

# The Border Canary

by Paul Dee

The border fancy was first officially recognized along with the formation of the first specialty club, The Border Fancy Canary Club (B.F.C.C.) in 1890, with the formation of the standard and the book of rules in 1891. The border was affectionately called the "wee gem" and was known throughout the border countries of Scotland as the Cumberland Fancy. It was shown in the Common Canaries section and judged for its color and feather quality. In 1938 the trend was for a large border with norwich blood and as a result "the neat appearance and jaunty carriage so essential to the good border were in danger of disappearing. Subsequently a reaction set in against the larger [courser] bird, and during the period of refinement that followed, a more compact, rounder type of Border has emerged differing in slight detail from the original conception of the breed."<sup>1</sup>

The grand essentials of a border fancy canary are TYPE and QUALITY. Without these the bird is useless. The general appearance is that of a clean-cut, lightly built, compact, well-proportioned, close-feathered canary. It should show no tendency to heaviness, roughness, or dullness, but it should give the impression of a bird of fine quality and symmetry throughout. No one feature should predominate.

I have been working with canaries since 1962, specializing in borders for the past twelve years. My beginning with borders was fortunate. I started with birds of good quality. My advice to the beginner today is to start slowly and easily. First, know the border fancy according to the scale of points as established in the standard and thus create a picture of the border in your mind. If you have been breeding borders for three years and have had no success on the show bench, then you probably should stop and re-evaluate your stock.

If the birds do not measure up to the Standard of Excellence, get rid of the whole stock and start anew. Type and quality are what you are after, not quan-

tity! Acquire one or two good pairs, preferably from the same source. Normal yellow to buff is the proper pairing. Double buff pairing usually results in dullness and rough, loose feathers. Double yellow pairing will result in a slim, racy type of bird. The hen should not be oversized but in fact she can be slightly undersized as long as roundness, alertness, type, position, and good feather quality are as close as possible to the standard. The reason I suggest a smaller bird is that big birds tend to be coarse, sluggish, awkward, flat headed, thick necked, and strong beaked. They do not stand at the prescribed 60° angle, a condition commonly called, "laying over the perch."

Your cock bird should have the same characteristics as the hen except for size and color. Since the cock carries more size than the hen, he can be a little larger than the standard. Color should be as deep yellow as possible even to the hard side. In choosing a buff, you should choose a color as high and level as possible, not too mealy.<sup>2</sup>

If it is a clear strain you are after, one of the pair should be ticked or light variegated or the cock should be a cinnamon carrier. Variegation maintains depth in color. A cinnamon cock will give you the fine feather quality which is so desirable in this breed.

The pairings just described are ideal to breed, but unfortunately they are hard to come by. To find the ideal birds, I would suggest that you visit the shows and get to know the top breeders. From there, put your wishes in their hands, and if they are sincere border breeders they will get you started correctly.

While you are waiting the arrival of your stock, the second hurdle is to be surmounted — that is the environment where you will house the birds. Poor breeding, hens out of condition, infertile eggs, long moults, and out-of-season moults are all curses of poor environment.

<sup>1</sup>Encyclopedia of Canaries, G.T. Dodwell, TFH Pub. Ind., Ltd., 1978, (p151)

<sup>2</sup>Mealy is defined as a very soft buff feather. Under certain lights they may appear to be white birds.

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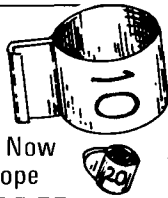
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A good environment should include the following:

**Lighting** — If you can schedule your bird's needs with natural lighting, so much the better. I cannot, so I depend on a fully automatic timer, and I keep the lights the same length of day as the natural daylight. For example, in the winter months the lights are on from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. with no outside lighting!

**Heating and Ventilation** — Temperature in the winter months stays between 55° and 60°F. Proper ventilation is a must. In my bird room, which is in the basement, I open the door or window at least once a day. During the winter months the bird room may need added humidity — 20% to 30% is desired. On the other hand, during the summer months it is a battle to keep the humidity at 40%, even with use of a dehumidifier. Baths may be given to the birds each day when the weather permits and the humidity is low.

**Insecticide** — A vapor strip with a periodic spraying is used to rid the bird-room of mites and lice.

**Diet** — An important thing to remember with canaries is that they are seed eaters, and with proper mixture they will thrive. The proper seed will be clean seed that will germinate. In and through the moult all

birds are given egg food, soaked seed (canary and rape soaked for 48 hours), and greens daily. The greens I prefer are spinach and kale, which are especially good for producing color in the feathers. If spinach and kale are not available, endive and comfrey are also good. Thistle, hemp and lettuce seed are given sparingly. After the moult, the egg food and soaked seed should be stopped. Condition food and greens are given to all birds until after the show season, which ends the first week in December.

**Hens — Housing and Diet** — Before and after the breeding season the hens are housed in groups of twelve in small flights (32" x 24" x 24"). Canary and rape are the main foods for the winter months. The birds also get greens three times a week and bread and milk on Sundays. As the days begin to lengthen and spring is in the air, I start feeding the egg food or nestling food three times a week and increase it to once a day when the birds are being paired up. Greens are also given once a day at this time. The hens get all of the soaked seed they will eat while they are feeding their young. Greens and egg food are fed two times each day while the birds are feeding the young.

**Cocks — Housing and Diet** — Cocks are

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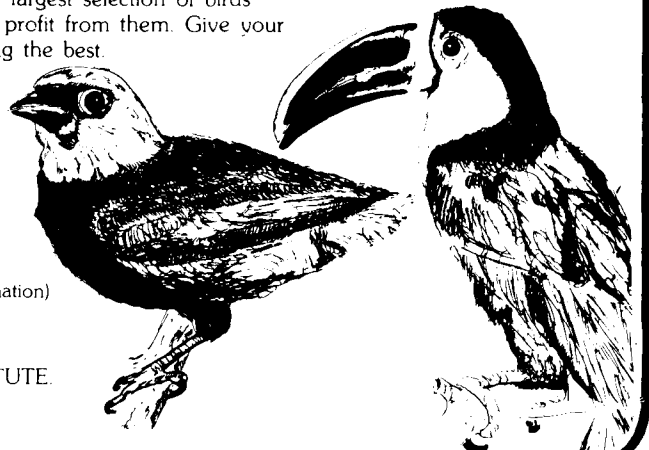
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kept separate in stock cages all year so that I can give them individual attention. For example, cocks not coming into condition as well as expected get a treat cup of egg food daily. Cocks that tend to be fat are cut down to just apple and greens. There is nothing more disappointing than to have your best cock bird fat and out of condition when the breeding season is upon you.

**Breeding** — I breed one cock with as many as six hens by running the cock bird from stock cage to show cage (without handling the bird) and then into the breeding cage with the hen. He is left there for approximately five minutes and then moved on to another cage. I do this every morning and evening until the hen has laid her third egg. An important point to remember is that the cock should not be in view of the hen since it tends to draw her attention away from the nest. She does not see the cock again until she is ready for her second nest.

**Young — Housing and Diet** — The young are housed with only two birds to a stock cage. Oversized young or birds with slipped or stiff claws, cocked wings or faulty wing carriage are put into a flight cage. Young birds get the same diet as the cocks and hens. A show cage is hung on each stock cage all through the moult. This helps get the birds accustomed to the small show cage.

**Show Preparation** — In September, when the birds are through the moult, it is time for some serious culling and show training. I leave birds in show cages overnight or longer if necessary, until I am confident that the birds are ready for the show bench. Handle your show cage from the bottom and handle it with confidence while you make the bird work from perch to perch with an alert, free movement of the head. A good trick is to scratch the bottom of the cage. This will help train the bird to move its head and to look around.

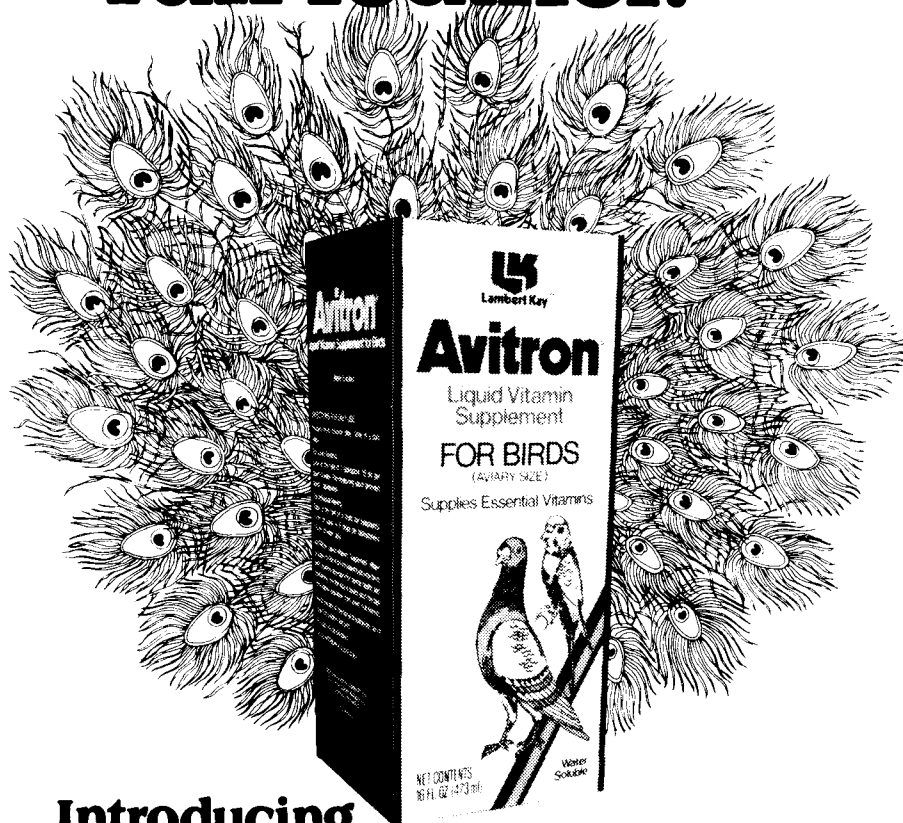
Take note! Hens that are flighty or unruly in show cages should not be used for feeders, because their young may learn these characteristics.

Spray the birds with ice water. This is an essential part of helping the birds finish and bloom.

Train all of your borders as if they were going to the show. It will bring out their natural instinct for even temperament and their easy manageability which will in turn be transmitted through your entire flock.

While you are training and culling your birds, keep a mental picture of the ideal border canary and judge your birds against the standard of excellence. Then, if you have bred from good birds and if you have proper management of the birds and their surroundings, you should be able to have consistent success on the show bench.

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