

# Mutations in Elegant Grass Parakeets

*Neophema elegans*

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**H**ave you ever seen a white mouse or rat with red eyes? I'm sure every one of us has seen one in real life or even owned one during our childhood years. Most people don't think much of it, but this lutino mutation is one of the most common mutations there is in the animal kingdom.

Webster's dictionary defines mutation this way: "*a. a sudden departure from the parent type in one or more heritable characteristics, caused by a change in a gene or a chromosome. b. an individual, species, or the like resulting from such a departure.*" <sup>1</sup>Albinic mice or rats are individuals with a change in a gene that is a sudden departure from the normal color, hence it qualifies as a mutation.

Today, there are quite a few mutations that can be seen in reptiles, fish, mammals, and birds some of which are quite common while others are extremely rare. Some of the albinic animals are considered so rare that they have been sought after to be hunted, trapped, or even worshiped for obvious reasons. In Asian countries, albino monkeys are considered to bring good luck. In Southeast Asia, albino elephants are worshiped as gods, and in American Indian culture, the albino buffalo is interpreted as a sign that a great change will soon take place.

In the world of birds, however, mutation is a common phrase and phenomenon. On several accounts, journals and reports have shown that several mutations of parrots have been seen or kept dated back in the 1800s. Today, there exist so many mutations just in Budgies alone that no one really knows how many there are exactly, let

alone naming them all. Even a hundred-page book cannot cover it in a thorough manner. Countless mutations already exist in the world of Cockatiels, lovebirds, Zebra Finches and Indian Ringnecks. All of these mutations have helped to keep aviculture both an interesting and a challenging avocation.

The genus *Neophema*, commonly known as the Grass Parakeets, are no strangers to most of the bird breeders. In recent years, numerous mutations have been seen in overseas collections, particularly in the Scarlet-chested, Turquoise, Elegant, and Bourke's Parakeets. Although only a handful of these mutations are available in the U.S. today, things will change.

This article will address the mutations that are known to exist in the species *Neophema elegans*, or the Elegant Grass Parakeet. The mutations illustrated here are well established in U.S. aviculture though still not in great numbers. Those who are fortunate enough to own them must be committed and endeavor to establish these mutations even further.

### Yellow

The yellow Elegant is an astonishing mutation. The green plumage has been replaced by a bright, solid yellow with a few birds occasionally showing some melanin. The blue on the wing and forehead has been replaced by white. The eyes are bright red and feet are light in color. It is a recessive mutation hence both males and females can be split. This mutation (sometimes

incorrectly called lutino) first appeared in Belgium during 1972 and was imported into the U.S. in 1982 and bred in 1983. Outcross with good, normal stock is strongly recommended to ensure the vitality of this mutation.

### Cinnamon

Cinnamon Elegants in the U.S. are often referred to as the European Cinnamon, because it is different from the Australian Cinnamon. Like the yellow, the European Cinnamon is a recessive mutation. It was first sighted in 1982 with an unknown origin. The cinnamon Elegants have light feet and beak and have a lighter shade of green and blue. The flight feathers are brownish and the beak is light horn color. The chicks have white down feather instead of usual gray. It can be combined into other mutations to form secondary colors.

### Pied

The pied Elegants are still a rarity in the U.S. and good examples of pids are hard to find. It was said to be developed in either Germany or Belgium during 1980s. It is a dominant mutation hence it only takes one pied parent to produce pied offspring, however, the best result is achieved by breeding a pied with another pied. Pied Elegants acquire more pied markings with each successive molt.

Recently, the pied mutation has been crossed with the cinnamon and cinnamon-pied offspring have been produced. This is a beautiful combination of two mutations (the two colors) that has two inheritable traits, one being dominant the other being recessive.

### Conclusion

There are bound to be more mutations popping up in Elegants in the future. As with all of the mutations, care, devotion, and patience is a must for the preservation of the genes. Without these avicultural qualities we stand the chance of losing a mutation forever.

### Sources

Random House Webster's College Dictionary—2nd ed.  
 Australian Grass Parakeets—Stan Sindel and James Gill



*A very nice yellow Elegant Parakeet. It looks like a lutino but is not, the genetics are recessive.*



*The feathers of the cinnamon Elegant (left) are noticeably lighter than those of the normally colored bird (right).*

Photos by Jim Chou