



The Rare Lovebirds... A Future Focus

The Peach-faced Lovebird

Agapornis roseicollis and its Mutations

by Rick Smith
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The Peach-faced Lovebird, from Angola and Southwest Africa is, along with the Budgerigar and the Cockatiel, the most common psittacine species in aviculture. In the wild there are two distinct races, one having brighter coloration and found in an isolated limited range. Ironically, the Peach-faced was not one of the first species imported, however with its willingness to go forth and propagate, its popularity caught on quickly. It has produced a myriad of mutations and combinations, and done so in a relatively short period of time.

My very first bird was a male Peach-faced, and he lived for 16 years and sired many offspring. At 14 (my age when I got him) they did not often hand-feed baby lovebirds for pets. However, at the Palos Verdes Bird Farm, where I acquired him, there was a tame baby on a playpen and I knew that's what I wanted. (Actually, I originally wanted a Mynah Bird, but when my mother saw the bottom of a Mynah's cage, she said, "no way!") Unfortunately the baby on the playpen was sold, but the employee at the bird farm assured me they were easy to tame if acquired young, and this proved correct. So home I went with a baby bird fresh out of the aviary, with some black still on his beak and his wings clipped. I was so excited that I immediately took him to the bathtub with a wooden dowel and within 15 minutes he was sitting calmly on my finger. Thus began a love affair that has cost me thousands of dollars to this day. While I have kept and bred many species of birds, the Agapornids remain one of my favorites, and I have never been without them in the collection. "Tiki," as I named him remained quite friendly for his entire life, even when breeding (a trait I attribute more to the males than females). He and his first mate actually had their first

brood while I was in Africa, and I had them boarded with a friend. I was disappointed not to have been there to witness this, however the couple rewarded me with many more clutches of babies over the years.

While the Peach-faced Lovebird has produced many color mutations, some say even more than the Budgerigar, the normal Green is still a beautiful bird. In this article I have decided to concentrate on the mutations and various combinations that have evolved. However, first let me explain the difference between a mutation and a combination. Two of the first mutations produced were the Blue and the American Yellow (Cherryhead). A combination of these two can eventually produce an American White (Silver). A combination is thus defined as a pairing of two or more "pure" mutations. In the early days when the new mutations were being established, the genetics were fairly easy to comprehend. However, as more and more combinations were tried, the genetic backgrounds of many birds became so diverse it was virtually impossible to predict what some pairings would produce. In my opinion this is unfortunate and it is primarily due to the fact that normal Greens were not used as a control when breeding. There is a warning "flag" to this as well. Some of the original mutations such as the American Yellow (or Golden Cherryhead as it was first called) are not common now as newer varieties have been developed.

Second, the size of the bird is starting to decline, something that would not happen if the birds were periodically outcrossed to Normal Greens. For example, a pairing over successive generations of Lutino to Lutino will definitely result in smaller and probably weaker birds. So, as I have stated in other articles, I feel it is imperative to maintain a con-

trol flock of Normal Greens when working with the mutations and combinations. One of the most commonly asked questions I receive is, "If I mate a Blue bird with a Yellow bird what will I get?" I used to be able to answer that question, however, without knowing the background of the Blue bird or the Yellow bird, your guess is as good as mine!

So, now let us begin to look at the evolution of the mutations and combinations in the Peach-faced Lovebird. In order to understand this, one must know that there are three methods or patterns of inheritance. They are recessive, sex-linked and dominant factor. In the simple recessive, a Green Normal mated with a Blue will produce babies that are all of a Normal Green coloration, however are split or are capable when paired with either another *split* or a Blue bird of producing a Blue offspring.

Let me try to simplify the RECESSIVE in the charts below.

Normal Green mated to or "x" Blue = Normal Green split to Blue babies.
We chart this:

Table One

Normal Green x Blue = Normal Green/Blue

Note the first color is the visible color and the "/" mark indicates SPLIT, followed by the color for which the bird is split.

Now let's mate two Normal Green/Blue together and see what happens.

Table Two

Normal Green/Blue x Normal Green/Blue =

25% Normal Green
50% Normal Green/Blue
25% Blue

In other words if four babies are produced, on the average one will be a visible Blue and the other three will be visible Greens, two of which may be split to Blue.

Now let's try some additional crosses.

Table Three

Normal Green/Blue x Blue =
50% Normal Green/Blue
50% Blue

In this cross note all the visible green birds will be split to Blue, or out of four babies produced, ON THE AVERAGE two will be green colored split to Blue, and two Blue colored.

Now let's cross two Blue birds.

Table Four

Blue x Blue =
100% Blue

All babies produced in this pairing will be visibly Blue colored.

In the beginning, with the first recessive mutations these genetic tables were an accurate means of predicting what offspring would be produced and what pairings would produce the best results. We did not want "POSSIBLE SPLITS," or the green colored birds which may or may not be able to produce Blues as seen in Table two.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Before we go any further it is important for the novice to understand that many of the visible colored birds we have today are not pure mutations. They are COMBINATIONS and may be split for many different colors. Thus the confusion when a white bird may appear in a nest of a Blue x Blue. If this happened we would then know, that the parent birds while being of a visible Blue color, were also split to white. There is, to some degree, no limit to the number of combinations that can be produced, and it becomes increasingly difficult to understand a bird's genetic background and predict the colors of its offspring.

The next method of inheritance we will examine is what is called SEX-LINKED. The example we will use here involved the Lutino. In a sex-linked mutation we can have Lutinos of either sex, however ONLY THE MALES can be split. This is a little more complicated, because now we must not only look at the color of the birds being paired, but the sex as well. Let's look at some pairings. In these tables the male will be the first bird listed and the female second.

Table Five

Lutino (MALE) x Normal Green (FEMALE) =
Normal Green Females
Normal Green/Lutino Males
Lutino Females

As you can see, in this cross the females produced will be either Normal Greens or Lutinos and the males produced will be split for Lutino. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A SPLIT FEMALE.

Table Six

Normal Green (MALE) x Lutino (FEMALE) =

Normal Green Females
Normal Green/Lutino Males

Note all the birds in this pairing are visibly green and no Lutinos are produced.

Table Seven

Normal Green/Lutino (MALE) x Lutino (FEMALE) =

Normal Green Females
Normal Green/Lutino Males
Lutino Females
Lutino Males

Note that in this pairing all four possibilities can be produced including Lutino Males.

If two Lutinos, a male and a female, are crossed, all the babies will be Lutino, and both sexes will be produced.

The third method of inheritance in lovebirds is called a FACTOR. A factor is a dominant mutation and can be carried by either sex. The American Yellow Pies are an example of a mutation produced by a single factor. When birds carry a factor there is no such thing as a split. They are either Pied or Normal Green. If a Pied is mated with a Normal Green, both Pies and Normal Greens can be produced.

We also can examine the dark factors, both single and double. For example, a single dark factor green is called a Medium Green or sometimes Jade. A double dark factor green is called a Dark Green or sometimes Olive. Thus, with dark factors we have three Green possibilities.

Normal Green - no factor
Medium Green - one dark factor
Dark Green - two or double dark factor

Some pairings here may include:

Normal Green x Medium Green =
Normal Green Offspring
Medium Green Offspring
Dark Green x Medium Green =
Medium Green Offspring
Dark Green Offspring
Dark Green x Normal Green =
Medium Green Offspring

In order to understand some combinations and how they are inherited, we must realize that more than one method of inheritance may be involved. The beautiful Creamino (sometimes mistakenly called Albino) is produced by mating offspring from a Blue x Lutino. Thus both sex-linkage and recessive tables must be considered.

My point in introducing the genetics of the Peach-faced Lovebird is not to confuse you, but to give you a point of reference in how the mutations evolved and what methods of inheritance were contributed in the many combinations.

As I introduce some of the many color varieties of the Peach-faced Lovebird, I will utilize the names given and accepted by the African Love Bird Society. I will try wherever possible to give commonly used names as well, however I advocate sticking with the ALBS's nomenclature. To our foreign readers, I apologize in advance, as I know that you have your own names for the mutations and combinations, and they may not coincide with ours.

MUTATIONS AND COMBINATIONS IN PEACH-FACED LOVEBIRDS

Green Pied Peach-faced

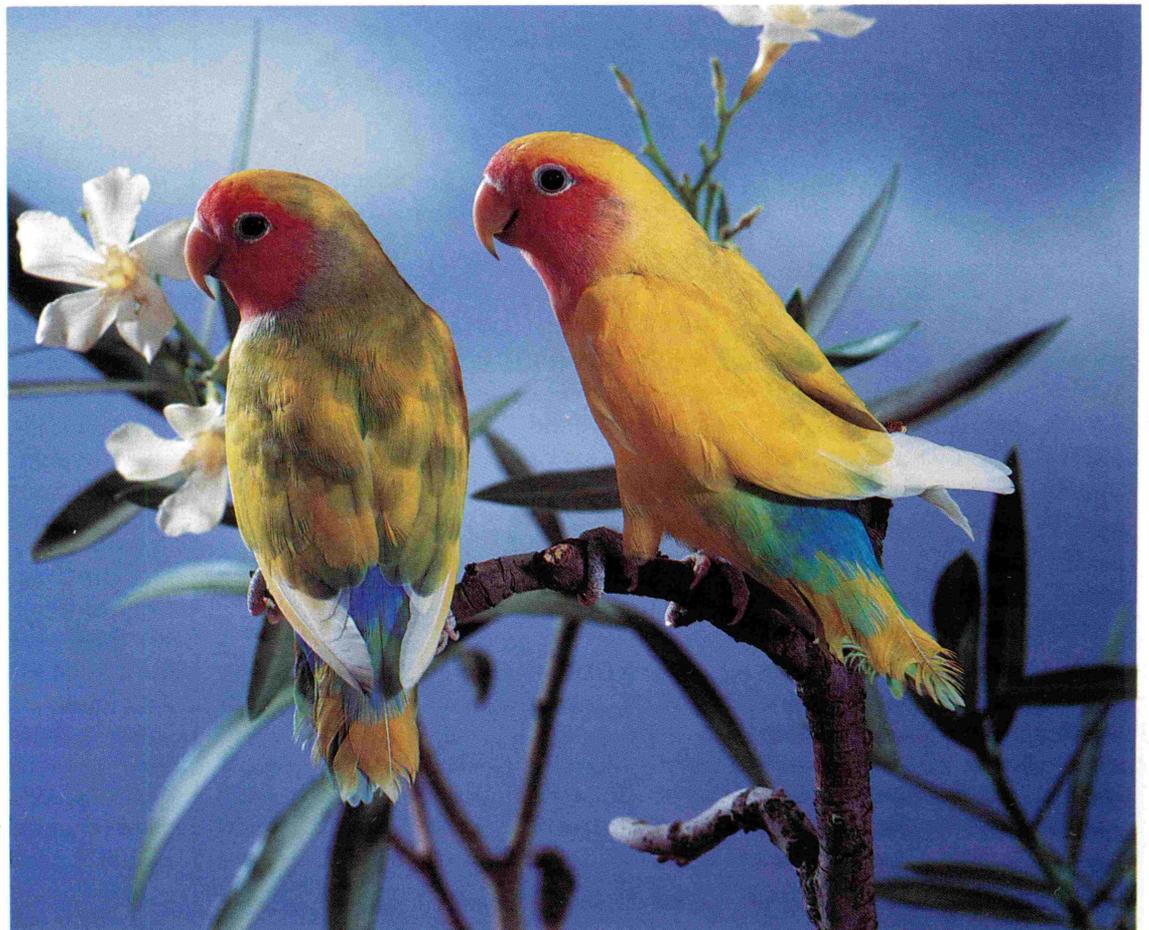
The first mutation and still one of the most beautiful to occur was the Green Pied, also called the American Green Pied, or previously, Yellow Pied. It was developed in the thirties in an aviary owned by a Mr. Ebert outside of Los Angeles. According to the late David West, Mr. Ebert was quite possessive of the birds, however, he did finally part with a few to West on the condition that none be sold until he (Ebert) died. Many of the birds eventually ended up in the hands of the late Mrs. T.M. Towne of Sunland and she raised hundreds until deciding there was no market for them, and sent them all to Japan. The Pies are well established today and some gorgeous birds with 90% or more yellow coloration have been produced. One important note with piers is that they tend to increase their yellow coloration for up to three years. Thus, a baby that may appear disappointing on fledging may acquire additional "pieness" with subsequent molts. As mentioned previously, Pied is a dominant factor and only one colored bird is necessary to produce Pied offspring.



Lutino



American White



Green Pied

Photos by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge

Blue Peach-faced

David West brought both the first Blues and American Yellow Peach-faced to the United States in the mid-sixties from Holland. The Blue is not a true blue as in the Blue Masked Lovebird or the Blue Indian Ringneck Parakeet. In Europe I believe it is called Par Blue. The first Blues were produced in Europe in a novice's collection who supposedly neither knew or appreciated what he had. The "blue" is more "greenish" in color and the scarlet on the forehead is replaced by a salmon pink. Blue is a recessive mutation. It is relatively common today and can be purchased in many pet stores.

The American Yellow Peach-faced

The Yellow Peach-faced has been known by a number of names, the most popular and common in the United States was "Golden Cherryhead." In Japan where the mutation was originally thought to have occurred, it was called "Imperial Cherryhead," although it is now known that this is not the same mutation we see in this country today.

The history of this mutation is really quite interesting. The late Mrs. Towne claims to have had a dilute yellow bird appear in her flock of Pies. However, she claims no one showed any interest in the bird, and she sent it to Japan with the Pies. Could that bird have been the founder for the Japanese Yellows (Imperial Cherryheads) produced there?

David West imported the first Yellows from Europe at the same time he received Blues. A dealer named Mr. D'Or assured him that he had birds from Japan in quarantine and that West could have first option to them. Of 20 birds, only two survived and these came to the United States. Admittedly, West was somewhat disappointed when the birds arrived, as they did not look like the birds' pictures he had seen from Japan. Eventually we realized that they were not the true Japanese Yellow, but a different dilute yellow entirely. In 1981 a Miss Williams from Perth, Australia visited the collection of Lee Horton in Vista, California and was quite excited to prove her theory that the bird we were calling Cherryhead at the time was indeed the same bird she had purchased from a Mrs. Davies in Perth. When she returned to Australia she asked Mrs. Davies where she sold her birds and was told she sold some to Mr. D'Or in Holland. This proved that West's birds were not from Japan, and

the American Yellow as it is now known probably originated in Australia.

West did raise offspring from these first birds, however we have come full circle again with this mutation and it is not as common as it once was. One would hate to see a bird with such a colorful past disappear from our aviaries. This mutation is recessive.

Japanese Yellow Peach-faced

The true Japanese Yellow never became well established in the United States. Lee Horton received several in the late 70's (all hens) and stated they laid infertile or deformed eggs. It is probably still raised in Japan, and reportedly exists in European collections.

COMBINATIONS

All the mutations mentioned thus far were combined and the following were produced, some which became prevalent and others are rarely seen anymore.

American White (Silver)

The American White or Silver as it was initially known was first raised by David West. It is produced by first pairing the Blue with the American Yellow. If their "double" split offspring are paired, an American White can be produced. The combination is recessive.

Pied Crosses

Green Pied x Blue =
Pied Blue

Green Pied x American Yellow =
Pied American Yellow (Cherry Pied)

Green Pied x American White =
Pied American White (Silver Pied)

At one time the Cherry Pies and Silver Pies were quite popular however, today one seldom sees them. On the other hand, the Pied Blue is quite popular and many gorgeous specimens have been produced. The method of inheritance is both a dominant factor and recessive. In other words a Green Pied must be split for Blue to produce a Pied Blue.

ADDITIONAL MUTATIONS AND COMBINATIONS

The Lutino

In my opinion the most beautiful mutation ever produced in the Peach-faced Lovebird is the Lutino. It originated in the aviaries of a Mrs. Schertzer in Chula Vista, California in the sixties. However,

once again it was the late David West who really assured its establishment in aviculture today. As you view these birds today, try to remember that the first Lutinos sold in excess of a thousand dollars each! The mutation is sex-linked.

The Creamino (combination)

Once the Lutino appeared we all were curious to see what would happen if crossed to the Blue. In Budgerigars and Indian Ringnecks one could produce a true Albino, however remember the Peach-faced Blue is not a true Blue. Thus, the bird first produced by Lee Horton of Vista, California was not white but a very pretty pastel yellow-cream color. The eyes in this mutation are red as in the Lutino. In pet shops I still see these birds incorrectly called Albinos, a mutation we have yet to produce. In producing Creaminos from Lutinos and Blues one must consider both the sex-linked and recessive methods of inheritance. This means that when working with splits, both sexes must be split blue no matter what color, however, if Green or Blue, only males can be split to Lutino.

At this point I begin to lose track of some of the chronological order of the evolution of the mutations and combinations because a "population explosion" was about to occur.

Dark Factors

With the arrival of the dark factors a number of new combinations would be produced. I believe Lee Horton received the first of these. A single dark factor Green was first called a Jade, however is now called Medium Green. A double dark factor Green was called an Olive, now called Dark Green. The factors were immediately introduced to the Blue. A single dark factor Blue was initially called a Cobalt and the double a Mauve and later sometimes Slate. To this there was a great deal of disagreement in the Love Bird Society, as the names were the same as those used for single and double dark factor Blue Budgerigars. However, again the Blue Peach-faced is not a true blue, and it was felt those names should be held for colors produced if and when a true Blue Peach-faced was produced. They are now referred to as Medium Blue and Dark Blue. The dark factors were introduced to the Pies as well and even today there is confusion as one sees ads for Cobalt and Slate Pies. The correct names recognized by the African Love

Bird Society are: Green (Normal Green), Medium Green (Jade), Dark Green (Olive), Blue, Medium Blue (Cobalt), Dark Blue (Slate), Pied Green, Pied Medium Green, Pied Dark Green, Pied Blue, Pied Medium Blue, Pied Dark Blue.

Dark factors as discussed previously are dominant. Again for example, a pairing of Dark Blue with Medium Blue will produce both Dark and Medium Blue offspring. A pairing of Dark Blue with Blue will produce Medium Blue offspring.

Dark factors would be introduced to virtually every mutation and combination from here forward.

Cinnamons

The Cinnamon is a mutation where the melanin pigments have changed to brown. Thus, the body color will be lighter and the flight feathers will be a light brown or "cinnamon" color. The rump is much darker. Cinnamons are also born with plum colored eyes which darken as they mature. The Fallow, which I will discuss later, retains the red eyes.

There are currently two different Cinnamon mutations. One is known as the American Cinnamon and the other the Australian Cinnamon. The Australian Cinnamon is more yellowish in the Green form. In the Blue combination the birds are not quite as blue, perhaps described as a little "creamier" in the Australian. All Cinnamons are sex-linked.

In both the American and Australian Cinnamons most of the other mutations have been introduced in combination and are recognized in shows. Many are beautiful birds including the Pies. The dark factors as well as the White-faced and Orange-faced which I will discuss later have been introduced as well.

Lacewing

I first heard of the existence of the Lacewing in the collection of Dr. Rainer Erhart in the early eighties. Dr. Erhart claims to have produced this in a cross where the male is a Cinnamon split for Lutino and Blue and the hen a Blue. He produced a Yellow and a White Lacewing from this pairing. He claimed that at first glance the Yellow resembled a Lutino, however the feathers are darker with a slight Cinnamon overcast. The flights are Cinnamon, not white as in the Lutino although the eyes are dark red. The rump is light blue. The

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White resembles a Creamino but the body feathers are less yellow and the flights off-white. I do not believe this mutation was ever firmly established.

Graywings

Lee Horton reported in an article for the African Love Bird Society magazine in 1983 that a bird sold to him as an American Yellow actually varied greatly. The bird was much more heavily suffused with green and the flight feathers were gray, instead of near white as in the American Yellow. The bird was placed in a flight with Yellows and it was several seasons before Lee noticed there a variation in the suffusion of green in his Yellows. Some of the Graywings had also been paired off with Blues, and subsequently two Blue Graywings appeared. It appears this mutation is recessive as is the American Yellow.

Whitefaced

The Whitefaced actually first appeared in Belgium in the seventies, however it was not until the early eighties that



Imperial Golden-cherryhead (American Yellow)

Photos by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge



Pied American Cinnamon Blue



*Dark Blue (left,
Blue (right)*

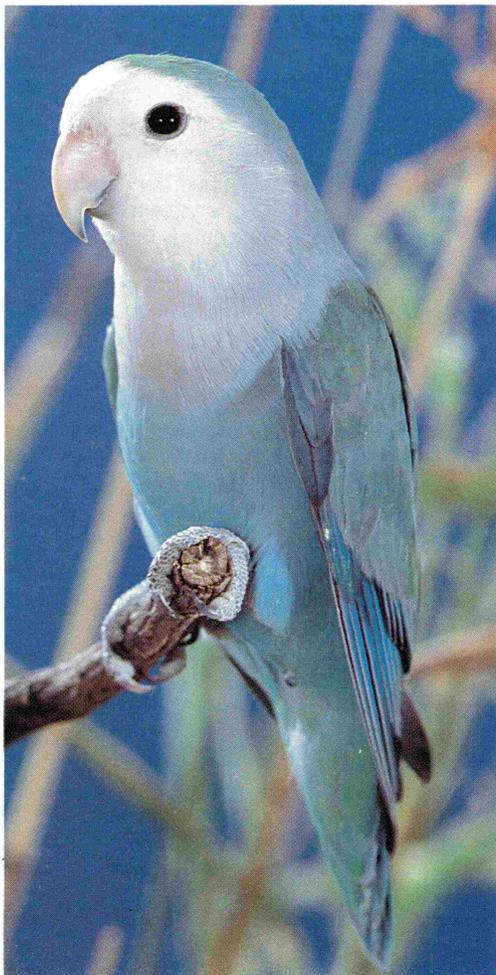


Medium Blue (single dark factor)

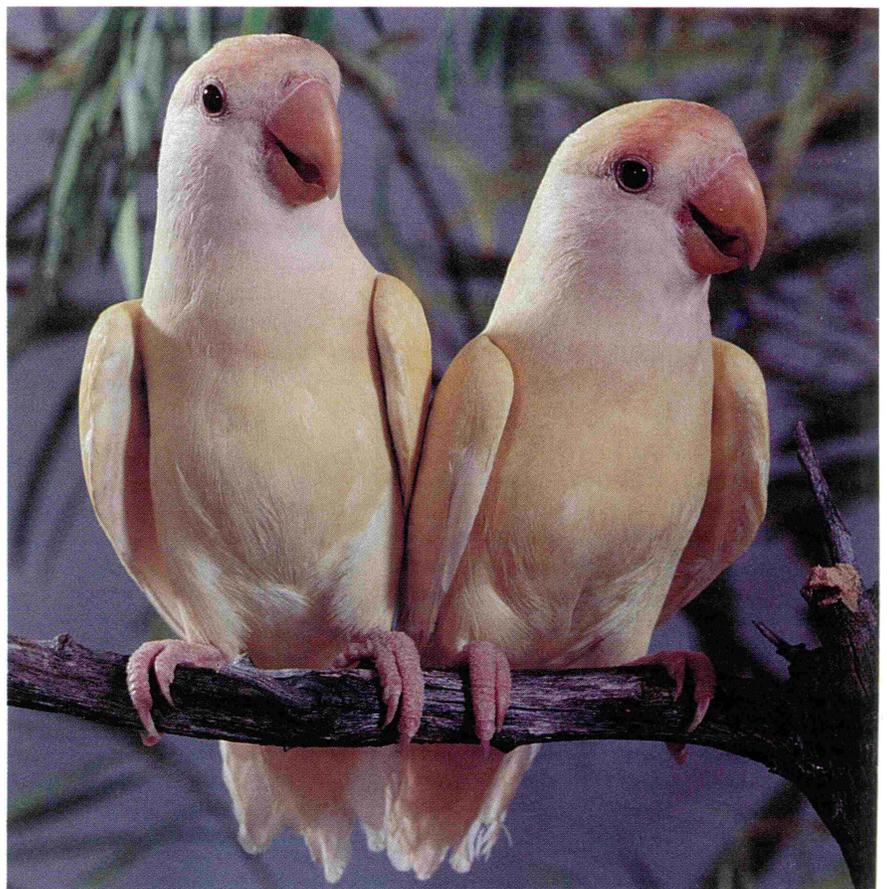
we began to establish them in the United States. This mutation is a dominant factor and occurs as both a single and a double factor. The single factor is known as a Seagreen while the double factor is referred to as Whitefaced Blue. As with many of the factored birds there is some variation by degree in the body colors of these birds. This factor has been combined with dark factors to produce both Medium and Dark Seagreen as well as Medium and Dark Whitefaced Blue. It has been introduced in combination as well to the American Silver, Creamino, Pied Blue, and American and Australian Cinnamons. The mature Whitefaced Blue has a completely white face and either white or only faintly pink frontal band. The blue is closer than any other to the "true blue" we have been seeking. It is very popular and many are being bred today.

Orangefaced

One of the most exciting things that can happen is to have a new mutation appear in one's aviaries for the first time. Mr. John Biggs Sr. of San Bernardino, California had raised lovebirds for many years, when in the spring of 1980 a fledgling from a pair of normal Green split to Blue Peach-faced caught his attention.



White-faced Blue



Creamino

Photos by Dale R. Thompson and George D. Dodge

This offspring, instead of the normal salmon pink on the throat, was bright orange. This new mutation was called Orangefaced. The young bird which turned out to be a male was mated out and a number of splits were produced which in turn in 1982 produced more Orangefaced. Since the original bird produced was split Blue, John had introduced the color to his Blue stock as well and in 1982 the first Yellowfaced as the Blue form was to be called appeared. The mutation is recessive. It has been combined with many other colors and is quite striking. On a visit to Lee Horton's I was particularly impressed to see Orangefaced Dark Greens, a very pretty combination.

Yellow Dark-Eyed Clear

The Yellow Dark-Eyed Clear originated in Australia and was called Australian Pieds. Different from the American Pied, this mutation is recessive. When combined with Blues it is known as White Dark-Eyed Clear.

Violet

The Violet factors are probably attracting more attention than any mutation currently, and in the various combinations are producing some very attractive birds. Green Violets are primarily distinguishable by the deep violet color of the rump. When combined with the Blue, one starts to see the more purple colored birds which are sought after. There are certainly degrees of shading and two birds of the same combination may not look the same. Whitefaced Violets are a pretty combination with striking contrast between the facial color and body. Violet Pieds can be beautiful as well, however as in all Pieds, variance occurs. Some Violet Pieds are so indistinguishable that one must look very closely to see if they carry the violet factor. The violet factors have also been introduced to the American and Australian Cinnamons.

Fallow

The Fallow like the Cinnamon, has a reduction of melanin which gives it a "wash" lightening the body color. However it retains the albinistic red eye. One breeder told me the eye is even redder than that of a Lutino. I believe the bird first appeared in Germany in two different strains. So far in the United States, they have proven difficult to establish and few birds have been produced. It is recessive.

Red

Occasionally one hears of red coloring particularly on the breast of the Peach-faced Lovebird and one time they were even being called red Pieds. However, while I have seen a couple of these birds, I have never heard of the color being transferred from one generation to the next. It appears the color is acquired and is not a mutation or combination.

Other Colors

We can hope to see the development of other color mutations in the Peach-faced Lovebird. We eagerly await the "true blue" and subsequently a pure true Albino and possibly a gray Peach-faced.

Breeding and Feeding

There is nothing particularly difficult about breeding Peach-faced Lovebirds, and they make a great bird for the novice. They can be bred in a cage or an aviary, however 18 in. square would be the smallest cage I would recommend. The main thing is to get a pair. Peach-faced Lovebirds are not sexually dimorphic, meaning there is no color difference between the sexes. So you must rely on either a knowledgeable experienced breeder, or one of the several methods of sexing available. If bred in a group the birds will find their own mates of choice, however be careful as extra birds are not always welcome and serious fighting may occur.

A wooden nest box, hudge size or a little larger is desirable. I do not recommend Cockatiel boxes as they are too large. They need nesting material and the section of the country you live in will determine what you use. In California we have an ample supply of palm fronds. However, willow branches, honeysuckle or acacia can be offered. One should avoid things like newspaper, string or burlap as these provide no humidity in the nest, which is required. The female will cut the nest material into strips and carry them to the box in her rump feathers where she will construct a pad and occasionally a semi-domed nest. Four to five eggs are average, laid every other day, and incubated for 21 days. The first egg laid will hatch first, and if fertile, the others will hatch every other day in the order they were laid. The babies will fledge in about seven to eight weeks, with the oldest out first.

If you choose to breed in a colony, you should watch for fighting because

sometimes parents from other pairs will not appreciate young birds in proximity to their nest. The male will feed the fledglings until weaned, and usually the female will return immediately and lay another clutch. Two or three clutches should be the maximum to maintain health and stamina in the adults. Babies are mature at about nine months and can be bred at one year.

The diet for Peach-faced is the same as for the rest of the family. A small hook-bill mix forms the basis. Some greens, sprouted seed fruits and vegetables like shredded carrot, along with a vitamin-mineral supplement round it out.

For those with an interest in Lovebirds, you might consider joining the African Love Bird Society. Its address is P.O. Box 142, San Marcos, California 92079-0142. Dues are \$20 annually, and an excellent journal is published. Please indicate you heard of the Society through the AFA Watchbird.

Most important, keep raising those quality Lovebirds. The next new mutation could appear in your aviaries . . .

Acknowledgments:

Many people have helped me throughout the years. David West was a friend, teacher and a "mentor" in learning about the lovebirds. Lee Horton and Roland Dubuc, co-founders of the African Love Bird Society, continue to assure the prevalence of lovebirds in American aviculture. Dr. Rainer Erhart, Mark Roberts, Nancy Polloreno and the staff at the San Diego Zoo have been helpful and supportive. A big THANK YOU to all.

Author's Note:

I want to tell you about a misfortune in my collection in the hopes it will not happen to you. This year in the Nyasa colony 15 eggs were laid in the first round by three pairs and 10 hatched, a rather pleasing accomplishment. It was not to last however, as the babies began dying off consistently. I sent them in for posting and the results came back Candida. The vet and I were baffled as to where it came from and then realized the problem was probably in the cooked beans I feed, which I have advocated and the birds relished. It was a costly lesson to learn, and I now recommend that if beans are fed, feed in separate sterile or disposable containers, and remove uneaten portions within 30 minutes of offering. The Nyasas were medicated and two babies have survived so far. The prognosis for these birds is still not very good. Their immune systems are weak and apparently they do not fare well in proximity to other birds. A second round of eggs have been laid, and now most of them are infertile (most of the first eggs were fertile), a problem we saw years ago in Nyasas. Ironically, their nearest rare cousin, the Black-cheeked Lovebird is becoming well established now and their future looks secure. ➤