

The English Budgerigar

by Buddy Walker
Phoenix, Arizona

A Bit of History

The Budgerigar was unknown outside its native land until Captain James Cook discovered Australia during 1770. It was not until 1794, however, that European naturalist John Gould first reported seeing large flocks of small green parrots during his venture to Australilia.

The grass parakeet was a favorite food of the Aborigines. In fact, the Aborigines call this bird "Betcherry-gah" (good food), hence the name "Budgerigar." The Budgerigar has also been termed with several other names such as shell parrot, grass parakeet and parakeet.

Budgerigars were first imported to England during 1840 and soon afterwards were imported to the United States. Import dealers imported several hundred thousands of Budgerigars until 1894 when the Australian government placed a ban on the exportation of these birds.

The English Budgerigar vs. The American Parakeet

In many circles there seems to be confusion regarding the difference between the English Budgerigar and the American Parakeet.

The American Parakeet has been primarily bred for commercial purposes to meet the demands of the pet trade. As a result, this bird has remained small in physical appearance (4" to 5" in length) and the features of the bird are unrefined. The colors are randomly mixed for the purpose of breeding a "heinz" conglomeration of colors on one bird.

Conversely, the English Budgerigar has been primarily bred for show and pleasure purposes. Generally speaking, the English Budgerigar is bred in controlled breeding cages and pedigrees are maintained for future breeding purposes. The end result is that

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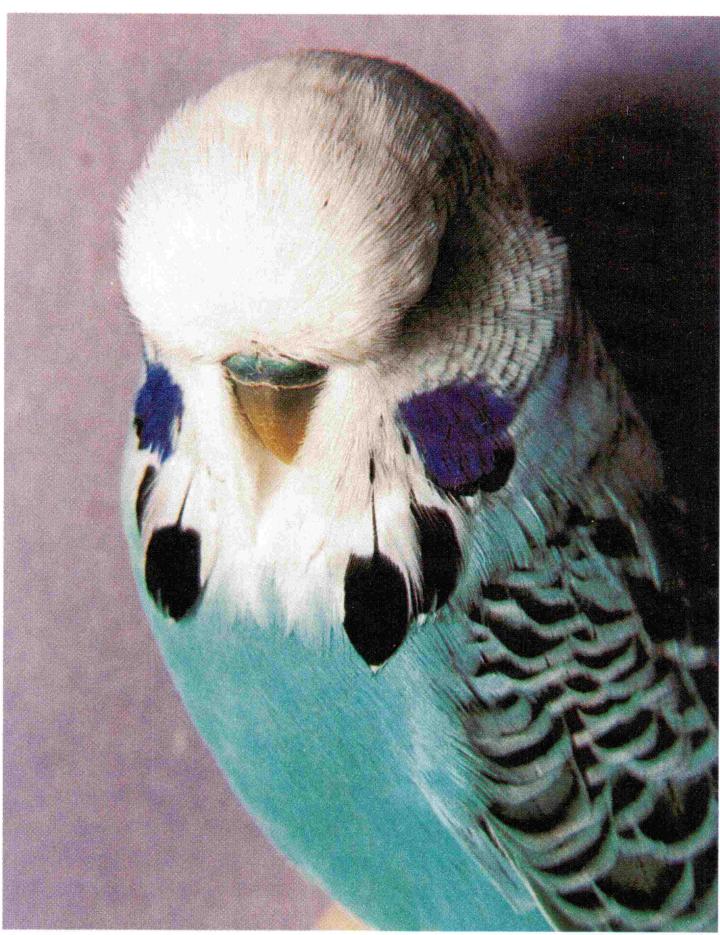
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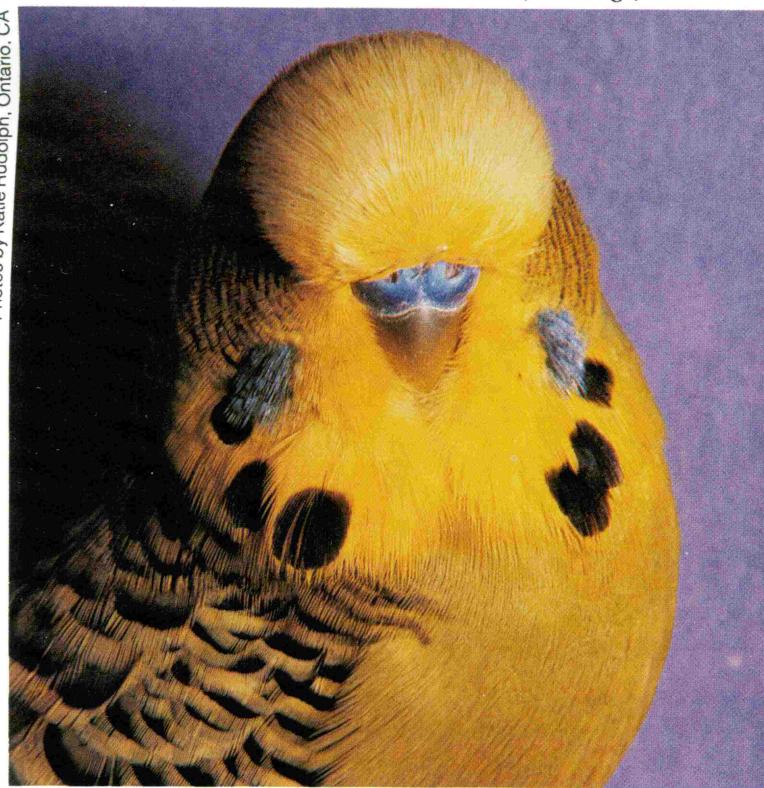
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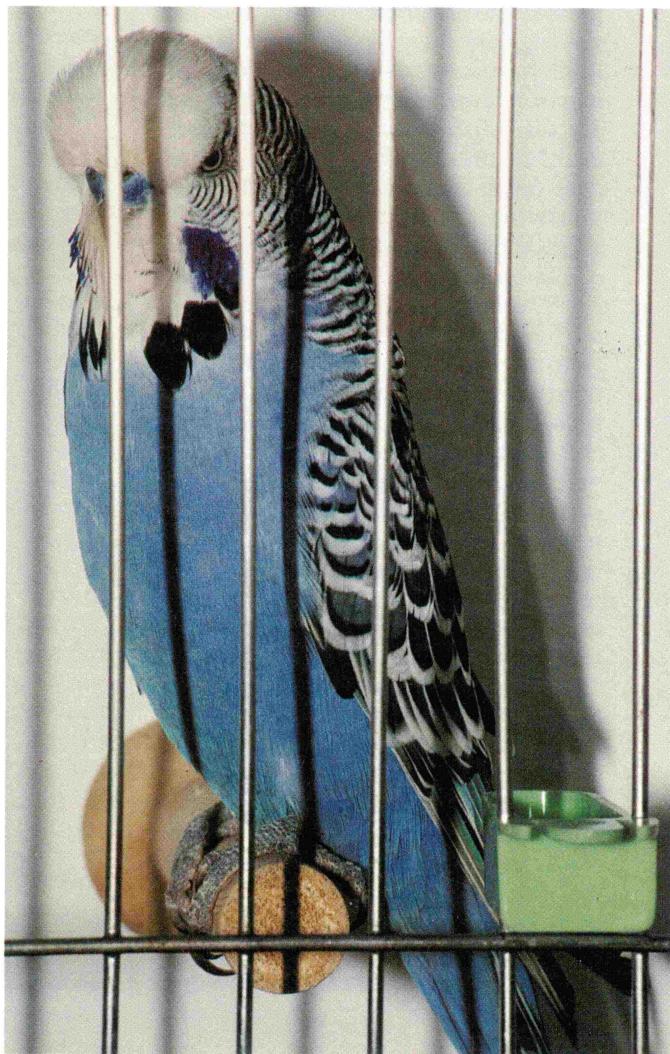
Light Green male - "Best Intermediate," owner/breeders Seth and Naomi Foster, San Diego, CA



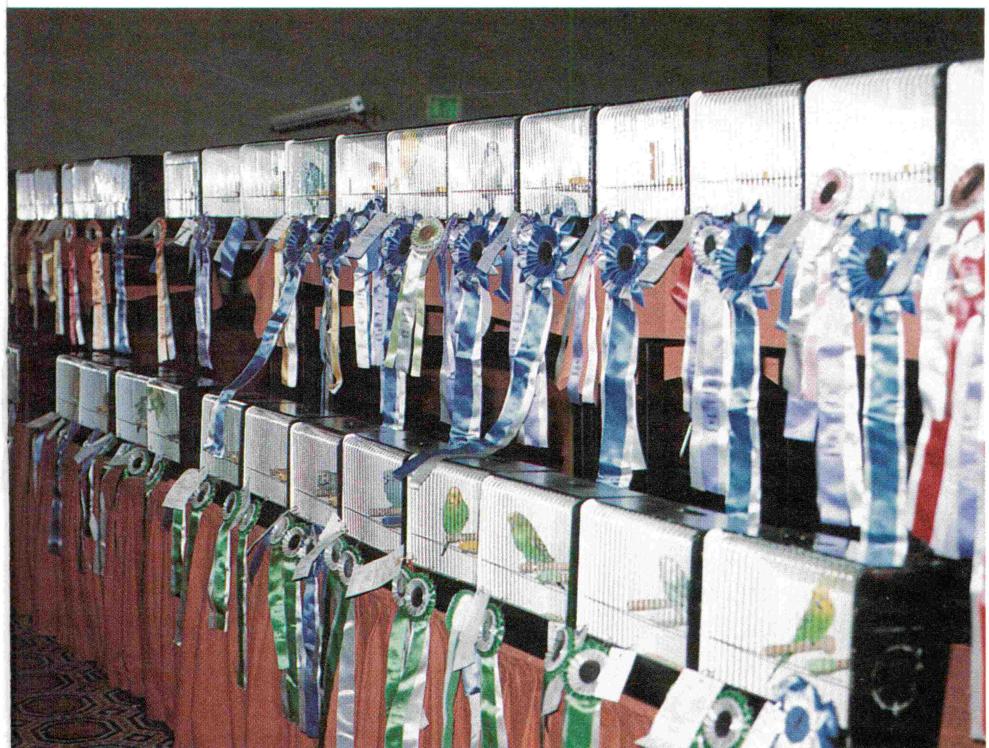
Sky Blue normal male - "Best in Show," owner/breeders Jeff Watkins/John Miller, San Diego, CA



Grey Green normal male, "Best in Show," owner/breeders Jeff Watkins/John Miller, San Diego, CA



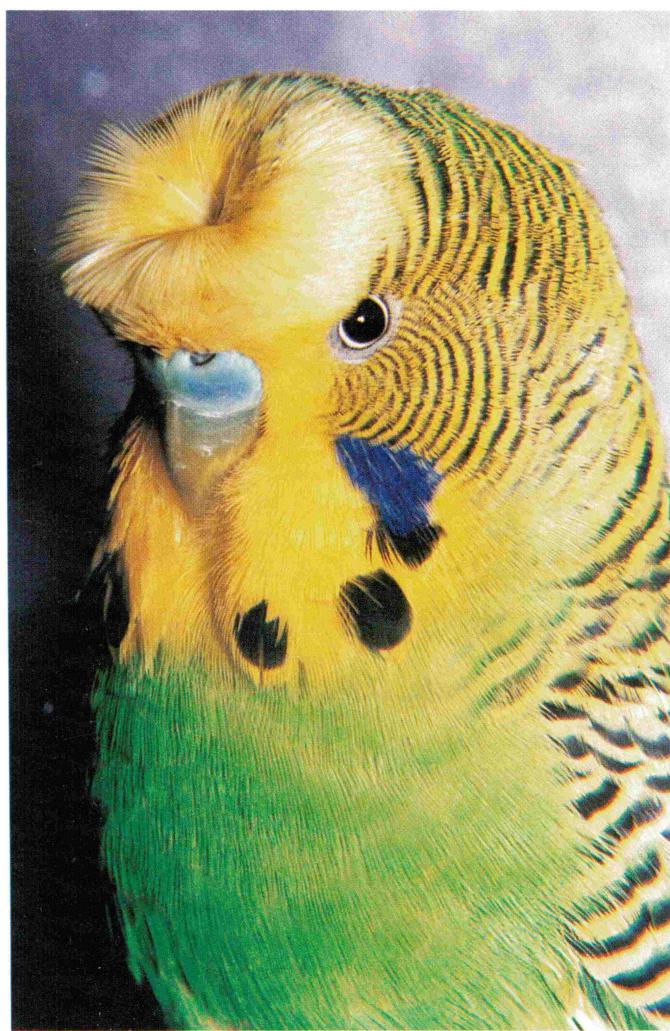
Cobalt Blue male, "Best Novice," owner/breeder Terry Travis, Escondido, CA



View of winners show bench at the Silver State Budgie Fanciers Show in Las Vegas, Nevada.



Dark Green Spangle hen, "Best Hen," owner/breeder Lou Smaldino, Yorba Linda, CA



Light Green Crested normal male, owner/breeders Jim and Audrey MacLaren, Temple City, CA



Grey normal male, "Best in Show," owner/breeders Jeff Watkins/John Miller, San Diego, CA

Photos by Katie Rudolph, Ontario, CA

the average size of an English Budgerigar is 8" to 10" in length. The features are refined and the colors are vibrant and intense because they are not mixed without a specific purpose.

During the remainder of this article, I would like to build on these differences and elaborate on breeding the English Budgerigar for show or pleasure.

The Varieties

During the early days, the Budgerigar quickly became a favorite of serious breeders. Through controlled breeding programs and maintenance of pedigrees, they found that the Budgerigar would mutate rather easily. Today there are over 36 different varieties and colors to choose from. A limited list of the varieties:

Normals - Opalines, Cinnamon, Blue, Cobalt, Mauve, Yellow-wing

Lutino - Albino, Yellow, White, Spangle, Crest, White-wing

Harlequin - Grey-wing, Violet, Grey, Yellow-face Blue, Olive

As you can see, the Budgerigar can be bred in a vast array of colors and varieties. The color selection continues to make the budgerigar a favorite in the show ring as well as a pet.

My advice for anyone interested in raising English Budgerigars is to join the American Budgerigar Society. By doing this, you will have a wealth of information at your fingertips. It is important to remember that each variety requires a genetic understanding of how to breed them.

Understanding the Standard

The American Budgerigar Society maintains a conformation standard that applies to all varieties of English Budgerigars and a color standard for each individual variety.

I would like to take a moment to outline the conformation points of the Budgerigar. Sometimes the point schedule approach can be confusing so I will summarize the qualities to look for when selecting English Budgerigars for foundation stock.

(1) Size, shape, condition and balance account for 30 points out of a total of 100 points. It is clear these components are an important aspect of the English Budgerigar. The ideal Budgerigar should be approximately nine inches in length. If you are purchasing stock for pleasure, a seven and one-half to eight inch bird would be sufficient to work with and be less expensive.

(2) Size and shape of head, mask, and spots account for 35 points in the normal series. It is important to focus on these refined qualities when purchasing stock for show or pleasure purposes. These are features that clearly separate the American parakeet from the English Budgerigar. (Note: 65 percent of the conformation points are allotted to size and head characteristics and qualities).

(3) Wing carriage, marking, and color make up the remainder of the 35 points.

I have condensed the points in this manner so the inexperienced person can easily focus on a couple of qualities and maintain a simple analysis of the bird. The more experienced person will want to examine each quality in detail. The uniform scale of points and pictorial will give you an opportunity to evaluate the English Budgerigar as an ideal specimen.

Purchasing Stock

An important and sometimes difficult decision is selecting a person from whom to purchase your breeding stock. I have divided the decision-making process into two categories: Pleasure breeding and show breeding.

Pleasure Breeding

In my estimation, a reputable breeder is a person who raises and sells healthy stock and is straightforward regarding the purity of stock (100 percent English) and varieties.

The primary attributes to look for when selecting pleasure stock are: (1) The variety of bird should be easily distinguished. Do not purchase a "heinz" variety. (2) Depth of color should be clear and of an even shade. (3) The conformation qualities should be in place — except overall size. Minimum size, however, should be seven and one-half inches in body length.

Selecting the breeder

This is a difficult assessment to make but a few aspects to consider are: (1) Is the aviary clean? (2) Are the birds well maintained (environment and diet)? (3) Do you notice sick birds, i.e. birds fluffy, huddled in the corner or fluffed with their head tucked in the back? (4) Hold several birds in your hand and determine if they carry proper body weight or if they are extremely thin. (5) Ask for references if you are new to the hobby. (6) Do the birds appear to be in the quality range you are seeking?

These are a few of the items to

consider when selecting birds for pleasure breeding. A final item that seems to go hand-in-hand with raising English Budgerigars is the breeder's involvement in the hobby (showing at shows and/or membership in a local club). Don't be afraid to ask questions before purchasing your English Budgerigars.

Breeding Exhibition Stock

The items which I covered under pleasure breeding will apply to this category, however, the selection process will be more involved. For a serious breeder/exhibitor, the selection process is as follows: (1) Select a champion breeder with whom you can communicate well and establish a rapport. (2) Discuss the quality desired and price guidelines. (3) Establish a five-year continued purchase plan (both parties should be agreeable) including quality and basic price guidelines. (4) See that the champion breeder is willing to share knowledge that will help you during your growth period.

Summary

The American Budgerigar Society, Inc. is dedicated to the advancement of the Budgerigar as a show specimen and pet. It is a Society that is composed of members who have varied interest from raising exhibition specimens, raising the rare varieties and providing educational materials covering all aspects of budgerigar management.

If you have an interest in the Budgerigar, I suggest that you join the American Budgerigar Society. To obtain membership information write the American Budgerigar Society, 1704 Kangaroo, Killeen, Tx 76543. For information regarding educational materials write Buddy Walker, ABS Educational Director, 1001 W. Northern Ave, Phoenix, AZ 85021. ●

Author's Profile

The name Buddy Walker is recognized throughout the Budgerigar World. He joined the American Budgerigar Society during 1975 and since then has raised and exhibited many champion Budgerigars. He specializes in normals, opalines, dark factors, yellows, clear-wings, and yellow-face English Budgerigars. Buddy is an ABS Champion Breeder, ABS Judge, ABS Second Vice President and Educational Director. He is also a columnist for the ABS monthly publication and correspondent for "Budgerigar World" (England).