

A brief history of the exhibition bird

The appearance of the show budgie has changed immeasurably over the past 60 years. **FRED WRIGHT** looks back at how birds' features have altered during his own time in the hobby, and calls for clear guidance over what comes next

BUDGERIGARS

DURING my early years of keeping birds, at the beginning of the 1960s, budgies looked smart; a straight backline, small heads and good feather quality. But there was a craving to put more feather on the birds and increase spot size. Birds were changing and it's fair to say they were improving. It was probably the result of Joe Collier's grey green cocks that found their way to Harry Bryan and Maurice Finey.

I think birds improved massively in the early 1970s. Alf Ormerod came down from Lancashire to join in partnership with Doug Sadler. I saw the stud that came down with him and the birds were different: much better than anything in the south. Two years later, the partnership bred the famous dark green cock that took the top award at the Budgerigar Society (BS) Club Show.

It was during the 1970s that feather came to be so important. While fanciers used opalines successfully to increase spot size and create wider shoulders for the spots to sit, as well as giving the birds the necessary spacing, this also brought the huge problem of flecking,

which we are still learning to manage.

Jo Mannes came on the scene in the late 1980s and brought quality and directional feathering in the cap. He also changed the shape of the cap. We don't really know what happened in his birdroom over a couple of years, but he bred great show birds that were different, especially in the cap. The Mannes type became popular and his birds infiltrated the whole of Europe – then many other countries, too. His birds excelled in top-end qualities; the feather quality was good and not too buff, and the birds tended to breed well.

Long-tails appeared in the UK and Europe in the 1990s. These are said to have come from South Africa. They were big and long and came with lots of extra body feather. They were odd, since they did breed some smaller, smart birds, but these were then likely to produce long-tailed monsters, even when paired to totally unrelated birds. It makes this type of budgie difficult to control. I used a number of them and, although there were great qualities, they did not have the



Go with Jo: Fred is a huge admirer of Mannes birds, which have quality and directional feathering in the cap, and tend to breed well, too. Pictured here (l-r) are a cinnamon spangle grey green hen, a grey cock and an opaline cobalt cock from Jo's stud in 2013. These three photos: Fred Wright. Inset: this yellowface grey was a winning bird at the 2009 BS Club Show for Huxley & Marchant. Fred credits this partnership for introducing longer feathering into exhibition birds, which has proved highly popular



charm of the Mannes birds. I found they produced size and feather, but the huge hens were not great breeders and it was always a challenge with them.

The next step seemed to arrive over several years: enter the Huxley & Marchant birds. These two breeders had done well on the show bench, but suddenly we became aware they were producing a different type again. The feathers in the cap may have been Mannes-like, but the feathering was longer and this became a really popular feature on show birds. It's a very appealing feature. As the bird "blows" feathers in the cap when in a show cage, they seem to open up and you can see light when viewed from the side. Most breeders have found that this seems to be quite a dominant feature when it's brought into a stud.

Daniel Lütolf in Switzerland is no doubt a master breeder; the man is a dedicated genius. He has bred wonderful birds for many years, but over

the past 10 years or more he seems to be producing a new type of bird that excels in the top end. His budgies are quite unbelievable. Not only do they have the lift and blow in the cap, they are so well filled in at the back of the neck. They are very special! I would love to see

Daniel show a team of birds at the Club Show at Doncaster and I am sure many of our top exhibitors would be in for one hell of a shock.

Fred Wright has been on the BS judges panel for more than 30 years.

Recent show winners: confusion now reigns!

I FEAR we have lost our way as breeders and as judges. Department seems to be something judges talk about, but as soon as they get the judging stick in their hands – it gets forgotten.

We have a standard as set by the BS, yet judges don't seem to be sticking to it. Just think about flights and flecking alone! It's not easy for judges when exhibitors are benching birds that are not fully fit. While patronage is directly related to numbers of birds benched, clubs are always going to be keen for exhibitors

and members to fill their show cages.

Top end – head and face, and feather – seems the all-important factor for judges, so breeders are confused. If judges are putting up birds based on these criteria, why should breeders have producing show birds as a priority?

We have seen some great birds winning the top shows, but my view is that frequently it's breeding birds that are winning – stock birds – rather than wonderful show budgies. I hate saying it but I fear we have arrived at a bit of a crossroads with our exhibition birds.



A current winner: **Ady Lovack's** light green won best in show at the 2017 BS Club Show and has subsequently gone on to win the show at the BS Convention in 2018. Right: Swiss master breeder **Daniel Lütolf** produces birds that have lift and blow in the cap, but are also well filled in at the back of the neck. Fred rates the Lütolf stud extremely highly

The large option

Strapping in stature and arresting in pattern: the Lahore pigeon is an obvious choice for fanciers – even novices – who aspire to one of the big breeds. By **DAVE BROWN**

PIGEONS

THE Lahore pigeon, despite its bold look and large size, has a gentle nature that makes it a popular breed with fanciers around the world. As the breed's name suggests, it was developed in Lahore, Pakistan, although its actual origins are thought to be in ancient Persia where it was used as a source of protein. This would explain its large size.

The breed is thought to have arrived in Germany in the 1880s. The birds in question were not imported

intentionally but, apparently, were used as a food source for more exotic animals being imported into the country. The surviving individuals were spotted by an eminent zoologist of the time, who saw their potential and took on the job of breeding the new arrivals. By the 1960s it was enjoying much popularity in Europe and specialist clubs were formed by enthusiasts for the breed.

The modern bird has increased further in size over time. Its standard calls for examples to be approximately 27cm (10½in) tall and 29cm (11½in) long and measure 14cm (5½in) across the shoulders. The neck should be

heavily feathered and lead to a full, broad chest. Cheeks must be full and the beak broad, stout and blunt-tipped.

Feet and legs are feathered, so lofts need to be kept clean to keep the muffs in good order. Using perches in the loft – which are made up of a wooden disc held away from the loft wall on a metal bracket – means that long, foot feathers are not as likely to break. This is because they do not come into contact with the loft and nest-box walls.

The other major feature of the Lahore is the eye-catching colour contrast of its plumage. Its base colour is white, while a secondary contrasting colour starts at the beak and spreads in an arc over the eye and down across the back and wings. A wide range of colours and markings can now be seen including black, red, brown, lavender, blue bar and chequer.

Lahore pigeons have a lot to offer the beginner. There are established breeders, so sourcing good stock should not be too hard and three pairs from a



'Eye-catching contrast': this breeding pair of Lahores consists of a black (left) and a less dramatic dilute. Other colours available are red, brown and lavender. Photo: Dave Brown

proven breeder is a good starting point. They can become very tame and this will be made easier if two feeds are offered each day, rather than feeding ad lib in hoppers. Trusting and not quarrelsome in nature, they should mix

with other docile pigeon breeds without problem.

Dave Brown currently keeps zebra finches, north Dutch frill canaries and Malaysian Serama bantams.