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Seldom Seen Budgerigars

by H.P. Macklin
 Pacific, Missouri

It is hardly believable that a little wild bird from Australia, originally found only in a bright green color with black trimmings, is an ancestor of today's many colored and designed "budgie." Found to be a prolific and loveable cage bird, this small parakeet has been developed from one color, by mutations at the hands of knowledgeable fanciers, into so many color varieties it is now one of the most popular of our pet birds.

It is reported that even in the wild state color mutations were noted, such as blue but these color differences never seemed to be able to increase. Probably one reason was such an odd color would stand out in a flock of all green and thus become easy prey for predators. Also the original green coloring is so dominant that a blue bird's offspring would revert back to green with no chance of reproducing the blue color. Even today with all the different colors that can be bred together respectively, the green will crop up most unexpectedly.

Down thru the years the budgerigar became a show bird in its own right. Today's exhibition budgie is probably 2/3's larger than his wild cousin. The heads are much larger with wide skulls and thick, compact bodies. The throat spots have been enlarged to possibly four times the size of the original and of course the colors now surpass the rainbow in variety. The first requisite in today's show bird is one of size and conformation. Most fanciers I have talked to seem to be color-blind and look only at the bigness of the bird. To a color enthusiast, like myself, this seems so strange. Unfortunately, the show-quality size seems to be centered in just a few of the many colors of the budgie. Most exhibition entries are comprised of greens and blues in their various shades in normals and opalines. Also the Lutinos (yellow red eye) and the Albino (white red eye) have also been developed to a larger size. Add to these the varieties of pied birds and that is the approximate extent of most entries to the show bench. I'm beginning to believe the majority of today's birds are mongrels, colorwise, because of the years of crossing the colors (regardless if they match or not) to get the much desired conformation and

bigness. Several years ago when I first started this color study I was mystified when some of my pairs would have, say, 5 babies in the nest with everyone a different color and different yet from the parents!

In the breeding of the budgerigars over the years many new color varieties have been created, hold the interest of a few fanciers for several seasons and then gradually return to the limbo from whence they sprung. Why? Mainly because they were not up to the exhibition standard; not because they were unique, a new color and beautiful in their own newness! Apparently all new mutations are on the small side and it would take several seasons of crossing on the larger birds to get them anywhere near to show competition. Most fanciers want instant show birds and so stay with the usual colors and patterns that produce the desired bigness. It is just too much time and work to bring up a new mutation to show requirements. And so we have, unfortunately, this shortage of the rarer varieties of parakeets that are infrequently shown and consequently the average fancier has a very hazy idea of just what beauty he is missing because he seldom has a chance to see it!

When I decided I wanted to breed these rarer varieties I sent letters to many fanciers that had shown possibly one such bird at a local exhibition. Many did not bother to answer and those who did usually had so few in their possession they had no desire to sell. But persistence usually pays off and after almost a year of correspondence I finally had a start in a few of the colors of these seldom seen budgerigars. I think it would make interesting reading to learn about a few of such varieties, and most importantly, to see an illustration of each kind described. So let's get on with the story of these rare little beauties . . .

The Clearwing Budgerigar

The first one to catch my interest, just from reading about how difficult it was to produce a good one, was the variety called Clearwings. But first let me describe it to you. The Clearwing is a bird of color contrasts. In the green series the body and tail are green with the head, neck, back and wings a pure yellow. In the blue series the body is blue with the head, neck, back, wings and tail a pure white. The throat spots are very faint and are NOT required in a show specimen. In breeding these birds the idea is to get the body color as deep and rich as possible and the wings to be as free of markings as possible. Unfortunately, today's Clearwings are not as "clear" as we would like them to be. I remember when my first pairs of Clearwings arrived I thought sure some mistake had been made because the birds looked to

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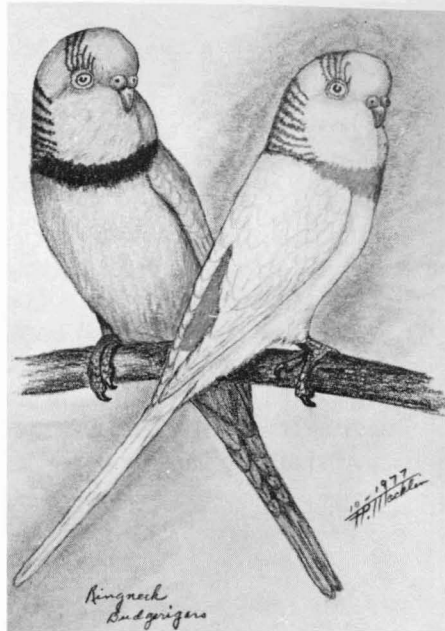


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Ringneck budgerigars

Drawing by H.P. Macklin

me like very light greywings. They were the blue series and of medium size, good conformation but definitely NOT the required big bird. Since I am primarily interested in color and markings in my birds, the smaller size of these birds did not really bother me.

I am now breeding the Clearwings (also frequently referred to as either yellow wings or white wings) in both colors. I am also trying to reduce the faint markings on the head, back and wings still further until they are really "clear" of all markings. Very few of the variety are in evidence at the exhibitions in the U.S. but in England they have a special Clearwing Club and many fanciers breed the variety and are responsible for the large entries at almost every English exhibition. The Clearwing is popular in England and I am told they have developed some birds of very good

size. If that is so then the variety has a very good chance of surviving.

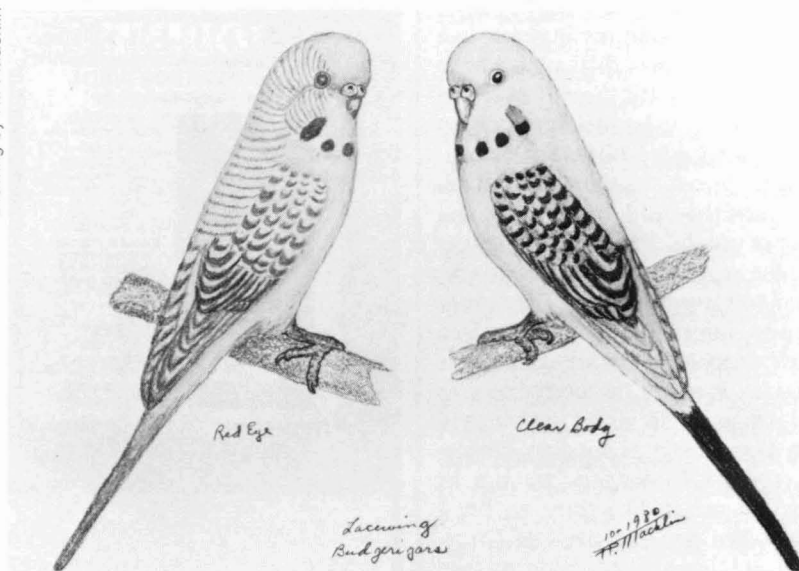
I have been told that years ago, when the variety was first mutated, that there were many birds that were absolutely free of markings and had the deep coloring which is so important to make the desired contrast of the body color from the wings. I personally think that the crossing of the Clearwings in the early days onto the Normals to make a larger show bird is probably responsible for the faint wing markings in today's Clearwings. Where color is concerned the Australian fanciers are probably the leaders. In some sections they give 50 and even 60 points for color and tone at the exhibitions. Comparatively, the American Standard allows the Clearwing the highest number of points for color of all varieties, at 35 points, which is considerably lower than Australian awards.

My breeding experience with the Clearwing has been a bit frustrating. I find the yellow wing shows a better color contrast as the green body color seems to hold a deeper tone easier than that of the white wings. I guess the blue color has a tendency to become lighter, so as to appear almost a blue tint in some cases, because the white on the rest of the bird possibly influences or weakens the blue color somewhat. So my problem at present is to darken the blue color of the white wings for a better color contrast. Also, the faint markings that show on the head, back and wings — faint though they be — have a tendency to tint the white area more a silvery-white.

The breeder of Clearwings certainly has a full sweep of color as there are three different shades of greens, blues in sky, mauve and cobalt, also violets. And greys which also come in light, medium and dark colored. Enough color there to please everyone!

Scale of point for the Standard Clearwing

Drawing by H.P. Macklin



Lacewing budgerigars, red eye-right, clear body-left.

Analysis per 3.5 grams (approximately one teaspoon)

A 600 IU
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In Australia the fanciers have also developed the Opaline Clearwing. In the U.S. this name usually refers to a "self" colored bird, meaning the wings are free of markings and (as much as possible) are the same color as the body. In other words, the Opaline Clearwing is approximately one color save for the head. However, in Australia the variety has been developed with a white or yellow wing and I am happy to report, the color contrast is very much in evidence and appears much more clear on wing markings than any of the American birds. In my illustration you can readily see the difference in the color design of the standard Clearwing from the Opaline Clearwing.

The Clearbodied Lacewing

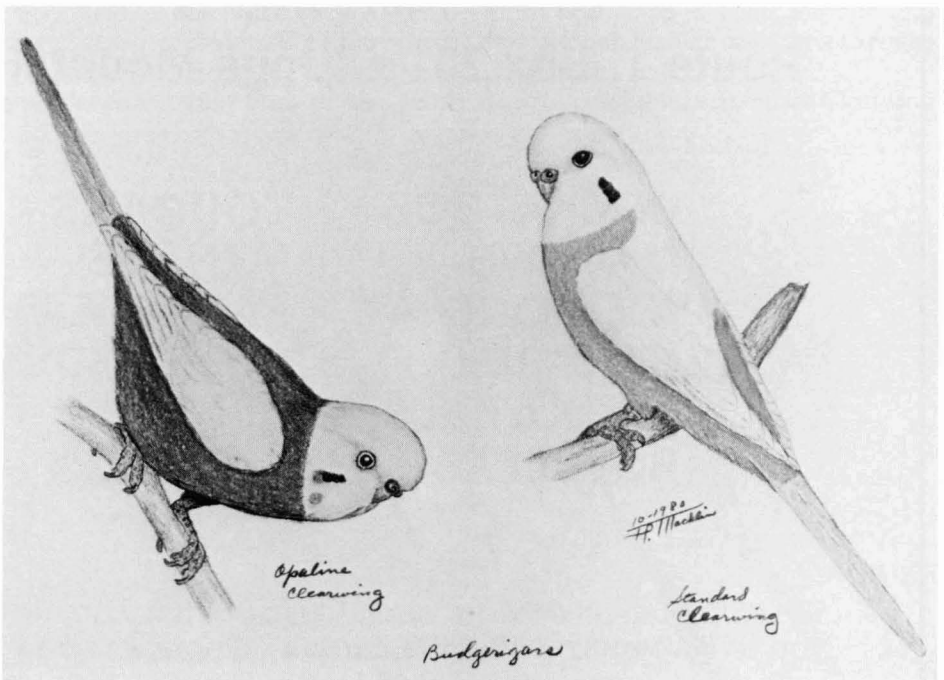
I finally, after a long search, located a fancier who had this variety. I ordered two pairs of the yellows — the whites being still unobtainable. But first let's have a description of these rare and beautiful parakeets. There are really two different Lacewing varieties but first let's take the black eyed variety as this is the one I am working with. The birds can be either solid white or yellow with black throat spots, black marked wings including flight feathers and a black tail. They are generally referred to as "Laced Clears" or "Clear Body Lacewings." This is because the body, head, back and neck show no markings whatever.

This mutation is not recent as in Aus-

tralia a Mrs. K. Rollings of North Sydney NSW., bred 3 black-winged yellows in 1960 and 1962 from some Greywing Yellows. In America three types of Lacewings had already been established. The first birds were known as the Terraneo Clearbody, in Wilmington, California in 1959. The bodies were clear yellow or white with the wings showing intense black opaline markings on the usually opaline green or blue ground color. All specimens showed a green or blue suffusion on the rump although this was quite light in the best birds. Cheek patches were the usual violet.

Mrs. Terraneo and Mr. John Papin of Long Beach, Cal., brought forth still another strain of the Laced Clears, around 1958 or prior to that year. These birds were known as Texas Clearbodies. They were a bit different from the Terraneo Clearbodies, having grey flights and tail and grey-black wing markings instead of the intense black flights of the Terraneo type. This strain also showed a greenish cast and the cheek patches were violet.

Around this same time a third American Clearbody mutation was being established by the late C.F. Easley of Rialto, Cal. The first specimen, a hen, was produced in Jan. 1957 from a dark green Opaline hen with a yellow body and exceedingly dark grey wing markings. From this hen two further mutants were bred, both cocks, with yellow bodies, black wing marking, black tail feathers and lavender cheek patches, one in opaline form and one normal. From this beginning a large strain of over 200 Clearbodies were developed. The distinguishing feature of the Easley Clearbodies is the cheek patch which is always lavender.



Budgerigars, opaline clearwing-left, standard clearwing-right.

Drawing by H.P. Macklin

At the present time the Lacewing is being bred in Great Britain but is not yet common. In America three fanciers are known to be actively trying to re-establish them.

If any of you readers have any additional information on these varieties of Lacewings it would be a great help if you would contact the fancier who is today actively tracing these strains which have come dangerously near to becoming extinct. He is Dr. T. Daniels, 4 the Loont, Winsford, Cheshire, England.

There is another variety of Lacewing that is called the "Red Eyed Lacewing" and a very beautiful bird it is but unfortunately, seldom seen. This variety comes in complete yellow or white with the markings of the normal which are always a cinnamon color. Whereas, the Clearbody Lacewing has no such markings on the head, neck or back, the Red Eye shows cinnamon cerations on head, neck, back, wings and tail. Also cinnamon neck spots.

As to my limited breeding experience with the black eyed variety of Lacewings, I find them good breeders and of fairly large type. They show nicely developed throat spots, very prominent on the deep yellow and good black wing markings. However, my birds all show a grey flight feather which I am trying to darken to be as black as the wing lacing. Also, some of the young produced show very faded markings with white flights and tail. These young show only a faint shadow of the neck spots. I was also surprised, on crossing with Opalines (to darken the flight feathers) to produce a lighter shade of yellow with dark markings like the normal design on head, neck and back. It is a very novel appearing bird when you are accustomed to seeing such normal markings only on the blues and greens.

In my quest to produce White Lacewings I used some very light blue Opalines on the Lacewings and all resulting young were still yellow but of definitely lighter shade, almost a creme color. I intend to use these split young Lacewings next season on other white-blue Opalines and also will try a cross on Albino. I think by then I should be getting into the white color — at least, that is my hope!

From my experience I would say the Lacewing is a dominant mutation and I am at a complete loss to understand why this unique variety has been so neglected!

Self Colored Budgerigars

These self colored budgies are also referred to as clear-winged Opalines. Since the variety, except for the cheek patch, has no markings whatever and is either all green or blue with a contrasting head color, I think it is much less confusing to call them as they appear — Self Colored. This

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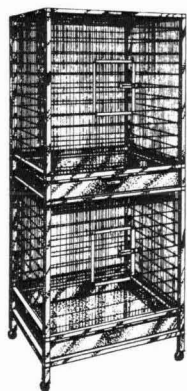
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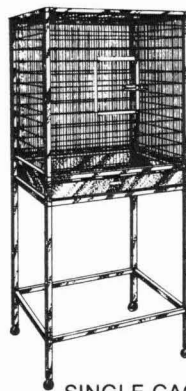
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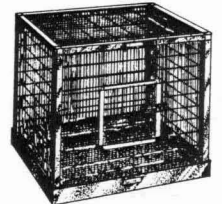


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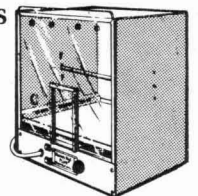
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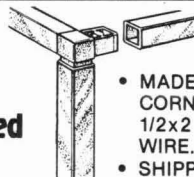


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variety is not mentioned in the Standard so I presume it is still unrecognized.

I became interested in this color experiment by accident. I had a hen of very light markings and green mated to a large cock that was a greenish yellow with markings so faint they were hardly discernible. I was interested in the resulting young to ascertain if they would have deep markings or go even farther into being one color. I was pleasantly surprised in that all the young were more or less of a self color with very faint wing markings. Also, there were an equal number of blue as well as green in all nests. This has given me a start and I have developed several pairs now for further work in the colors.

I find in mating a Self with a marked Opaline the resulting young show 50% Self and 50% Opaline. Now whether this is a consistent and continuing pattern I do not know as I have to try a few more pairs of this combination before I can state such is a workable fact. So far this leads me to believe the Self is also dominant.

In breeding the Self colored budgie I would say the greens are less difficult to develop. Apparently in the blue the eliminating of the dark markings in the design has a tendency to lighten the blue coloring. Most of my blue Selves are more of a powder-blue which is also a very pretty, soft color. I would also like to develop a deeper color, more like the cobalt. If I can develop a deep body blue with a white head or a deep, dark green with a yellow head, I'll feel I have really accomplished a beautiful color contrast in the variety. One stumbling block I find to producing the darker color is in the wings picking up a slight tracing of the Opaline design as the body color deepens. It is also disappointing that the flight feathers and tails in both colors hold to a grey tint. So far I have not been able to color these feathers even faintly with the respective body color. But I am already planning next year's matings and, who knows, I may just hit the right combination. That is what is so fascinating about parakeets — there is just no limit as to what you can accomplish with the different varieties!

The Pied-Ringneck Budgerigar

This parakeet variety has been around for a spell but is not too often seen, probably never at the exhibitions because it has not been developed into the large show-bird requirements — as far as I know.

Ringnecks are very active and quite productive. They breed fairly true to markings and are eye-catching in their design. At best I am NOT a good camera man and I simply could not get an unblurred picture of these little birds because they are so active. So I drew a sketch of a yellow, also a white, in very correct design. A picture is

better than a thousand words of description but I'll try to describe the colors and where they are on these birds.

They come in two series, white bodied and yellow body color. I'll describe the white ones: the face is white, the forehead being bordered by an even band of black stripes across the top of the head, from eye to eye. The pied varieties all have a white spot on the back of the head; well, this variety has the spot developed into another white narrow band across the back of the head. Then the black cerations (or stripes) continued and end evenly where the neck and back meet. An even band of blue borders the face and upper chest, ending at the wing shoulders. The rump sports a vivid blue spot. The rest of the body, wings and tail are white. In the yellows the neck ring and rump are green.

The yellow Ringnecks come in all three shades of green and the whites in three shades of blue plus grey and violet. The variety usually shows no throat spots. With or without the spots these birds are little beauties!

I find the Ringnecks breed fairly true to markings but getting the border lines of the design to be neatly even takes some doing. I find the colored neck ring on the upper chest frequently has a break in the color and some young show little or no neck ring in spite of the fact they came from parents with rings almost too wide! Frequently, too, the stripes on the back of the neck will overflow onto the back or top of the wings, not much but just enough to make you work harder the following year to correct it. The color spot on the rump is always correct and very bright, showing to great advantage against either white or yellow wings. The white or yellow band across the back of the head is sometimes uneven but does not present too much of a problem.

In the event you do not have two well-marked birds to breed from, pair them according to the rule of overmarked to undermarked. For instance, a bird with a complete ring — even a ring that is too wide will compensate for the mate who has too little color in the ring. In other words, pit the strong or correct points of one bird against the weak or incorrect points of its mate. This tends to correct and modify in the offspring any deficiencies in the parents. This method can be applied to any breeding where a set design or color markings is desired.

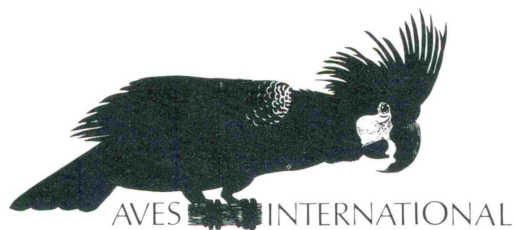
It is indeed unfortunate that more fanciers do not breed to improve these rarer varieties of budgerigars. It is also discouraging to know that finding such varieties is not easy today and usually defeats those who do want to buy these beautiful rare ones for their own enjoyment. ●

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