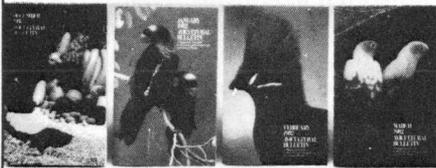


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Mutation Princess of Wales Parakeets

by Roger Bringas
North Hollywood, California

Not known to many American aviculturists, the lutino Princess of Wales parakeet, (*Polytelis alexandrae*), is truly one of the most spectacular color mutations to have occurred in a long while. The lutino mutation spontaneously occurred in the aviary of an East German breeder back in the mid 1970s. With much skill and effort on the breeder's part, the bird was able to survive its first winter and was successfully bred to a large, normally colored mate the following year. It proved to be autosomal recessive, as is the blue, in its mode of inheritance.

West German breeders, quite experienced at that time with the blue mutation, became aware of the lutino P.O.W. and travelled, in some cases, hundreds of miles to see it. Because East Germany allowed no legal import or export of birds, it seemed as though the only way in which Western Europeans could obtain this mutation would be via smuggling. Thus was the case; in 1978, a West German breeder successfully passed the lutino mutation into northern Germany, and has enjoyed tremendous pleasure and results ever since. Presently the lutino Princess can be found throughout a few countries in Europe, but in very limited numbers at this point.

In 1982, after becoming aware that there was, in fact, a lutino mutation of the P.O.W., I decided that that was a bird which had the potential of being "a dream come true" for me. Princess, in general, are quite pleasing birds to keep and admire. The normal P.O.W. is

blessed with a beautiful arrangement of pastel colors, moreover, its personality is usually that of an inquisitive, gentle, almost naturally tame bird. This, combined with the fact that I find yellow colored birds extraordinarily special, made the thought of importing this mutation and adding it to my collection a must.

I prepared well in advance, contacting four or five breeders who were raising lutino Princess so that I would hopefully have a selection of birds to choose from. I selected my initial stock from the aviaries of my good friend John Postema. To my knowledge, Mr. Postema has the best and most complete mutation collection in the world. His spectacular collection of over 300 pairs of birds is certainly the subject matter of another article entirely.

The importation process went well and all birds survived the 30 day quarantine. Evidences of roundworms were noticed in stool samples taken after release from quarantine. The affected birds were treated and back to normal in no time. Typically, Princess love to dwell on an aviary floor, chewing, digging, and extracting minerals from the earth. In my opinion, stool samples should be examined twice a year to determine if the birds need worming or not. Many breeders find giving all their birds yearly worm medication standard practice. One should take note that several types of parasites require specific treatment and/or medication in order to be eliminated from

the bird entirely.

The seed diet which I use consists of a mixture of the following: white millet, canary, oat groats, red millet, sunflower, safflower, hemp, and buckwheat. Apples, oranges, pomegranate, swiss chard, dandelion, and chickweed are rotated and fed throughout the year. Spray millet is also given, especially when fledglings are just learning to eat on their own. The Princess take an exceptional interest in corn and peas when feeding young. This is given abundantly in the spring, and continued through the summer. A mixture of grated, hard-boiled egg and wheat bread is yet another favorite when chicks are being fed. One may wish to add to this nestling combination a good vitamin-mineral supplement since it is readily eaten by the adult birds and youngsters alike.

There seems to be as many variations of nest boxes used for Princess as there are individuals breeding these birds. I have seen several styles of "L" shaped boxes, slanted-angled boxes, "grandfather clock" type boxes, as well as a few other elaborate concoctions which must have taken someone a great many hours to plan and build. I've experienced very good success with a nest

box I very simply put together five years ago. Because of the fact that Princess hens seem to just drop on their eggs from the entry hole with reckless abandon, many eggs were being broken or cracked. I use a 12 x 12 x 12 inch box, built out of one inch pine, with the entry hole two inches from the top, centered, and three inches in diameter. Two inches below the entry hole, I locate a 3/4 inch dowl which enters a good three to five inches inside of the box, and extends outside two or three inches. This helps prevent the hen from directly entering the nest box with enough force and momentum to damage the eggs. I like to place at least three inches of wood shavings in the box as well. By building up the shavings, one can regulate, to one's desire, the depth of the box, thus contributing to the preservation of the valuable eggs.

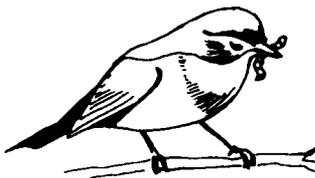
Princess can lay an astonishing number of eggs in one clutch and throughout the season. I know of one instance where one hen laid over twenty-five eggs in one season alone! Eggs are usually laid around 7:30 p.m. To insure greater success in raising young, it is wise to look after the eggs with a little special attention. I remove the eggs just after they are laid, store

them at room temperature in a sealed container lined with cotton, and mark them with an X and an 0 on either side. I turn them 180° twice a day while in storage. The hen is usually broody by the time the fourth or fifth egg is laid. At that time I replace the eggs previously taken. The anticipated result is for all or most of the eggs in the clutch to hatch within a day or two of each other.

Being that the lutino Princess, like the blue, is autosomal recessive, it's possible to have "split" birds (heterozygotes) of either sex. A lutino paired to a normal will result in all normal-looking offspring, but all young will be split lutino. A lutino paired to a split lutino produces 50% lutinos and 50% split lutino offspring. Lutino bred to lutino produces 100% lutino young. The possibilities really become exciting when lutino is paired to blue. All young from this pairing, although normal in appearance, will be double split (split blue and lutino). Double split paired to double split will produce nine different possibilities, one of which is an albino. I have been fortunate enough to have raised three albino Princess thus far. Because they are true albinos, all color is lost and one is left with a pure white bird. Although not as beautiful, perhaps, as

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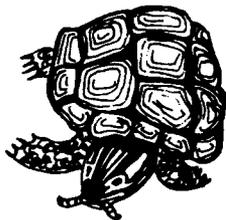
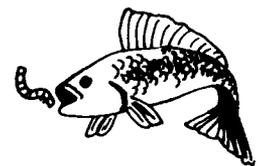
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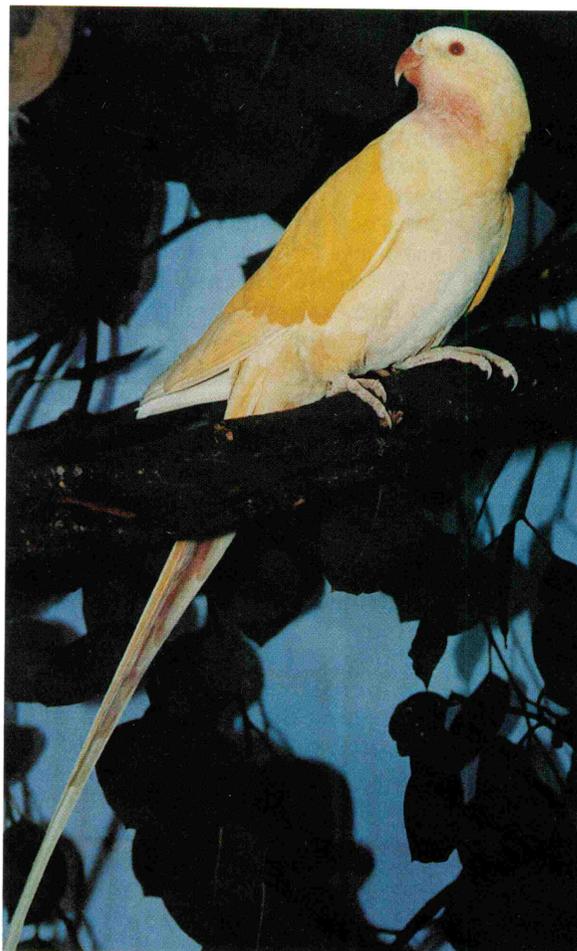
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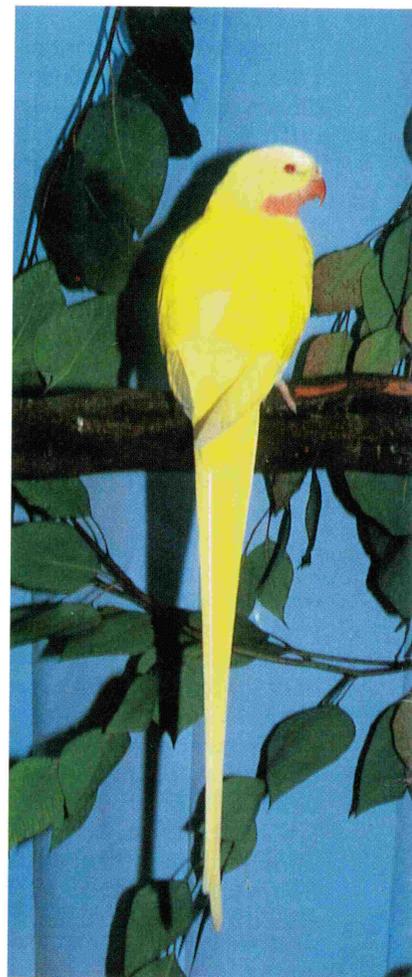
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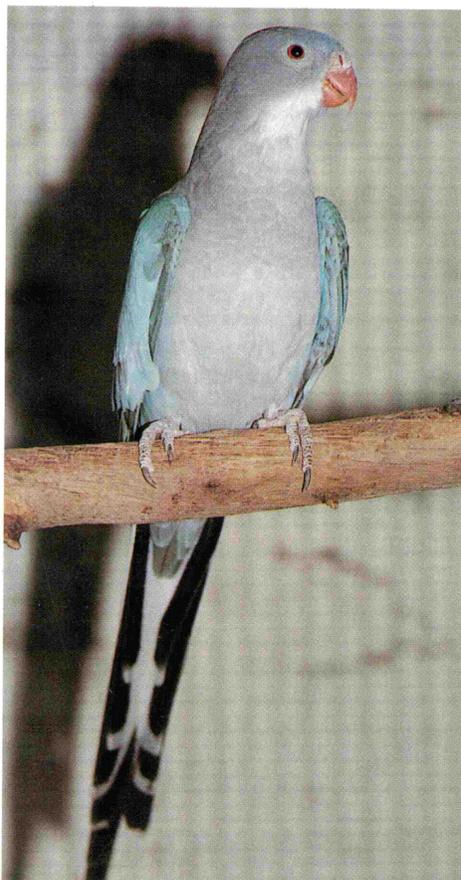
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Adult male lutino Princess of Wales. A spectacular specimen, and father of several offspring.



A good look at the back of a lutino Princess of Wales. The deep yellow color contrasts nicely with the beautiful pink on the throat, legs, and tail.



Photos by Roger Bringas, North Hollywood, CA

the blue and lutino mutations, the albino mutation is an invaluable bird genetically. My favorite pairing is albino to a double split (blue and lutino). This results in 25% of the offspring being green double split, 25% blue split lutino, 25% lutino split blue, and 25% albino.

Because of my fondness for Princess in general, I would hope and recommend that individuals seeking a new species of bird to add to their collection strongly consider the Princess of Wales parakeet. Normally colored specimens, simply beautiful on their own, are readily available at reasonable prices these days. If anyone should wish to work with the mutation Princess, the challenge awaits him or her, and so does an accordingly more expensive price.

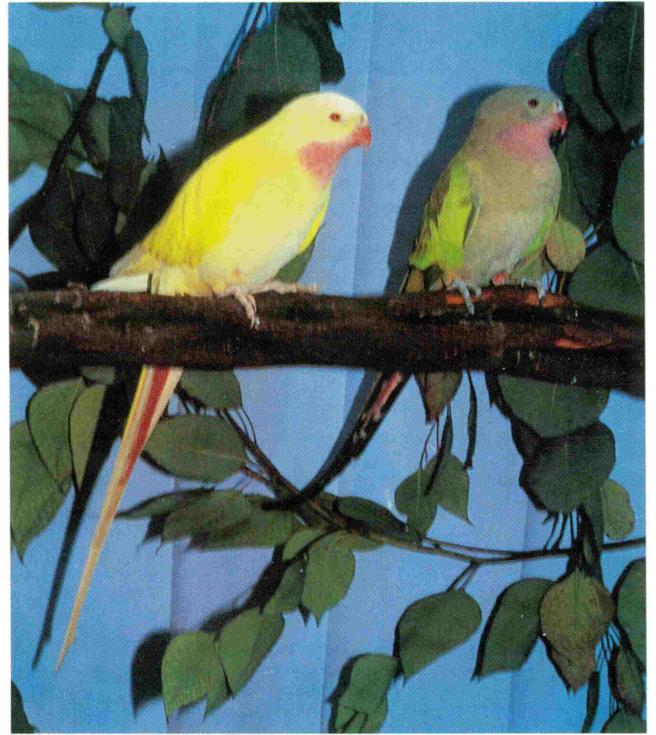
The thrill involved with raising mutation colors is not easily explained.

In the blue mutation, the pink is eliminated and becomes white, while the green turns to various shades of blue. On many specimens the body color resembles more of a steel grey color.



A red mutation of the Princess of Wales. This bird was photographed in a collection in Australia.

Perhaps this short story may help. In the spring of 1985, I opened the nest box of one of my lutino split blue pairs. Five out of the six eggs had hatched, and the babies were approximately 4 weeks old and feathering out. Inside the box there were two lutinos, one blue, one green, and one albino. What a joyous sight that was to behold and, as a mutation breeder, I could ask for little more. ●



A lutino Princess cock with his split hen. Note the similar color intensities and differences throughout the body in both birds.

In this side view, one can see how the blue mutation compares to the normal. Beautiful blue colors are visible on the rump, head, and wing bar areas.



A poor photo of the first albino Princess born in the United States. This bird carries both the blue and lutino genes and thus has a total loss of pigment. Although lacking in color contrast, this mutation possesses rare and valuable genetic potential.



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