

Breeder Profile



JOE ELIAS

“Still a hobbyist at heart”

Joe Elias began breeding birds “for something to look at” over 40 years ago. The ribbons that crowd cupboards, boxes and drawers, and the rooms full of trophies, in Joe’s house are testament to his commitment and the success he has had over many years, both as a canary breeder and judge, and as a budgerigar breeder.

At first his focus was breeding and showing canaries with some budgerigars on the side. His introduction to budgerigar showing and club life was by pure chance when in the early 1970s a budgerigar he sold escaped from its new owner and was found by Mark Gillette from the St George Branch. Mark tracked him down through the bird’s ring and encouraged him along to a meeting, inviting him to enter his birds in the club table show. As they say, the rest is history.

Although Joe continued to show and breed canaries at a high level, winning awards from overseas judges and at the national level, his budgerigars gradually drew him into the fancy and by the mid 1990s he was breeding budgerigars full-time. As Joe explains, budgerigars are much easier to breed and show than canaries which are more susceptible to diseases, require hand-rearing of chicks and colour enhancement of the birds before shows.

Joe admits that when he first began breeding his feeding regime was simple and not overly involved with diet supplementation and disease prevention. However these days he has a comprehensive regime. He uses a variety of seeds, including fledgling mix and a tonic seed mixture. When his budgerigars have chicks he adds to his usual seed sunflower seeds and hulled

oats with a little bit of egg, as well as his home grown spinach.

Joe is careful with his use of soft food. He gives his birds some soft food every second day and never leaves it lying around—as soon as the birds have finished with it he throws any remains away to prevent disease.

Joe has a complex preventative treatment regime. This regime includes water additives to prevent the algae infestation to which budgerigars are susceptible; and weekly water cleanser to crystallise droppings and prevent the spread of disease. Joe doesn’t use shell grit—rather he uses powder substitutes. Vitamins are added to the water four days a week only.

Joe’s show preparation begins two to three weeks before a show when he starts spraying his birds with lukewarm water. A week before a show for two to three days he adds glycerine to the water spray—however Joe warns not to overdo this because the feathers will stick. As the show gets closer he will just spray his birds with plain tap water.

He puts gloves on when transferring his birds to the show cages. To minimise stress which can also affect breeding, he packs his cages back to back, except the end cages, and keeps his birds in the dark. He also doesn’t show the same birds too often—each show he will exhibit different birds.

Joe is always pleased to go to a show, especially when his birds are only beaten by birds from the aviaries of high profile breeders. Sometimes he will enter his young birds in the older class just so he can compare his birds. This year he has had particular success with these birds, beaten in some cases only by birds that have been to the Nationals. His 2006 successes included Champion Nest Feather and Champion Open Opposite Sex at the Southern Cup. Previous successes have included Grand Champions and Champion Opposite Sex at Royal Easter Shows. Joe’s strongest lines are lacewings, dominant peds, and recessives.

Joe has some firm views about judging, some of which stem from his many years of experience as a top-level canary judge and with which, he concedes, some may not agree. Interestingly, in canary judging models of the canary varieties are

placed on top of the show cages as the birds are judged—these prompt the judges to consider all the required attributes of a particular variety. Joe believes that budgerigar judging in Australia needs to consider more the Australian climate and be less concerned with judging according to the English standard with its focus on a big head.

Some key advice for new breeders from Joe are “don’t breed with long flighted cocks” and “don’t buy birds because they are being sold but because they will do something for you”—i.e. because they will develop your aviary and lines. He also says that having the right birds is not enough—“you have to have an eye for beauty and the knowledge about how to pair your birds.”

In Joe’s words, these days he does what is best for him and his birds. When all is said and done Joe smiles and confesses that he is “still a hobbyist at heart.” And, if anyone has one to spare, Joe is after a good lutino cock!!

by Marilyn Harrington



Quality birds currently in Joe’s aviary



One of Joe’s quality lacewings



A small sample of Joe’s trophies



RAS Grand Champion