

CREATING AND MAINTAINING A WINNING STUD

By Pierre Swart (P888)

Everyone remembers your recent success on the show bench, but nobody remembers that many times you travelled to shows and did not even win a first place.

When people ask me how I managed to build up my current stud, a number of things come to mind.

The Principal

First of all – how do you tell somebody just in a few short sentences how to do it, because anybody can do it, if they put their mind to it. It is actually a very simple principle, but that is the only easy part, the principal, the rest is not so easy.

Doc Robinson

Many years ago I obtained a Grey cock from the famous Doc Robinson line. It was a good bird, but no longer a young bird. I paired it to a nice Opaline Light Green hen that I got from another person, who claimed that it came with a Doc Robinson bloodline in it. This pair produced five chicks. The youngsters were not outstanding, but fair. I wanted good chicks from this cock, so I paired it up to a better hen. Needless to say, no chicks! I tried the cock with a few other hens, bred a few more chicks, but nothing much, and in the end the cock died.

Keep the Blood Together

After a while I began noticing that his chicks with the Opaline Light Green hen began to look better and better every day. Unfortunately, I had already got rid of the two weaker ones – both hens. That was a big mistake! One of the chicks, an Opaline Sky-Blue cock, won my first Major award – Best Beginner on Show at the 1996 Eastern Cape Area Show. I started to use these three cocks – some of which can still be traced back in my birds' pedigrees. This was the first hard lesson I learned – keep the blood together and don't be too hasty evaluating youngsters from good blood lines. I made a promise to my self to be very weary of this in the future.

Very Good Youngsters

The same year I paired a good Mol Kentin-bred cock to a De Beer hen – which was very average but she was very well bred. This time I saw the chicks were good and I kept them breeding for 3 more rounds, fostering all the chicks. I tried to get as many chicks as we could from this pairing. Later I paired the hen and cock to different partners after they had rested well. Both the parents produced good offspring for me with different partners. I learned my second very important lesson: when both birds (the cock & hen) are predominant in producing good offspring, the chances of them producing very good youngsters is good.

Pairings Will Start To Pick Themselves

I started to make sure that I test-pair birds with different partners, taking just one round and then at a later stage pair those birds together that have produced good youngsters with different partners. One thing that is coming out of this system, is the saying that "you have to know your birds to breed them". Using this system is slow in the beginning, but after a very few years it will get momentum. Good families will start to build and pairings will start to pick themselves.

Outstanding Quality

In 2005 I picked a Yellowface Grey Cinnamon spangle cock and a Grey Cinnamon spangle hen – they just looked perfect for each other. I must admit that it is not a pairing everybody would have made, but I knew their backgrounds. Both their parents produced good birds. I waited for them to mature and then paired them. At first a huge disappointment, the hen began plucking just after the chicks had been rung so I had to foster them out. As the chicks started to feather up, I realized that my calculations were spot on, they were all of outstanding quality, producing many Best In Show and CC winners.

A Blessing in Disguise

The hen plucking her chicks in this case was a blessing in disguise. It made me implement a new system. In the past I fostered the eggs of every second round, but now began fostering the chicks as soon as they were rung. This lets the hen go through the full breeding cycle but it just shortens it. If a pair is looked well after in this way

then it will easily produce 20 and more real quality chicks and any breeder will know how valuable this is for any stud.

Pair Up As Long As Possible

Many visitors over the years were amazed by how many chicks I am able to get from a good pair. Remember that when two birds produced good chicks with different partners, and they are paired together, they will then produce the required quality youngsters. They should be paired up together as long as possible, to get the maximum chicks possible. I had some pairs together for as long as 2 years.

Brothers and Sisters

I also used the sisters and brothers of the Spangle Grey Cinnamons extensively enlarging the family and also adding other colours. I paired a well-bred Opaline Cobalt to one of the daughters of a Spangle Cinnamon pairing. This produced my 2007 National winner; his mother's sister was also best opposite sex at the same National. Today I have very good Grey Greens, Light Greens and Greys, winning the South African National in 2011 with a Normal Grey.

Brothers and Sisters

If this sounds very easy to you, let it be a fair warning, because it is not. You should be prepared for all kinds of setbacks that come with breeding good birds, i.e. French Moults, infertility, chicks being attacked by parents and the list can go on and on. Most probably the French Moults set us back the most. I believe in a product called Virukill which also kills the Polyoma virus and using it extensively, touch wood but for a number of years I don't have that problem anymore.

Focus, Dedication & Observation

If you want to keep on breeding quality budgerigars you have to be focused, dedicated and at all times very observant, but most of all be ready to absorb setbacks every day. If you can do that, you are half way there.