

# Alexandrine Mutations; Where Are They All?

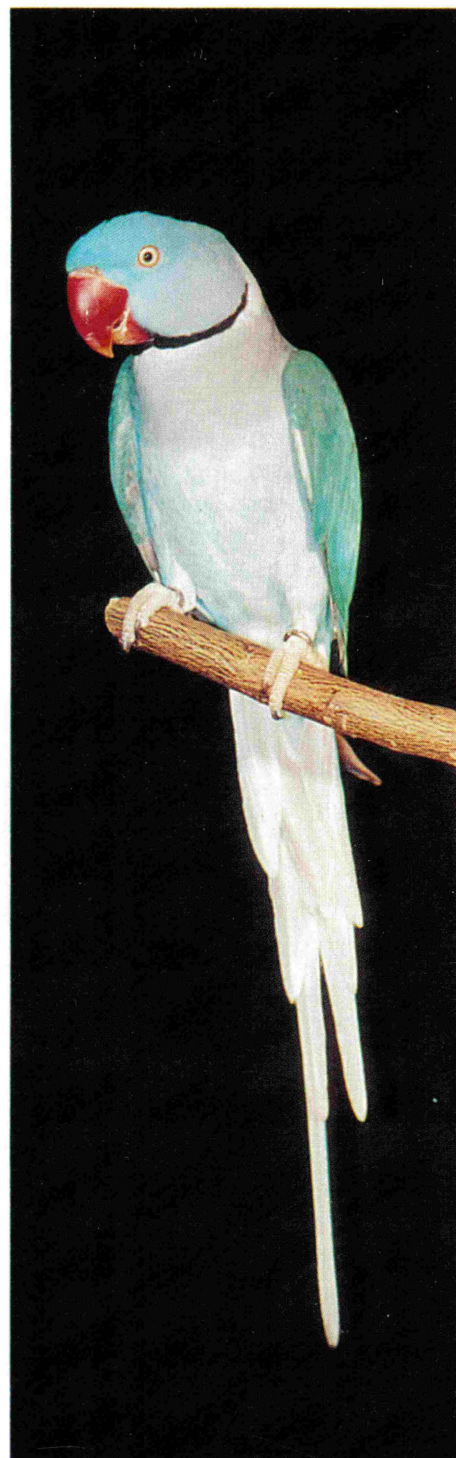
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*Lutino Alexandrine Adult hen.*

**A**lexandrine Parakeets *Psittacula eupatria* have quite a large geographic distribution ranging from Afghanistan and Pakistan to countries in Southeast Asia such as Thailand and Vietnam. As with many bird species, I have found that quite often the more northern sub-species are larger than the specimens which are distributed in the more southern regions. Thus the Alexandrines found in northern India are much larger than those found in Thailand.

Many people have the misconception that their habitat is limited to the jungle scrubland of India but that is probably due in part to their popular close cousin with the descriptive name, the Indian Ring-necked Parakeet. Another reason may be because earlier on in this century the majority of *Psittaculids* which came to England and continental Europe, were captured and sent from India. Many American aviculturalists kept in close contact with British enthusiasts and news pursuant to birds was related back and forth across the Atlantic. A few years ago, while visiting with George Smith in the U.K., I had the marvelous opportunity to spend hours in his voluminous library, reading over copies of the English Avicultural Society journals and became aware of the various mutation Alexandrines that were kept by some of



*Blue Alexandrine adult cock.*

the early English aviculturalists.

In the early part of this century, there were a few very wealthy and prominent aviculturalists in England. Sir Alfred Ezra, his brother David Ezra, and the Marquis of Tavistock later to be known as the Duke of Bedford were probably the strongest collectors and breeders of psittacine birds and their mutations. The Ezras had business interests in the Indian tea trade and kept a keen eye out for rare mutation colored parrots. In 1923 the Ezras obtained an adult pair of mutation Alexandrines, a blue cock and a lutino hen. Initially they were paired together and only infertile eggs resulted year after year. Then they were each paired to normal greens and in 1928 two green birds were fledged by the lutino. The following six years found similar success with the addition of eight more green offspring. Then in 1935 the original lutino hen was paired back to her son and two lutinos resulted from three chicks. In 1929 the blue had its first chicks and reared four. In 1930 it had three and in 1931 it had four more. In 1934 the original blue cock was paired to one of its daughters and both a blue and green bird were reared.

By 1939 they had bred six blue Alexandrines and many more split birds but then tragedy struck with the onset of World War II. Besides having to deal with the occasional bomb, the only food available for the birds was poultry food and that was severely rationed. There was virtually nothing to feed the animals with, and by the war's end the entire line of lutino and blue Alexandrines had died off, not to be seen again in Europe until the early 1970s.

In 1965 a dear friend of mine, Dave West, along with Rae Anderson had embarked upon a breeding project which Dave termed "a planned mutation." The primary color mutations of the Indian Ring-neck Parakeet, lutino, blue, albino and cinnamon had been established, still some of these colors were rather rare and difficult to obtain. There were just a few pied-looking birds scattered around the country, a turquoise blue line, and in Europe there were grey-greens and isabells. It was obvious that the Ringneck mutations had a strong following in Europe

and America and both new and combined mutations were subsequently appearing every few years.

The focus of mutation colors was directed to the Alexandrines and because there weren't any in this country, a few breeders, notably Dave West, Rae Anderson, and Hank Johnson, began hybridized breeding projects of various Ringneck colors into the Alexandrine line in an effort to create a mutation-colored Alexandrine, thus "a planned mutation," but a more accurate title would have been "a planned hybrid."

I have seen several hybrids of lutino Indian Ringnecks to Alexandrines and the goal is simple. Breed the lutino Ringneck into the normal green Alexandrine in an attempt to obtain a lutino Alexandrine. The more one breeds back to the pure Alexandrine, the closer the hybrid becomes to looking like a true Alexandrine and less like the Ringneck. I have seen some some lutino hybrid birds which have been bred back to six generations of Alexandrines and they do look quite good, yet a sharp, educated eye can detect the small amount of hybrid blood.

One of the many problems with the hybrid lutino Alexandrines is that once a fairly large sized bird has been established, the transfer of color to the wing patch and neckline can be inconsistent. I have seen fairly good looking hybrids throw small, poorly colored offspring which is an obvious drawback when trying to pass the birds off as Alexandrines.

It is a much more difficult task to try and obtain a blue Alexandrine through hybridization since the blue is a recessive mutation and the breeding back of hybrid split birds to normal greens will only result in possible split hybrid birds.

In the early 1970s John Postema of Holland imported lutino and blue Alexandrines from India. He successfully outcrossed all of his birds to vigorous normal green birds and only now has a reasonable number of pairs of blues and lutinos to sustain the population of these mutations. From one of his original lutino birds, a gray-green mutation fledged which in turn has gone on to reproduce. I believe he is the first in the

world to have bred an albino Alexandrine mutation and hopes to breed a gray soon.

In 1987 I went to India for the first time in search of similar mutation-colored birds. After much hard work and a little sacrifice, my efforts were rewarded when, indeed, I too was fortunate enough to have secured a beautiful group of interesting mutation birds. Three Alexandrines were initially imported, a lutino, a grey-green, and a bird which has a very light cinnamon body with a green head. Some years later I obtained a spectacularly large blue cock and a very impressive lutino hen. The blue cock is now paired to a split blue hen and the lutino hen is paired to a split lutino cock.

The yellow color of the lutino Alexandrine is a slightly softer yellow than that of a lutino Indian Ringneck. Of course all of the dark red pigments remain on the upper wing patch as does the collar encircling the neck. The feet are light in color and the nails are white. The flight feathers range from white to very light yellow. Since this is a true sex-linked mutation, all visual lutino birds have red eyes. The blue mutation has a darker blue color on the back and head with a slightly softer blue color on the chest and belly. The feet are dark and the nails are black as in the normal. Flight feathers are black and dark blue. The dark purple-red wing patches become silver and the neck ring becomes black and white.

The wars in Europe took their toll on some of nature's most precious miracles. Fortunately, because of the high regard that the Indians place on Alexandrines for pets, small numbers of their mutations have once again been collected and exported into the hands of people who hopefully will go on to multiply their numbers. I am very grateful for all of the help, inspiration, and encouragement that Dave West gave to me during the years of our friendship, not only concerning birds but regarding life in general. Shortly before his death, he drove over to my home specifically to see the blue Alexandrine cock who had just molted out into his adult plumage.

Dave stared at the bird for a while and remarked "if God raises birds, He raises blue Alexandrines." ➤