

Budgerigars

by Sheldon Dingle



photo by Steve Clause

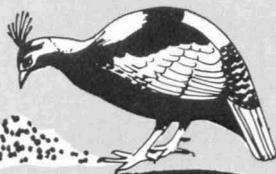


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There can be no doubt that the most common and widely beloved parrot in captivity is the delightful little Budgerigar (*Melopsittacus undulatus*). The budgie is native to Australia where during ideal conditions it congregates in legendary flocks that darken the sky. All of these native wild Budgerigars, believe it or not, are of the green variety. Once in a great while a yellow or a blue bird may be spotted in a wild flock, but the myriad colors seen in captivity are unheard of in nature.

The first living Budgerigar to reach Europe arrived in England in 1840 with the naturalist John Gould. The Budgie's natural charm delighted the English people and the little bird became an instantaneous success. There was a great demand for Budgies and high prices were paid to import them from Australia. Of course, then, just as today, a few aviculturists began breeding Budgerigars for the profit of it and soon the prolific little birds were domesticated.

The next great boost in the popularity of the Budgies took place when it became known that an occasional yellow or blue bird was noted in the wild. In 1872 the first yellow mutants arrived in Belgium and thirty-eight years later the first pair of blue Budgerigars turned up in Europe. With green, yellow and blue birds to start with, an era of intensive selective breeding began and has not stopped to this day. Now there are probably more than sixty color

variations that are recognized by experts in Budgerigar breeding and showing.

There are two basic kinds of Budgerigar operations that I know about. One can breed good pedigreed birds for the show bench or one can breed a whole flock of uncontrolled birds that are destined for the pet markets. All of the little critters are beautiful and a breeder's own interests will determine the direction he takes.

Years ago I was involved in breeding several thousand pairs of Budgerigars for the pet market. I was a newcomer to aviculture and didn't know anything about genetics, show standards, or selective breeding. Right now, my preferences tend more toward controlled breeding and record keeping. Although my Grandfather had a huge Budgerigar breeding operation in the 1920's and I have raised my own Budgies for several years I am by no means an expert. These most popular little birds are, however, very interesting and worthwhile and should be given their due respect. Accordingly, we are collaborating with the American Budgerigar Society to bring out a Budgerigar specialty issue in the near future.

We will feature articles by well known and highly respected experts in natural history, nutrition, genetics, aviaries, cage breeding, showing, and other related fields. The grand show Budgerigar of today has little resemblance to his small, green, wild ancestors and we want to explore all of the factors between the two •