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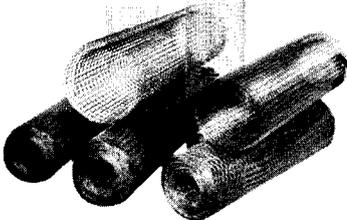
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New Agapornis Mutations

by Lee Horton

In this special issue of the Watchbird, it is with great pleasure that I have been asked to write about not only my favorite bird, but my favorite subject, mutations. The progress made in the last few years with mutations of the *Agapornis* is phenomenal and today the selection of color is wide enough to satisfy the taste of any aviculturist.

The Peach Face is number one with new colors, with over eight mutations and their many combinations. These are well established in this, the most domesticated of the *Agapornis*.

The first to be established was the Pied, genetically a variable dominant. Still today this is the only variable dominant mutation in Love Birds. Thanks should be given to Mrs. T.M. Towne, long time member of the Avicultural Society of America, for establishing this beautiful mutation.

The next mutation was the West German Blue brought here to the United States about ten years ago. I was fortunate enough to obtain a pair the following year and have since crossed them with many other colors and have produced some beautiful new combinations. My favorite is still the Blue form of Pied, the first being raised here in our own aviaries. The Blue is a recessive mutation. Our strain has proven to be very healthy. Also through controlled breeding, we have been able to establish not only excellent fertility, but the tendency for hens to lay between six and eight eggs per clutch. Often there are too many young for the parents to feed, so normal Peach Face are then used as foster parents. In a few short years their numbers have grown and today they are readily available here.

In the Orient, a yellow mutation had been well established for some years. Here in the United States we had not only heard of it, but had seen beautiful color pictures of this bird. In the photographs, the yellow was pure, like that of a lutino, and striking in appearance. A good friend, David West (a true friend of the *Agapornis* as well) brought a pair of these birds into this country about eight years ago. Upon arrival David was disappointed, as the birds were dilute

yellow (greenish in color) and not pure yellow as the pictures suggested. But they were still attractive and their popularity is evident. In the Orient these birds are called "Golden Imperial Cherryhead", Cherryhead being the name used for Peach Face. This Yellow, as well as the Blue, are both recessive mutations. The Yellow crossed with the Blue will produce a dilute form of the Blue. This bird is very attractive and is sometimes called Silver Cherryhead, or White.

Some dark variations of the Yellow (Cherryhead) exists today in the United States. Tests are currently being made to determine if an additional mutation exists, which should be called "Grey Wing".

Here in San Diego, California, the most spectacular mutation occurred, the Lutino. David West called me and said Mrs. Schertzer had a hen with red eyes and was pure yellow in color. He made an appointment, and naturally I went along. Mrs. Schertzer had bred the hen and raised many young but was unable to produce another Lutino. While visiting, David purchased six of the green youngsters from the Lutino hen, with hopes that somehow the color could be reproduced. He also advised the owner to breed one of the sons back to the Lutino hen. The next breeding season, David bred the six birds (brothers x sister) together and Lutinos appeared. Unfortunately, during these first few years, most Lutinos would die in the shell or within a few days of hatching. The one or two that survived to maturity were then crossed to the Blue in hopes of strengthening the young. The Blues being of strong stock would also eventually produce an Albino. There was much discussion regarding the purity of the future Albino. Some said it would be White, but I disagreed, pointing out that the Blue was not pure and in Pied form, the light areas were lemon yellow, not white. The first Albino appeared in Holland, and a month later, a second appeared here in our aviaries. The so-called Albino was pale lemon in color, not white.

In the last few years, news of another

dilute yellow Peach Face reached California. These birds were in the pens of a commercial breeder in Texas. David West again made arrangements to have eight birds sent here. These birds were given to us here at Agapornis Acres on loan. One yellow died upon arrival, the remaining seven birds proved to be hens. Upon close inspection I realized important differences between these birds and the dilute yellow from the Orient. These birds were all the same shade of Pale Apple Green. The Oriental birds are greenish yellow with variance of color depth with each individual, some being more yellow, others being more greenish in color. The Texas birds had beige flights with a brownish quill; the Oriental birds' flights are greyish white. The rump color is also different in the Texas birds, being a deep blue instead of a pale blue-white.

Obviously we had a new color variety. Since they were all hens, we used Blue males as this could eventually lead to a Blue form of the new color, which I chose to call "Cinnamon". After the 1976-77 breeding season, many young green babies had been produced. All would be split for Blue and hopefully also split for Cinnamon.

While catching up the adults for placement in resting pens, I discovered something new about the Cinnamons. It was a very bright sunny day and a Cinnamon's eye appeared brown in color instead of the usual black. Upon closer inspection I found all the Cinnamons to have warm brown colored eyes. This led me to believe that when first hatched, as with many other Cinnamon mutations, these birds would have a plum colored eye that would turn darker with age. This current breeding season I selected three males split for Blue and Cinnamon and matched them to Blue hens. All the remaining green youngsters were placed with the original seven hens to be bred in a colony. Breeding the split males to Blue hens was a test to see if this mutation is sex-linked, as many other Cinnamons are. We have now produced Cinnamons from such a pair, thus proving the Cinnamon to be of sex-linked inheritance. Also the young hatch with reddish or plum colored eyes, the down at first is a brighter orange than the normal baby and as it matures, turns beige in color instead of the dark grey of the normal.

I would like to add that two other members of the African Love Bird Society in Texas are also working with this new color. This season the first Blue form of Cinnamon has been produced in Texas and here in our aviaries.

Another interesting mutation of the Peach Face showing varying degrees of

red feathers has been appearing in many parts of the country during the past fifteen or more years. Some of these birds are completely red on the breast and show heavy scalloping in red on the head, back, and wings. Three members of our Society are documenting information on these birds and currently some birds showing these red feathers are producing young of the same color. The amount of red increases with age very similar to Pies, getting more light areas as they age. Hopefully the genetics of this elusive mutation will soon be understood.

Since the formation of the African Love Bird Society, we have had more and more correspondence with other members and aviculturists around the world. Recent information from Australia regarding mutations shows at least three or more mutations new to us. Since they have very strict import and export regulations, and are cut off from most bird sources, the Agapornis left in Australia is very limited. The Olive Peach Face is not very attractive, but of great value for crossing with other mutations for new colors. Six Olives are in the United States at this time. The Olive is near brown in color, so dark that the rump is charcoal grey instead of Blue. Genetically it possesses two dark factors, meaning that bred to a normal Green with no dark factor the resulting young will have one dark factor. These birds with one dark factor are an intermediate shade of Green between both parents. This color is called "Jade".

This Olive then crossed with the German Blue should reproduce two new shades of Blue, a Dark Blue, and an intermediate Blue. Will they be a more attractive color? Crossed with Lutino, can we produce a deeper color, possibly orange? The potential is great and I'm sure news of such crosses will soon be coming, such as Australian mutations include a sex-linked yellow. Pictures I have seen show a bird to be almost clear yellow, like a very light pied. They also have a red-eyed Cinnamon. Hopefully these birds will be made available for still further work in this country.

In Europe, another Blue mutation has occurred in the Peach Face. This bird is being called "Double Blue", a misleading and incorrect name. The blue on the breast and front of this bird is the same color as a Blue Indian Ring Neck Parakeet. The head, back, wings and rump are the same color as the Blue we have here. The face is white, instead of pale pink, the forehead is pale near white instead of apricot like the Blue kept here. This mutation is also recessive in nature. Many hope for a true Albino (pure white) from this Blue when crossed with Lutino.

I do not think this will happen. Instead, we will probably produce an Albino which is pure white on the breast, face, and forehead, but the back and wings will still be pale lemon in color. Time will tell.

The combination of the German Blue and this new Blue may produce still another blue color, and then think of the possible combinations of this adding the dark factor of the Olive!

One further note on still another Peach Face mutation. Here at Agapornis Acres last year in a nest of Lutino and split young, a pied looking youngster appeared. This bird is red eyes, has lutino yellow head and "V" saddle on the back, tail and back is like that of a Lutino, but the breast and wings are light green. This bird (a male) is currently mated to a Blue hen. A sister which appears to be a Lutino is mated back to the father. With a little good fortune, we will be able to produce more such birds.

In other species of Agapornis the color varieties are certainly much more limited, but interesting colors exist, and still more can be created by selective breeding under controlled conditions.

The "eye ring" group, that is the Masked, Fischer's, Nyasaland and Black-cheeked are next in potential development of color varieties. Again, in the Orient, for many years there has been a dilute or yellow form of Masked. Examples of these birds many years ago were seen here at the San Diego Zoo. Curator, Kenton C. Lint, a great supporter of the Agapornis, worked with them. Unfortunately all were eventually lost. We here at our own aviaries have been working with these mutations for over nine years and are still having difficulties establishing them. As with many "eye rings", the mortality during the first year is high. We keep out crossing to strong unrelated stock with the hope of over coming their weaknesses. Here in California, in the late 30's the Blue form of Masked appeared in Mr. Harold Rudkin, Sr.'s aviaries and are well established here. A beautiful true blue color, they are always in great demand. Crossed with the blue dilute yellow, we get a beautiful pale form of the blue, almost silver in color.

In the last year or two a few so called Yellow Fischer's have been coming into the United States. These birds are not pure Fischer's, but in fact hybrids created by crossing Yellow Masked with Fischer's. In the dilute form (yellow) it is very difficult to tell the difference between Yellow Masked or Yellow Fischer's. In the Yellow form of Masked, the body is pale greenish yellow which varies with individ-

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NEW MUTATIONS

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uals as in the Yellow Peach Face. The bill remains bright red, the face and mask is pale rosey beige which deepens with age. Hybrids between the two have some orange on the face, but not nearly the brightness or clarity of a true Fischer's. A true Yellow Fischer's will have a mask of clear bright (brighter than normal) orange. Rosey cheeks or dark beige areas on the forehead or head are definite indications of Masked parentage. If you possess Yellow Fischer's, breed them to pure normal Fischer's and their young, since the yellow is recessive in nature, will be normal green split for yellow. In these young you will probably see the Masked side of the family more readily. Pick the best youngsters, those with brightest orange faces, and breed these together to obtain more yellows. These yellows should be crossed back again to the best pure normal Fischer's. This process should be repeated until all the young show no variation and green split yellow young look exactly like pure Fischer's. This method of hybridizing the eye-rings can produce other colors, but it takes patience and at least eight generations of systematic back crossing to pure stock.

Within the next ten or so years, we can produce Yellow, Blue, and White birds in Nyasaland, Black-cheeked, Fischer's, and Masked. Please do not take on such a project unless you keep accurate records. Breed all pairs in individual enclosures and take the project seriously! To hybridize birds with less than this in mind is a crime, and should definitely be frowned upon.

The Nyasaland has produced only one mutation to my knowledge. This is a Lutino of recessive inheritance. This mutation occurred in Australia many years ago. About twelve years ago it seemed that they would easily be established in this country. They have declined so rapidly that today only a handful remains. Serious efforts are now being made to revive this beautiful variety of Nyasa. With new wild caught blood from Africa, maybe we can look forward to this being accomplished. If they make a come back, the Lutino Nyasa opens the door for future colors with all the eye ring group, such as Lutino or Albino Fischer's, Masked, etc.

Pied marked birds in the eye-rings have appeared from time to time. I have seen some beautiful examples. One such bird was a striking male Fischer's with pure

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rail, but a Jacana, or Lilytrotter, related to but not a true Rail.

Many Thanks
Sheri Williamson
Ft. Worth, Texas

We slower folks have a world of problems. Here when my one-track mind thought everything was going well, I get de-railed by a Rail. And not a true Rail at that. The photo was not identified and we couldn't contact the photographer so your humble one-track servant had to do the research. Of all the books I went through, Ripley's "Rails of the World" has the closest pictures. I knew the bird was not in the book and I couldn't find my Lilytrotter volume so I called it a Rail. We sincerely appreciate your fine observation, though, and the trouble you took to correct us. I hope we never get away with a mistake. Editor

A BALANCED RATION FOR LOVE BIRDS

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who do eat apple. Their reluctance will soon be overcome by curiosity.

Dry whole wheat or cracked wheat bread is an excellent supplement to the ration. The sliced bread is cut into one inch squares and allowed to dry or it can be crumbled and mixed with grated carrot and vitamin concentrate. Hard boiled egg added to the latter makes a good nestling food. The average love bird will eat about one of the dried squares or its equivalent daily along with its other feed. Birds feeding young will consume double or more this amount together with greatly increased quantities of greens and apple.

Birds kept in flights may be provided the different seeds in separate dishes to cut down on waste. Birds kept in breeding cages must be fed a seed mixture as space limits the number of receptacles that can be accommodated. A minimum of five receptacles is necessary to properly feed birds kept in breeding cages, including the container for water. The other four receptacles are necessary for the small seed mixture, and sunflower seed fed apart, the container for greens, apple and dried bread, and the one for oyster shell.

Other seeds, both starch and oil, greens, vegetable, fruits, and supplements, may be fed the caged bird provided the ration is nutritionally sound and balanced and that it is accepted by the bird. Availability and cost play a large part in this selection and variation in the ration from time to time may make it more interesting to the bird.

NEW MUTATIONS

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yellow shoulders and flights. No young with pied markings have been produced from such birds, but efforts continue and hopefully this variation will someday be established.

In the old books dealing with the Agapornis during the 1920's and 1930's, mention has been made of hybrids between many different species, such as Peach Face x Masked, or Fischer's and even crosses between Madagascar x Black-cheeked, etc. These publications state the young so produced are fertile. In recent years we have known that hybrids within the eye-ring group are fertile, but crosses with Peach Face and others are thought to be mules. There needs to be a great deal of work done to document

hybrids and their fertility. This information is very valuable to us for future work with our birds.

Possibly the African Love Bird Society could set up a committee to deal with this subject, and club members could participate. So much can be done, work that should have been done years ago. We have long needed an organization to help improve our Agapornis, by setting standards, and helping to educate through shows and publications.

If we do our job well, that is, keep good records, close band our birds, foster carefully controlled experiments, and cooperate with various avicultural organizations, we will have the African Love Birds with us for a long time. These delightful little birds will continue to add variety and color to grace our aviaries. The future looks good.

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