pigeons, built a loft in the backyard, and started flying his own birds. His enthusiasm carried over to his older brother and even

Photo by Roger Bringas



Gordon Hayes in his aviary. The lush plants and mild climate make the birds feel at home.



*Gordon Hayes, master aviculturist.*

to his father as they both joined in his racing pigeon hobby.

By the time Hayes was 15 he had started his own pigeon club, and two years later he started yet a second larger club called the Lincoln Racing Pigeon Club. Racing pigeons had become an important interest in his life but little did he know how they would indirectly influence his destiny and the paths he was to take in the future.

Gordon's grandfather maintained a gentleman's ranch in a suburb of Los Angeles called Montebello. The property next to his grandfather's had several large aviaries with hundreds of budgies, demonstrating fabulous colors. This menagerie of color greatly impressed Hayes and ignited his interest in foreign birds. His family physician, knowing that he was keen on all species of birds, gave him a few pairs of Zebra Finches and thus Hayes was on his way to breeding aviary birds, a hobby he would maintain over a lifetime.

Hayes attended Cal Poly University where he earned a bachelors degree in entomology. After graduation, he joined the county of Los Angeles and worked as a junior entomologist until he was drafted into the army in 1941. Hayes had nearly served all of his one year obligatory service when his military career was extended because of the December 7th attack on Pearl Harbor.

Initially he served under General George Patton, training in the deserts

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of California. Once the war was underway he was transferred to the "pigeon corps" where his expertise with racing pigeons was recognized and he was placed in charge of a "combat mobile pigeon loft."

His duties took him to the front lines of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Italy, and France where he worked closely with the U.S. and British intelligence services. Oftentimes Hayes found himself on covert missions working side by side with spies and espionage specialists. The famous racing pigeon "G.I. Joe" was in Hayes' same outfit. While in North Africa, Hayes noticed that many local people kept a variety of song birds, Canaries, Budgies, and Ring-necked Parakeets. His powers of persuasion were successful enough to get him a few pairs of Budgies which he kept and bred in the Army pigeon lofts. After leaving Tunisia, the invasion of Italy took place. The pigeon corps was growing, but so was the level of danger.

When the war in Europe ended, Hayes finished his duty in the service as a Master Sergeant. He arrived home safely to Los Angeles in 1946 with his lovely Italian bride Sylvia whom he met while on duty in Northern Italy.

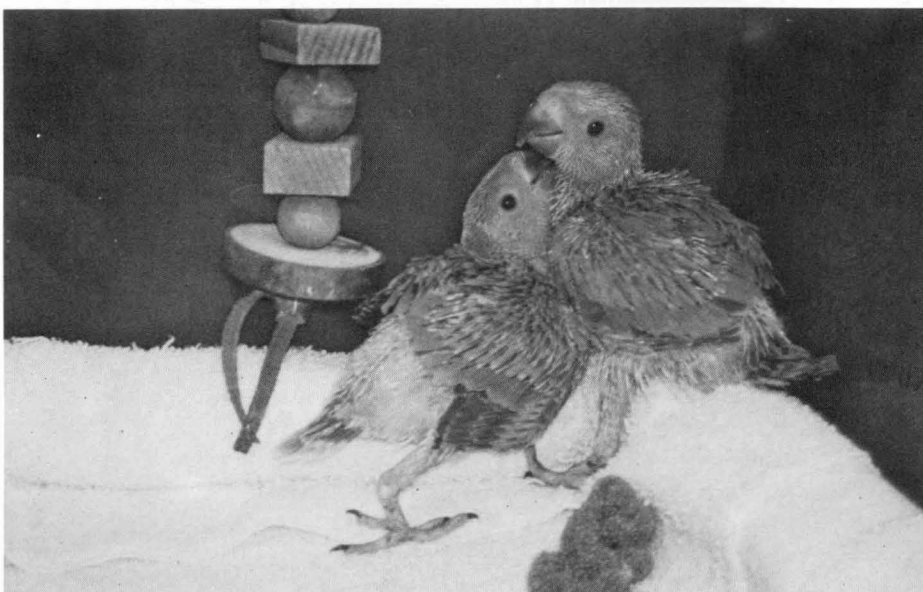
He was hired by the city of Los Angeles and went to work as a public health inspector. On a picturesque site overlooking the Pacific Ocean Hayes and his wife established their residence and built his pigeon lofts and

aviaries.

In the late 1940s, David West sold Hayes his first hookbilled birds (aside from Budgies)—one pair of Princess of Wales and one pair of Elegant Parakeets. Hayes followed up on his interest with Budgies and soon became a regular on the English Budgie show circuit exhibiting his own fine champions. About this same time he acquired one pair of green Indian Ring-necked Parakeets which went on to produce the first sex-linked cinnamon Ringnecks in the United States. Oddly enough, there was no appreciation for that particular color mutation at that time, forcing Hayes to wholesale more than 20 cinnamons to a dealer to unload his excess stock.

Fortunately, the lack of interest in cinnamon Ringnecks did not dissuade Hayes from working with other colored mutations of that species. His affiliation and friendship with Ray Thomas (a wealthy businessman with a private zoo permit), Dave West (a pioneer in mutation birds), Max Sanders (a sharp bird dealer), and Mr. & Mrs. Poi (friends who had excess aviary space) allowed him a network from which he could pool resources and maximize his breeding efforts.

Ray Thomas once mentioned to Hayes that he personally knew the Minister of Agriculture in Fiji. When Hayes became interested in importing parrots, he and Thomas asked the Minister for help with permits. The Minis-



Baby cobalt mutation Ringnecks.

Photo by Gordon Hayes

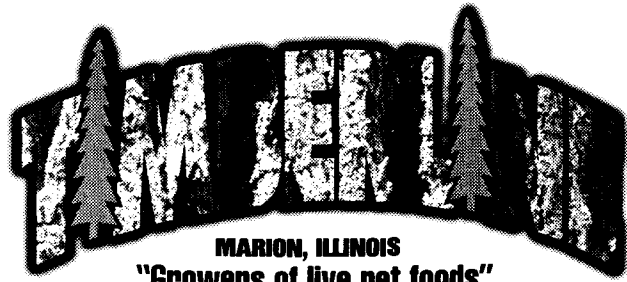
ter was happy to help but wanted a favor in return—a male and two female Beagle Hounds, one male and two female Wild Turkeys, and 12 Jack Rabbits. TWELVE JACK RABBITS?

This set Hayes back a bit. Nevertheless, he tried. Taking his long-handled bird net into the desert, Hayes worked up a serious sweat, lost a lot of weight, and finally figured out he was no match for a Jack Rabbit on open ground. At last he found a hunting magazine that advertised Jack Rabbits for sale. Without asking how they caught the rabbits, Hayes ordered a dozen.

The deal was made and the Hayes/Thomas team received 500 Red-faced Parrotfinches and a handful of other “weird ones” thrown in. The Minister got his hounds, turkeys, and Jack Rabbits but only God knows what he did with them.

In 1953 Ray Thomas ordered one pair of blue Ringnecks from a dealer in India who promised he could get them. Months later, beating all odds, the birds arrived in Los Angeles. To Thomas’ surprise and disappointment the birds were not blue, but rather par-blue. Thomas refused to pay the Indian dealer for the unremarkable birds and, adding insult to injury, never sent them back. The pair was housed in a large aviary filled with pheasants and odd species with absolutely no hope of breeding. Hayes commented to Thomas that if he were ever to sell or trade the par-blue birds, he would be interested in them. Approximately 10 years later Thomas did decide to downsize his animal collection and Hayes became the happy owner of one pair of par-blue Indian Ringnecks.

A few months later, on Christmas day, Hayes went out to check his birds. To his dismay he found the cockbird dead with a broken neck. The hen was subsequently paired to a green cock split lutino and fate smiled on Hayes as many young were produced. The mutation was given the name “turquoise blue” and it was from this single hen that all the turquoise blues in this country and in Europe were derived. A second wild caught turquoise was imported and bred in the U.S. in the late 1980s.



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In the early 1970s, Hayes lent Dave West a turquoise split lutino cock which West paired to an albino hen. Fate dealt a double-sided hand to both men. The pairing produced the very first "cream albino" Ringneck in the world, but they were only able to admire the unique bird for a short time as it was eventually stolen from West's ranch. Other cream albinos were subsequently produced and the foundation stock of these mutations well established.

Another interesting mutation that was somehow obtained by Hayes in the 60s was a pied Ringneck cock bird. It was typically marked green and yellow, but the yellow did not expose itself on the bird until it reached maturity. Hayes paired this pied cock to a normal green hen and then bred the cock back to its daughter. Pies were eventually bred and Hayes, in a moment of confusion, gave all of the pied birds away to a friend and fellow breeder who in turn gave away the pies as pets.

In retrospect this was rather a costly error as this strain of pied has not since appeared and the pied mutation in general is not established here in the U.S. There are a variety of "pied looking" birds throughout the country, but we are still lacking a true, consistent pied mutation.

Most people don't think of senior citizens when they consider sex and propagation. Well Hayes didn't let this deter him when in 1982 he paired a 22-year-old green cock split for blue and lutino with a similarly ancient turquoise hen. The pair was unremarkable except that the cock was crippled and could not fly. The hen was turquoise but a very dark turquoise. From this pairing of seniors a dark green hen was produced. A bird which would go on to be the foundation for all of the dark factor birds here in the U.S. and a mutation which would have an extraordinary impact on Indian Ringneck mutation breeding around the world.

The dark green was a hen, and two years later in 1984 it was paired to a blue cock. She laid five eggs in her first clutch and the first four babies to hatch were normal looking greens. The fifth baby was different, very different. The

feathers had grown just a few millimeters past the ends of the quills, enough so that the color could be detected. Hayes called several of his friends to see the little miracle which he took into his house for handfeeding. The bird was the most striking color of blue—almost violet—that one could imagine. Dave West commented "If I ever had a bird like this, I would move a chair in front of the aviary and watch it all day long."

But the question remained, was this new color a cobalt or a violet mutation? We now know that the mother, the dark green hen, was indeed split for blue and that the mutation was dominant. Was there also a violet factor, as well as a dark factor influencing this exceptional color? The odds were against it and in time it would be proven that this new, amazing mutation was positively a cobalt, as all subsequent dark factored blue birds (cobalts) were identical in color. It was an unprecedented moment in the development of domestic mutations and one which will have a great impact on future Ringneck breeding for a great many years to come.

It should be noted that some years after Hayes first bred the cobalt, another breeder in Belgium claimed to have the same mutation. I have seen both mutations and in my opinion the *American* cobalt is a superior bird in color as it is more of an attractive violet shade. The European mutation is nice, but there is a recognizable difference.

Hayes continually kept back all of the dark factored green and dark factored blue birds raised, earmarking them as the nucleus for his breeding stock. Five of these very special birds were housed in an aviary that had been used for years. Everything was fine until the neighbor next door decided to spray his trees and shrubs with a chemical pesticide. A lethal amount of overspray killed all of the young dark greens and cobalts Hayes had been counting on for future breeding. Needless to say, this was a devastating setback. Hayes continued on and has now managed to firmly establish the dark green and cobalt mutations.

Some people may not be familiar

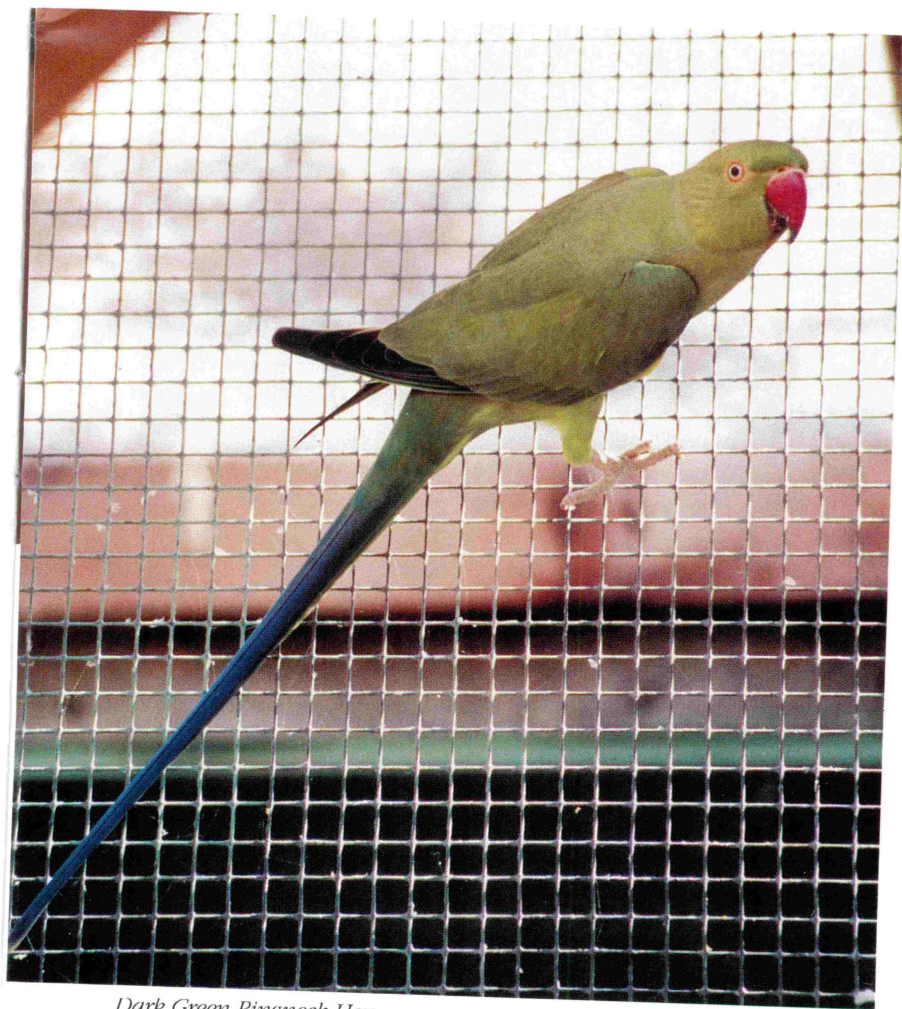
with the names that have been used here and perhaps a brief explanation will help clarify the nomenclature. This "dark factor" mentioned in this article is a dominant mutation, meaning that only one visual or homozygous bird is needed to pass on the dark factor trait. Keeping with all other dominant mutations, there are no splits or birds which are heterozygous for this color. So either the dark factor is present visually or it's not.

At this time it is most suitable to use the universally accepted Budgie standard nomenclature as our reference. Thus in the green series, a single dark factor green is traditionally called a dark green; a double dark factor green is called an olive. In the blue series, a single dark factor blue is called a cobalt; a double dark factor blue is called a mauve. It is highly advisable that breeders do not refer to a bird as a *dark factor*, but as a dark green or cobalt whichever is befitting. Apparently there are a few people misrepresenting their birds as "dark factors" and their birds have not proven to produce a recognizable mutation.

For the record, it should be noted that in 1988 Hayes received three sex-linked cinnamon yellow-heads (sometimes incorrectly referred to as lacewings) which were originally imported from Belgium. He paired two of the birds together and, at the age of one year, they produced three visual cinnamon yellow-heads. This constituted the first breeding of this mutation in the United States.

Gordon Hayes has spent a lifetime around birds. In 1981 he self-published a fine book about his experiences in the army's pigeon corps titled *The Pigeons That Went To War*. He is a good-hearted, honorable, trustworthy, man who has been both a friend and inspiration to me and to many others. My life certainly has been enriched by knowing him. His numerous achievements with several mutations are exceptional and those who appreciate mutations now know to whom they owe just a little thanks. I am most grateful for all of the advice, time, lunches, and friendship that I have shared with Gordon Hayes and his wife, and look forward to many more years of the same. 🐦





*Dark Green Ringneck Hen.*



*Dark Green and a Cobalt.*

Photos courtesy of Gordon Hayes

*Cobalt in the foreground,  
Bluegreen (Turquoise)  
in the rear.*



*Dark Green, Cobalt, and Lutino, what a color selection.*

