

Giving some thought to some of the specialist varieties – Fred Wright

I have to admit that I am an exhibition breeder who probably prefers normals in all the main colours with a few cinnamons and opalines for the qualities they bring. Opalines bring the width of shoulder and spot size while cinnamons are not only an attractive variety but they can be used to improve feather quality. However, let's take an open-minded look at some of the popular "specialist varieties"

Spangles are a great variety. They are a strong variety and by that I mean they are as good quality-wise as any normal or opaline. They are attractive but if we are to achieve good wing markings and spots as they should be – they become a challenge. There have been all sorts of reason put forward as to why the good markings have been so difficult to maintain but I feel sure it's centred on all the non-spangles that have been bred into them that has to some extent spoiled the markings. The wings should have black edging to the feathers and the spot should be a real bull's eye – black on the outside and clear in the middle.

The variety is bright and attractive – popular and always easy to sell. That is an important factor as we can breed lots of birds in a season but if we cannot sell them easily we are hesitant about breeding lots more the following year. Breed lots of greys and grey greens and they are difficult to sell – breed spangles and they are always in great demand.

Genetically they are an interesting variety. They are what we can only call a partial dominant. If we pair a spangle to a normal – we get half spangles and half normals. The fascinating thing is that if we pair two spangles together we get a percentage of what are called "double-factor spangles" and these are either clear yellow or clear white. The yellows are the green series birds and the whites are the blue or grey birds. If we pair a "double-factor" to a normal we get our single factor spangles again. It's probably best to think of a spangle that has markings as a single factor bird.

Observations that is worth thinking about – some of the best markings on a single factor spangle frequently to come from a double factor parent. For the exhibition breeder, it's worth thinking about. Still on markings – it's worth remembering that if

we introduce yellow-faces into spangles we pick up a huge advantage. For some strange reason, when the spangle and the yellow face factors come together, the wing markings and spots “appear” to be improved. Top fanciers in Germany realised this many years ago and lots of the top winning spangles are in fact yellow-face spangles. It must have something to do with the contrast. Strange but true!

Dominant peds are another variety that reproduces in exactly the same way as spangles – partial dominants. So, we can have single factor dominant peds and double factor dominant peds. This time it’s the single factors that are the true show birds as the double factor birds carry a high proportion of white or yellow – in fact too much white or yellow.

Just like the spangles, the double factor birds are valued in the breeding cabinets. It’s the double factor birds that give the super marked single factor birds. It’s the variegation that is so good on the birds so are really useful when breeding. There is another advantage – the double factor birds produce lots of dominant peds when paired to a normal. It’s a way of really increasing the numbers quickly.

Dominant peds are extremely attractive birds – again easy to sell and wonderful to see in an outside aviary or flight. Never forget we all entered the hobby by seeing all these attractive varieties so they are ideal for promotional aviaries where the public is going to see budgerigars and hopefully want to join our hobby.

Lutinos and albinos are really popular varieties. They are the same genetic factor but the lutino masks a green series bird while an albino masks a blue or grey bird. Try to understand what we mean by “masking” as a variety that just sits on top of the base colour. Make no mistake, these are difficult varieties. Its challenging to achieve size, width in the face and shoulder and thick feather – and then it’s all about colour. Deep clear yellow with no green suffusion is vital on the lutinos and no blue suffusion on the albinos is equally important. So – difficult to achieve quality and add the problems of colour – and it’s a huge problem to breed top quality birds! The real problem is that when we try to improve the quality of the bird by using a normal or non-ino – we see serious problem enter with the colour. It’s not easy to achieve a balance!

Lutinos and albinos are sex linked varieties. Genetically it's the same factor – "ino". A normal cock can be a split but a hen is either an "ino" or not. An "ino" cock will produce all "ino" hens and "split ion" cocks when paired to a non-ino hen. So – it means that when a Lutino cock is paired to a non-ino hen all the young hens are lutino. It means that lutino cocks can only be bred from a pair where the "ion" factor is present in both the cock and hen. It's not easy to fully understand but this is not an article about sex-linkage!

At one time I kept a separate stud of recessive pieds with my normals. At first I did not like them and took them on as a challenge – and some challenge they were too. These are recessive in nature so to breed them we need the recessive factor on both sides of the parents. Remember a "split recessive" will look just like a normal so it's vital to keep good breeding records. The way forward with them is to pair a recessive – cock or hen with a normal and breed "splits". These "splits" can then be paired to a recessive and we get fifty per cent recessives in the nest. These youngsters should see some improvement on the original recessives but its slow progress. The "splits" that are bred from the "split" to a recessive are known as "second splits" and really should be discarded as they will not contain enough of the quality from the normal and too much of the lesser-quality blood from the recessives. It's all about using "first splits" to move forward.

Once I learned to understand them I started to love them. They are free-breeders, always popular and can only be described as a bit special. There is a lot of waste when breeding them but recessive pieds are again easy to sell and it's about only using the best for breeding and real progress can be made quite quickly.

A special word for all judges and aspiring judges – recessive pieds can be the most difficult of all varieties to judge. It's the duty of any decent judge to make sure he or she understands them and the only way to do that is to keep and breed them for a while.

There are lots more specialist varieties we could have considered but something about clearwings, dilutes, clearbodies, violets and more another time.