Budgerigars History

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The information for this article was obtained through discussions I have had with the curators of birds at the Australian National Museum, Sydney - Australia.

Feather, as the theory goes is a modified scale with a very long history. It is put forward by Palaeontologists, the budgerigar of today has prehistoric ancestors, meaning it has evolved from some Dinosaur like creature. The reason for their conclusion is; both scales on reptilian type creatures and feathers on birds are formed subcutaneously (under the skin). Moreover when feathers and scales fully emerge from the skin they are dead and cease to grow any further, both are held in follicles which lie beneath the skin.

Supposedly the common ancestor linking Birds and Reptiles is a prehistoric creature that existed some 140 million years ago, called Archaeopteryx. That's a mouth full! It is the first fossil which had scales along with feathers, the feathers growing down the side of its long tail and its' front legs appeared to indicate early wing formation. Archaeopteryx could not fly.

Australia, Africa, South America, India and Antarctica were joined together making up one very big land mass, which has been referred to as Gondwanaland. Approximately 100 Million years ago Gondwanaland broke up, the countries separated and started drifting toward their current positions on the globe. Roughly 15 Million years ago Australia was covered by Forests and the centre of the Continent had massive inland lakes. Somewhere around this time the climate began to slowly change, the Forest areas died leaving Deserts and large depressions where this inland sea as it was called previously existed.

The above bit of history is very important to mention and take note of, because our little friend the Budgerigar could have been very different then, to the bird that exists in the wild today. My thoughts in this regard were sort of legitimised when it was

pointed out by the Museum, the Budgerigar, Rosella and Night Parrot all have common ancestors. DNA testing has apparently validated this. The Wild Budgerigar therefore could have been much bigger than it is today. It would have had a very constant and rich food supply, it would not have had to fly the long distances it does today, the climate would have been more temperate with a less hostile temperature range and there would have been an abundance of water. Maybe these points substantiate my beliefs.

If the above theory is correct, then "have we seen the maximum size our Exhibition birds can attain"? Maybe not, most of the emphases of improving the exhibition bird has been put into feather increase, because this is definitely the simplest route over the short term. However over the long term, and probably well past our lifetimes, I think the dimensions of the actual frame of the bird can be increased dramatically, even to the size of its' distant relatives. This has happened with many other forms of livestock. Look, how far we have progressed with Budgerigars over the past forty years. I have seen some truly massive individual Budgerigars in my travels.

According to the Museum, they have recently found a cave at one of their 'dig' sites, located in South Australia. This cave was the home of an extremely large carnivorous Bat that consumed large numbers of budgerigars. This Bat evidently took the Budgerigars back to the cave to feed its' young. In the process it dropped a large quantity of bits and pieces on the floor of the cave and these became fossilised. The fossilised Budgerigars have been dated at approximately four million years. This would establish the wild bird of today has, remained almost unchanged for at least the past four million years.

The above was a remarkable find because the bird, being so small and its bones so fragile, it would normally disintegrate long before being frozen in time. Also Budgies were prime fodder for the other inhabitants of the arid areas, which meant they would not last long on the ground if dead, wounded or ill.

The wild Budgerigar is a real survivor being able to fly on leaving the nest at about four weeks of age. If the wild bird resembled our exhibition type budgerigars which take a while to get airborne after leaving the nest, they would have been gobbled up

long before they had a chance to pass their genes on for prosperity. Also the wild Budgerigar has an unbelievable tolerance to salty water and can go without water for long periods of time. Both of these traits are necessary in their inhospitable environment. Again natural selection process, survival of the fittest.

From the above information about our little friend the wild budgie you can see it has remained almost constant for at least four million years. All the domestic budgies we keep originated from this wild stock. When you have four million years of genetics working against you, it is understandable why exhibition type improvement is so difficult. It would also explain why when improvement is made it is so difficult to maintain. Regardless of how good ones' stock is or how experienced you are as a breeder, every season there seems to be a few birds produced which resemble their wild cousins.