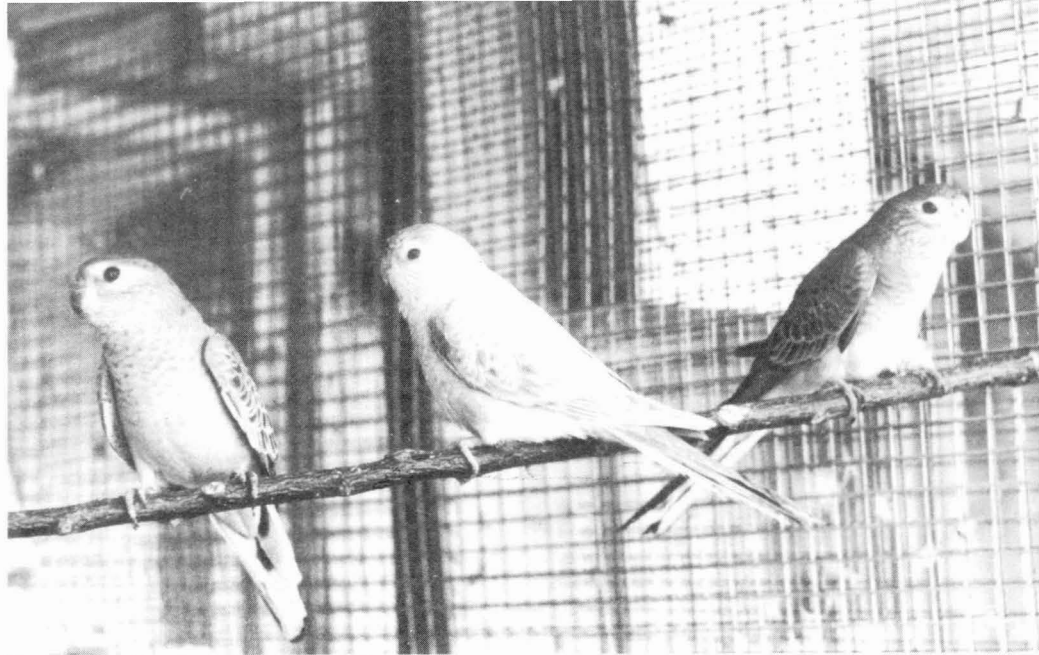


# the gentle little bourke

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Turquoise Aviaries



Two normal Bourkes with a yellow Bourke in center.

*NEOPSEPHOTUS BOURKII*, or *NEOPHEMA BOURKII*, The Gentle Little Bourke:

In response to a request, I shall endeavor to write a small article on the Bourke, one of my favorites of all the hook-bills.

The Bourke parakeet is from western New South Wales through western Australia. Approximately 10 inches long, the Bourke is considered by most to be a member of the grass parakeet family. Though much discussion has been given to this pro and con, a reported crossing of a Bourke and a Scarlet-Chested (*neophema splendida*) in Southern California in 1975 suggests to me that they are indeed a member of the group. The hybrid babies reportedly have Bourke coloring with some green on the wings. I have not confirmed this mating myself other than speaking to one of the co-owners of the birds.

The normal Bourke is a beautiful little bird, with grey, brown, pale blue, grey-olive, rose-pink on frontal areas, white around eyes, and blue marking on adult male's forehead, all blending into a gem in any aviary.

While flying in the aviary, the Bourke makes a whistling noise with its wings, unlike any other bird I've ever heard. It is a very quiet little bird, making a faint but musical whistle.

The yellow mutation of the Bourke is one instance, in my opinion, when the new mutation is an improvement of the original. The yellow cock mutation has red eyes, reddish legs and feet, a lot of cinnamon-yellow on the back, rose-pink on abdomen and upper breast, extending up over the shoulders and behind the head. The yellow female mutation is by far more beautiful and colorful than the male (quite an exception in hook-bills), with ruby eyes, and very little

original grey in the body, but a lot of yellow, white, blue, and cinnamon all blending together into a beautiful little bird.

The yellow mutation of the Bourkes is sex-linked, as are most red-eyes. Breeding yellow cocks to yellow hens in our Southern California aviaries has proven to be a very weak mating, with discouraging results. Out of 13 fertile eggs, only 3 hatched in six matings. Mating the yellow cock with a normal hen, and the yellow hen with a split or carrier cock (normal in color, split to yellow) has proven to be a much better mating.

I realize most aviculturists (myself included) are not too interested in genetics, other than wanting to know what to expect from certain matings:

Yellow cock x normal hen — all normal-colored babies will be cocks, split for yellow, and all yellow, red-eyed babies will be hens, meaning the chicks can be sexed from the day they hatch, and even from dead embryos in shell. This mating also allows new blood, or new genetic traits, to be introduced by changing the normal hens used in matings.

Yellow hen x split or carrier cocks — produces four possibilities of babies: yellow cocks, yellow hens, split/cocks, and normal hens, 25% each.

With the above two matings, it is easy to determine that more yellow hens than yellow cocks will be produced, making the yellow cock the most expensive and least common, but it is in my opinion a much stronger breeding, and a lot more birds are hatched than the yellow-to-yellow mating.

The third best mating would possibly be a split or carrier male to a normal hen, producing again four possibilities: a split cock, a normal cock, a yellow hen, and a normal hen, 25% each. The one drawback here is that all cocks will be normal in

color, and 50% of these will be split to yellow, making it a must to breed them in order to determine just what they are.

The yellow mutation of the Bourke is quite rare in the United States, having been imported from Europe, and possibly other areas. A limited supply should be available in 1977, hopefully!

I purposely didn't include any nesting or dietary factors in this article, as most aviculturists already know that all grass parakeets are fairly easy to raise, with the Bourke being probably the hardest of the group. With halfway decent care, they will do just fine. Most of mine are raised in a pen 3' wide, 8' long, and 6'3" high. Nest boxes are 6" x 8" x 10" high, with a 1-3/4" hole near the top.

Colony breeding is not recommended, though I do know of one case where it is being done.

If you decide to raise grass parakeets, start off with the Bourkes ■

Four yellow Bourke babies in the nest box.

