

Buying Birds

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Please visit his page and view photos of his amazing budgies.*

Some comments made to me by struggling fanciers has prompted me to put pen to paper. On many occasions, fanciers have lament "nobody will sell them good birds" or "they can't afford to buy or won't pay the prices asked for good stock birds" along with "after all the money I have spent, my birds are going nowhere!"

Apart from the above statements being a bit of a whinge, the basic problem would appear to be, that very little thought has been given to the many factors which influence whether a purchase is going to be useful or not. These factors could include:-

- Whom the stock is purchased from
- How the stock is utilised
- The actual quality of the purchased stock
- The background of the purchased stock
- For what reason the stock was purchased
- The price paid for stock
- And the buyers own stock quality

In addition to the above, we must not forget the most important factors, the fancier's own ability and experience. Many birds procured by fanciers are of little or no use to them. In fact many birds should not have been purchased in the first place.

Hopefully the information contained herein will address some of these points and give you something to think about before you next make a purchase.

There are many reasons why breeders buy budgerigars. Some breeders may have aspirations of being one of the next Legends of the hobby. While others are quite happy to just plod along enjoying their birds without ever wanting to improve their stock exhibition wise. There is absolutely nothing wrong with either of these goals as

they are a very personal choice. The vast majority of fanciers are lodged somewhere in between these two extremes.

In the beginning

Birds acquired in the early stages of the hobby should be regarded as disposable or for want of a better explanation a stepping stone to the future. I say this because in the early days the new fancier does not have the skill or knowledge to get the best out of their birds. Most probably the initial exhibition stock birds will have died and thus will have been wasted before they could be properly utilised. Spending big at this point would be foolhardy. Even if you can afford visually superior stock, you simply will not have the eye necessary to make full use of these birds. The fancy is littered with breeders in this position, successful today and floundering tomorrow, then exit stage right.

In the beginning buy a few pairs of reasonably priced stock from a recommended (word of mouth), breeder and have some fun. That's right, have some fun, while you learn the ropes, getting on top of things like breeding, feeding and keeping these finicky exhibition birds alive and well. Then when you're ready, trade-in your birds and move up to the next step on the ladder. Take time to enjoy your days as a beginner. Use this important time to educate your eye for the finer points of exhibition Budgerigars.

From this point on the breeders will have been breeding for a while and should be starting to appreciate a quality bird. Thus they would be ready to improve their birds to be more competitive in whatever status they exhibit. It is from here that you should be starting to consider building the foundations for your future in the hobby.

The more experienced and established breeders will be trying to buy features to implant in their own birds, making them more complete and therefore more likely to win the highest accolades on the show bench. All the above categories of breeders have very different requirements, and are therefore sourcing a very different style and or quality of birds.

Be honest with yourself

If you are not an accomplished breeder, you will more than likely have some major inadequacies in your present stock. You must be objective and absolutely honest with yourself, acknowledging your bird's failings, if you wish to make real progress.

The fundamental problem is, the features so necessary on a winning Exhibition Budgerigar are not all that heritable. Meaning, for instance, if your birds have poor head features you will find that in almost every case, a single purchase is not capable of fixing this well established problem in your birds. This happens because the poor features will be dominant, thus suppressing the new improved features you are trying to establish. The results are disappointing when purchased birds are paired to birds that do not have comparable or compatible backgrounds. This is why so many outcrosses fail to pass on their superior features.

Unfortunately, in many instances breeders are just wasting their time trying to fix endemic problems within their stock by buying in the odd out-cross. I'm sure you've all heard the "flogging a dead horse" or "banging your head against a brick wall" analogies. These two sayings are especially true regarding breeding exhibition budgies!!!!

Need for Upgrading

If you are honest with yourself and you can recognise you are in the above position, you would be far better off to cut your losses and completely upgrade your bloodline and start an entirely new line within your aviary. Rather than wasting time and money on the existing line that is resisting your efforts to improve and therefore holding you back. I have done exactly as outlined on three occasions over the past sixteen years.

Being realistic, I knew the birds in my aviary at the time did not have what it takes to be competitive. Nor were the bird's backgrounds there to pull the necessary features out. The first upgrade was to the Scoble birds, the second an imported UK line Frankie McGovern and finally I was fortunate enough to buy birds from Mannes in

Germany. The last upgrade was some four seasons ago, and I am reaping the benefits of the Mannes blood now.

You must have faith because each time I converted to a new superior line, visually my birds took a step backwards. On each occasion however the babies produced in the first season were a vast improvement on the predecessors. All it took was for me to swallow my pride and admit to myself, that my birds were as good as they were going to get! My birds did not have any chance of progressing to the quality of the Mannes birds, so they had to go! No other purchases have been necessary or should be necessary in the near future, since this last complete major overhaul.

Obviously I could not afford to buy Mannes top birds, but the ones I did buy were from his strongest lines. From previous experience, I learnt, "you are far better off with a visually ordinary bird from an outstanding stud than you are with an outstanding bird from a mediocre stud". This is because in an outstanding stud the birds will have background, pedigree substance and ancestral homogeneity. Regardless of the birds visual quality if it is from an outstanding bloodline it should be capable of passing on the family attributes. The mediocre stud will not have the background to do this.

Justifiably, an ordinary bird from the outstanding stud may be the same price or in the case of Mannes a lot more than a good visual bird at an average establishment. Human nature will wrongly push even the most experienced fancier towards the visual purchase almost every time. If you wish to progress, the first and most important consideration when purchasing is background. You can't breed great budgies from a second-rate bloodline. Select the best bird you are offered or can afford with the chosen background. This is exactly what I did with the Mannes birds. With this type of purchase I know that over the long haul these birds will reproduce, and they have as expected, produced some excellent quality babies over a few generations.

The secret is if you can buy a group of birds from one dependable bloodline, there are many possibilities (chances) for producing quality youngsters. This is better than putting all your eggs in the one basket with that one super bird purchase. From this

you should gather I basically disagree with the general thinking that you are better off buying one good bird instead of several lesser quality ones. Of course, the proviso is, the birds purchased must be from an outstanding bloodline and have impeccable parentage.

Looking for stock

From who and what quality of birds you purchase, will depend on your position within the hobby, your future aspirations and of course your resources. However, if do you wish to build an outstanding stud of birds, you must acquire your stock from a breeder who has an outstanding stud of birds, with all the contemporary features you desire, most especially top end features. What is the point of selecting rejects from a breeder who is not capable of mixing it with the best?

Where do we get these marvellous birds? Whatever are your individual requirements you must not be hasty, take your time and be on the lookout for breeders who are exhibiting stock with the features you desire. Or if you require a new start, look out for breeders who are winning year in and year out with young and old birds all of course bred in their own aviary. Make sure the selected persons are winning with different birds, not the same few they are flogging to death.

The last point is cost! Personally, I buy so few birds, the cost over many years is almost irrelevant. If the birds are the ones I want and they are available, within reason I will pay the price asked. To me the bird is much more important than the price. Each buyer will have their own circumstances and must work within these constraints. All fanciers should be aware though there is absolutely no correlation between the price you pay for a bird and the quality you are getting.

To summarise

- Check if the features you need are in your flock before buying.
- Only buy for a reason.
- Take time to find a source to purchase your requirements for the future.
- If your flock is well off the pace, be prepared to start from scratch.

- When you do buy, give your purchases the opportunity to prove their worth.
- Although winning is nice, it far from being the most important part of the hobby.

I hope the above information is of some assistance. Good Luck, take your time and enjoy the hobby!