

A Touch of Class or Blue for You?

by Sheldon Dingle
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Not every bird in aviculture enjoys the same prestige and status. Granted, the stratification is man-made and unnatural but it does exist I'm sure you'll agree. The hawk-headed parrot, for example, holds more prestige than the zebra finch. Tragopan pheasants are higher on the social scale than golden pheasants, etc., etc.

Of course, beauty is in the eye of the beholder and the top bird varies a bit according to the preference of the individual. But there are, in my opinion, some few birds that have an intrinsic high rank — class, as it were. To me one such bird is the mutation Indian ring-necked parakeet (*Psittacula krameri manillensis*).

There are some eight color phases (so I've read) of this graceful, long-tailed bird from India and there is an article in the works that will explore these various mutations in some depth. The bird, however, that has traditionally been one of the most desirable aviary subjects is the blue ringneck, with the lutino ringneck just a shade behind its blue brother in beauty and prestige.

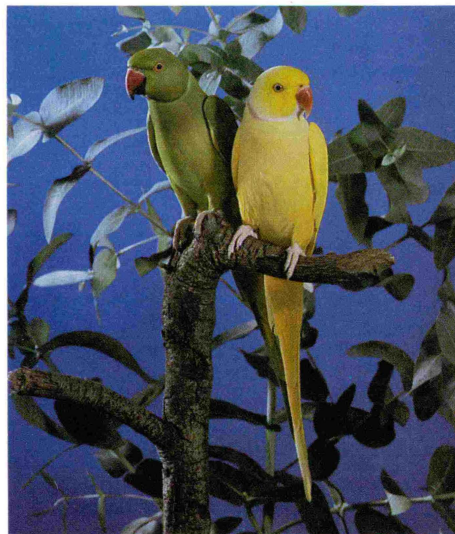
Just a few years ago the blue ringnecks were so few that you would have to get on a waiting list to purchase one — and at a rather steep price, too. Now, with more breeding going on, blue ringnecks are more plentiful but still rather costly. One of the main reasons for this bird's popularity is the great beauty of its powder blue color. It has other virtues as well, including a very graceful form, its hardiness, and its willingness to breed in captivity. In short, the blue Indian ringnecked parakeet comes very close to being the ideal aviary bird.

Just where did this blue variety come from? I can tell you that the first blues I ever saw were in the collection of David West of Montebello, California. When I began searching the literature I found out why this should have been no surprise. The following data were gathered from a number of bulletins, journals, magazines, books, etc., very generously lent to me by Rae Anderson out of his truly impressive collection of avicultural literature.

The first blue ringnecks mentioned in the literature were those kept in gold cages in Calcutta, India by Mr. M.G. Malleck. There seemed to be two birds, both males, that were kept as pets and curiosities and no attempt was made to



Here are two different varieties of the blue mutation. The male is called turquoise blue (you can see that there is a lot more green in this color phase). The female is the beautiful powder blue color phase that was first established by the Duke of Bedford in Europe and by Dave West in the U.S.A.



The female here is the normal green color found in abundance in the wild. The striking yellow (lutino) male is one of the most beautiful of all aviary birds. Lutinos do occur in the wild but they are quite rare.

breed them. Malleck had these birds during the 1920s.

The next reference is that of a British aviculturist stationed in the army in India. He noted a pair of normal green ringnecks nesting within the confines of the military compound. The soldier

was greatly surprised when three green and one blue young left the nest. The blue mutation is not common but it does occur in the wild.

Prestwich's *Records of Parrots Bred in Captivity*, (1950-1952) refers to the "Journal of the Avicultural Society of America," 1941, wherein it was reported that a Mr. Sheffler of California said a pair of green ringnecks that had always raised green babies this year raised all blue babies which was never known to happen before. I haven't been able to learn anything more about these blue ringnecks hatched in California in 1941. The Second World War began at about that time and perhaps the birds became less important in the face of national danger. In any event, the birds seem to have disappeared completely.

The literature contains some conflicting reports. In one instance the 13th Duke of Bedford was said to have acquired two blue ringnecks in 1950. Another recent account puts the date at 1954. The Duke himself reports on his blue ringnecks and their first breeding in "Avicultural Magazine" July/Aug. 1951. He bought the birds in the winter of 1949. One was an adult male, the other proved to be a young hen. They didn't breed in 1950. At the end of June 1951 three blue babies emerged from the nest. Bedford raised four more blues in 1952 and four again in 1953.

Probably the first blues the Duke let go went to Dave West in California. West got two in 1952 and 1953 received two more. In 1955 West reported in "Avicultural Magazine" Nov./Dec. that he had raised two blue babies from the first pair of blues gotten from the Duke.

Rosemary Low (*Parrots, Their Care and Breeding*, 1980) says that it is probable that all the blue ringnecks now in Europe and the U.S.A. originate from that wild-caught pair that the Duke of Bedford obtained in 1949. She is without doubt correct.

From the Duke to Dave West; from West to Rudkin and Anderson; gradually blue ringnecks have spread from aviary to aviary. I feel fortunate to have gotten my start in blue ringnecks from Dave West himself when I worked for him. I took my pay in split-for-blue birds. Later my wife got two blues from another source and our aviaries took on that look of elegance and class that these beautiful blue birds bring with them. ●

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