

Selecting the right variety and colours for you

by Fred Wright

Most people “drift” into colour and varieties but if you were to start all over again – what would you keep? It’s a question I have put to myself.

I love budgies, their colours and their characters, so if I kept Budgerigars for non-exhibition I would be in a total quandary as to what I would want to keep. The ones that really fascinate me are the birds we can see in pet shops and garden centres when we stand and look – and really wonder what colour they are. The ones that get me are those little birds that could be a green, but they could be a blue. Sometimes I am sure they are a green and then I wonder if they are a blue series bird with the yellow-face factor thrown on top. Is it one of those yellow-faces with so much colour-run through the body that it’s a blue bird – but it actually looks like an odd coloured green. What does it matter? It’s a budgie, we love them and it’s just another of the things that make them so special.

In recent decades it’s probably the Spangle that has had the most influence on colours – and general interest. The Spangle comes in all colours and they can be a beautiful bird. Someone showed me recently a Spangle and asked if it were Cobalt or Violet. I was not sure as it was a baby in nest-feather. Most people would have said instantly it was a Violet as it would have been worth a lot more money. My answer was to see how it moulted but just enjoy the bird for what it is right now.

Spangles have brought so much to budgerigar breeding. They seem to have brought fertility and enthusiasm for breeders. Most fanciers love them, they are special but for exhibition they have been mixed with so many varieties that many of their offspring have lost those positive markings, which is what we love about Spangles. If we are not showing – it matters not!

Clearwings are wonderful birds. Birds with clear wings – and we seem to be missing those birds here in the UK, but not Australia, are striking because of the colour contrast with the body colour. It’s this very reason that dark factor birds are so popular with Clearwings. A White-wing Cobalt or Violet, a Yellow-wing Dark Green displays that contrast and it’s what makes the Clearwing such a special variety. For

some unknown reason, the body frame of the variety is small and always gives that characteristic narrow face. It's difficult to increase the size and getting a bird with thick, buff feathering is almost impossible. However, they fly well, live long – and are just what we need if we are keeping the colours we love – and are not trying to show them. Make no mistake – if we do decide to show them, they are popular on the show bench but it comes with enormous challenges.

Red-eyes – Lutino's and Albinos are more popular than ever here in the UK. Our Lutino classes are probably the largest at our major shows. Personally, I prefer the Lutino's but these are a real specialist variety. To breed them successfully for the show bench, you need all the skills of a top breeder and then you need to add dedication, patience and spirit. Would I breed them if I were a non-exhibitor? They would certainly be high on my list but as they do not come as "power-birds", probably not! Never forget they are one of the sex-linked varieties so their breeding is always slightly more interesting.

Dominant Pieds seem to have lost favour here in the UK. Few fanciers specialise in them but for sure they can be a striking variety. Again it's the colour contrasts that are the attraction so the dark factor birds are popular. Dominant Pieds – I love them! Recessive Pieds are one hell of a challenge. They are really lovely "little" birds. Again, one of the small-frame birds and difficult to improve. The Recessives are the perfect bird for garden aviaries, popular as pets as they are so special in colour. The real thing that spoils a Recessive that where exhibition fanciers have tried so hard to improve them is that they frequently come as flecked birds. The black feathering in the cap, and around the neck, really spoils this attractive variety. Breed them as they should be – small, clear capped and they will reward you with breeding lots of babies.

Cinnamons, I love them for exhibition but they are not so popular with colour breeders. The Cinnamon dilutes the body colour and one of the attractions of Budgerigars are the vivid colours. On the show bench we work hard to retain the strong body colour of our Cinnamons but once we breed just for colour – the body colour dilutes and they become an insipid. From one who believes that Cinnamons are one of my exhibition favourites, I would not suggest them to the colour breeder.

Dark Factors we have discussed – they are beautiful birds in their own right but combined with other varieties, they offer such a colour contrast. It's here we need to include Violets and Violets are probably the favourite colour for the colour breeder. If anyone can get hold of Violets, keep them, breed with them and then breed more of them. They are THE most popular colour and you can never breed enough of them. If my phone rings and the caller wants birds – the chances are that it's a Violet they are looking for!

Opalines and Opaline Cinnamons are super birds for showing but as flecking has become more of a problem, Opalines and Opaline Cinnamons have become less popular and it's easy to understand why. Great varieties but unless the flecking is managed even on non-exhibition birds, it seriously detracts from the beauty of the birds.

Normals - I love as an exhibition bird and they are always popular with other breeders to improve the specialist varieties. For the colour breeder they are never going to be quite so popular, unless they are the purist breeders and are reluctant to get into the so called "new mutations". The Normals are the original bird and many breeders will have no wish to breed with what they might call "those mutations". Just think about all those attractive Lovebirds and many other small parakeets – there will always be a hard core of breeders who just want to breed the Normals. However, budgie breeders may forget it was the Light Green that was the original bird and who would want to breed just Light Greens for that garden aviary – not many, I fear when there are so many attractive colours around.

It's the old story – there is something for everyone with Budgerigars! What would I select? Maybe Lutinos, maybe dark factor Spangles – but that's a too difficult decision for me to make.