

Showing Budgerigars: breeding with the power birds

by Terry and Clare Pilkington
United Kingdom

Editor's Note: *The following is from a presentation given at the AFA convention in San Francisco. Its contents depict the attitude and characteristics of what is needed to be a top winner in showing budgerigars. Terry and Clare Pilkington are current top budgerigar breeders in the United Kingdom. They started breeding budgerigars over 20 years ago. They won the Budgerigar Society World Show in 1982. This award is classed as the ultimate achievement on the British Budgerigar scene and the prestige and satisfaction gained is everlasting. They not only won the Best in Show award with a Grey Green Breeder Cock, but managed to take an additional 11 trophies. In 1984, they won Best Opposite Sex Breeder at the Budgerigar Society World Show with a Grey Cock.*

Breeding with the Power Birds. To begin with, what is a "Power Bird"? This is an American expression which is now being used in the United Kingdom to describe the sort of budgerigar which is most sought after by the top breeders both here and abroad. This expression has only just come into our budgerigar "lingo", but I think that the words Power Birds really describes what we are trying to get across. *Power* is a bird of *great influence* which is appealing to the eye. What does this mean? My own interpretation is that you are walking between staging at the show and are looking at the classes and just glancing at the birds, the "power birds" are the very good specimens. They are the birds that stand out among the others and they make you stop and look again.

Why has this type of bird caught your eye?

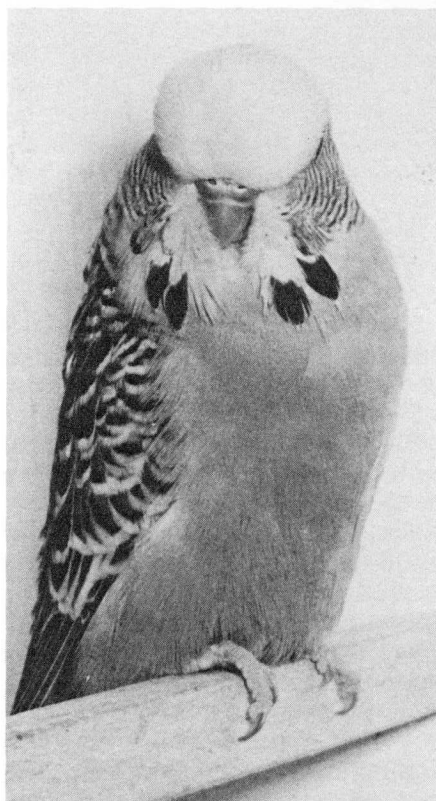
1. It will have probably filled the cage looking fearless. It will be standing boldly off the perch with the right size, shape and deportment.

2. The head will be large and round with plenty of brow. When viewed from the front it does not show its eyes.

3. The mask will be deep with four evenly spaced large spots.

4. The shoulders will be wide in

proportion to the rest of the body and wide enough to carry the head. The bird's outline should flow. The shoulders should not protrude, yet the neck should flow from the shoulders to the head to give an even outline. It is the shoulders of the bird that should impress you, plus the size of the bird.



One of Pilkington's champion budgies.

5. The bird's great size gives plenty of width to the top of the wing butts and chest. The body is in proportion to the rest of the bird. It should taper off evenly and extend well below the perch.

6. The back of the skull should be nice and rounded, complementing the backline and flowing into the shape of the head. Most power birds tend to lean towards the buff-feathered type of birds. The best show birds are of the intermediate type feather. They are half way between the coarse buff bird and the yellow feathered bird.

Why are intermediate power birds better for the show bench than the

buff power bird?

1. They carry the size of the buff bird.

2. They look neater in feather than the buff.

3. They can be shown more than the buff bird because they hold their condition better and longer.

A buff power bird is very hard to get into condition for the show bench. You will be lucky indeed to get them to one or two shows in one year. If you manage to show them, they will often come back with the main award, providing the bird has that special character, type and showmanship explained earlier. Buff power birds rarely leave the aviary because of their feathering. The intermediate power bird will also do a lot of winning but a buff bird in condition will often beat it.

How do you set about to breed these power birds? To breed these type of birds you need at least two types of birds in your aviary.

1. The buff bird with the long coarse feather, large head and brow, deep mask and overall shape. A straight back line is vital.

2. The large bodied type with plenty of length extending and tapering well below the perch. The distance between the mask and the perch is the most important. There should be plenty of width across the shoulder and the straight back line should be associated with intermediate feathering.

Pairings

Both of these types of birds must come from good show type stock with the necessary features needed to produce the ideal bird. It is best when pairing that a buff cock is paired to a hen of intermediate feathering. We have found when using these types of pairs that we have produced the best and largest youngsters, providing the pedigree has been taken into consideration. Much of the appearance of the youngsters has been inherited, so the parents have to be seen showing and carrying good features. You will only know this after years of studying the birds and breeding them. It is important that you have a good idea of what features your birds, or individual birds are carrying. If the birds have had show winners in their background, they will have a better chance to produce good show winners in the future. One should also note the bad points as well as the

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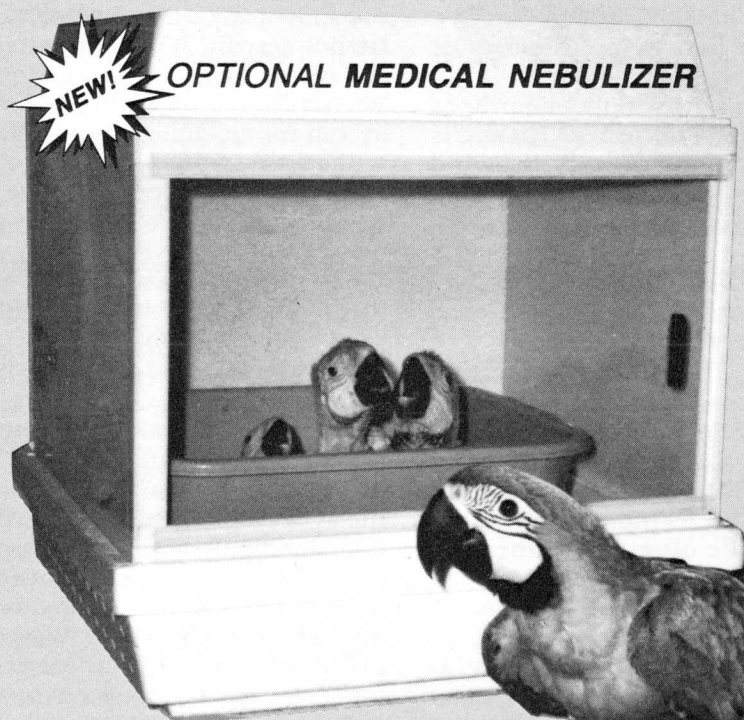
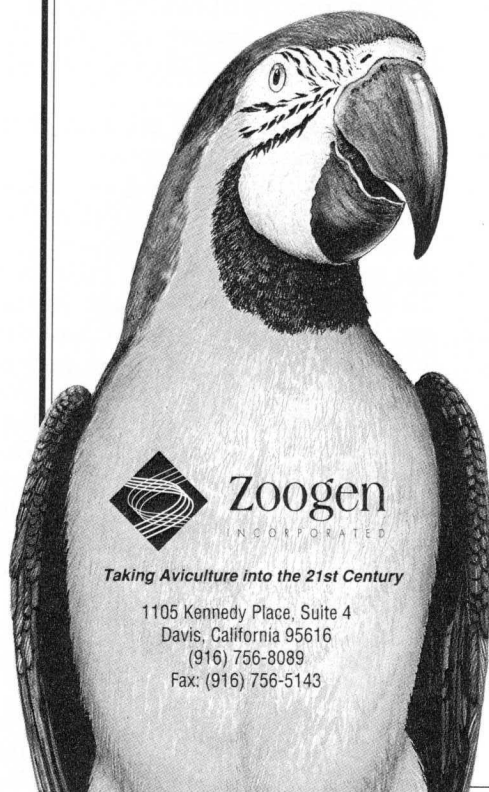
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good points as these will also be carried and reproduced. It is best to try to eradicate the bad features. This could be a lack of vigor or strength. But be careful — always watch fertility. A good bird is not good unless it possesses good fertility.

What type of records should be kept? They should be as detailed as possible for it will help you in future years. A bird that you know today may be completely forgotten tomorrow. Information on each bird's background and show wins should be kept on its pedigree.

At what age can you tell a power bird? Are power birds different in bone structure? We think they are. As youngsters in the nest box at approximately three weeks of age, they fill your hand when you grip them. You feel as though you are holding a large bodied bird. By this large size, we mean skeleton and not fat. We think that the size of the bone structure is also evident in the width of the head. A good, broad-headed youngster will always have a wider head as an adult than a narrow-headed youngster. A youngster at three to four weeks of age with a wide head, broad shoulders and big body should make out to be an outstanding power bird. We think you can tell an exceptional bird at a few weeks of age. If they have the requirements of being exceptional, then they can only improve. When these youngsters replace their baby feathers with adult feathers, you will find that as adults they usually have a lot longer feathers and therefore they exaggerate their features even more. If they moult out showing the buff feathered characteristics, they usually end up being outstanding power birds.

Some people say that some birds take longer to mature than others. For example, cinnamons and blues only develop at 18 months of age. We, however, think it depends on the actual family of birds regardless of color. A youngster can be exceptional no matter what color it is.

One other point that must be watched is the feathering. Breeding buff to buff can produce feather problems. These offspring, even though they are what you dream of, will never see the show bench. This is because their feathers are very rough or they may have feathers permanently missing.

1. Feather deformities (double feathers, bad tail).

2. Feather ball.

3. Rough feathers.

4. Flecking.

These birds, despite their faults, are superb specimens and are a pleasure to breed and look at, but will not be seen by many people unless they visit the breeder's aviary.

Feather Deformities

Besides double feathers, some birds can be classed as having an



Terry and Clare Pilkington, chabudgerigar breeders of the United Kingdom.

Photo courtesy of the Pilkingtons

Elizabethan collar. This particular type of deformity is usually found in the power birds. This is usually caused when pairing buff to buff. We like to pair buff to intermediate or fine feathered birds.

Some birds grow only one proper tail feather. The other feather is always shriveled or very thin and straggly. This prevents this bird from being shown on the show bench.

Feather Ball

One other type of feather deformity we have experienced is the feather ball. This is where the feather starts growing internally and continues to grow. In the end this causes an abscess or cyst. This is more common in the double buff birds. When this happens, the feather has to be cut out and quite often the feather will not grow again.

Flecking

The degree of flecking can vary, as in any other budgerigar. The most disappointing aspect is that they can not be shown.

We believe that the best birds produced today are a mixture of several different varieties of birds. These are normal, opaline and cinnamon factored birds mixed together.

All of these factors have had an important role to play in the past to produce the show birds of today.

a. The normals are used for their good show type, depth of mask, width of head and broad shoulders.

b. The cinnamons are used for feather texture and their good body length.

c. The opalines are used for their long feathers and large spots.

Do power birds breed as well as lesser birds? We find that the power birds breed well as youngsters. By this we mean we will pair up a cock if it is fit at six months of age. At this age, it is usually very active and will fertilize the eggs. As these power birds get older, they tend to become more lethargic. Some people say that buff power birds are infertile. We put it down to being lethargic as most power birds will breed successfully when they are young enough. Another way of getting good breeding from them is to place them in a large flight to get plenty of exercise. We then pair them when they are in peak condition.

As far as hens are concerned, one has to make sure they are mature. Some of the large hens tend to take 12 to 18 months to mature. In fact, you feel like throwing them into a flight in disgust because they have not shown any signs of going to nest. Do not despair. When they are ready and mature, they will breed for you. We have also found the age of maturity can run in families. Some families will mature quickly while others seem to take forever. When we were novices we had two sister grey-green hens which were visually very good. When paired they would not breed. After placing them in a flight, we tried again the following year. Again they did not breed. As these birds were visually very good, we tried again the third year. Again they did not breed. At this time we were building a 7 ft. by 7 ft. extension to the aviary which was slightly dark. It contained only nine breeding cages. As a last resort we paired the two hens in this cabin and they went to nest right away. Why? Was it the maturity of the birds or was it environmental. This particular aviary used to breed on an average a larger percentage of birds per pair than the other. This aviary has been replaced by a larger, brighter aviary and it does not produce anywhere near the average the smaller cabin used to breed. We feel the environment does play a

part in reproduction.

In conclusion, the most important factors to consider when pairing big power birds are fertility, strength and vigor. If your birds do not breed, you will not make any progress. The more youngsters you breed in a given year, the more choice you will have. The more ruthless you are in the selection of the next year's breeding stock, the better chance you will have of reaching your goal. It is the law of averages. Talk to most of the top fanciers and they will all say the same thing about their studs.

1. One third of your pairings will breed well.

2. One third will breed very little with the usual things going wrong.

3. One third will produce practically nothing at all.

This is a rough estimation, but it is the usual. You can have, as a beginner or novice, exceptional years of outstanding results. This is what we call beginner's luck. When you have kept birds for ten and 20 years you will realize that nature does not always go the way you had planned it. The person who overcomes these difficulties and perseveres will win through in the end. ●

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