

Member Profile

Wayne Cusack

A focus on the Black Eyed Self Colour variety

Interview by Marilyn Harrington and Warren Wilson

In May this year Wayne Cusack of the Mid-State Budgerigar Club was admitted to the Australian National Budgerigar Council's (ANBC's) Hall of Fame following his fourth Nationals win in the same variety—the Black Eyed Self Colour class. His achievement is made more extraordinary by his winning that class four years running.

To add to this impressive achievement, Wayne has had ten NSW Nationals representatives in four varieties in the last six years: one Recessive Pied 2003; one Black Eyed and one Spangle (Hen Class) 2005; one Black Eyed 2006; two Black Eyed and one AOSV (demo) 2007; and three Black Eyed 2008.

Wayne has a long history with Budgerigars. As with many others, following a brief flirtation with pigeons he started breeding Budgerigars as a child. He bred them for a few years and then was drawn back to Budgerigars in his late twenties.

For Wayne, the highlights of his 'budgie life' have been his entry into the ANBC's Hall of Fame, and having four Nationals winners, ten

NSW Nationals representatives in four varieties in the last six years and a few local Grand Champions.

In replying to the question about breeding rare varieties, Wayne advises newcomers to start with the main varieties—the Normals, Opalines, Cinnamons, Spangles, Dominant Pieds and Yellow Faces—to learn first about breeding Budgerigars, before getting involved with the finer points of breeding the rare varieties.

Wayne says that the best advice he ever received about breeding Budgerigars was not to breed in cages that are too small (John Scoble) and pair up after 21 June, the shortest day of the year (Neville Seage). Wayne admits he does breed in the first half of the year but he saves his best birds for pairing after 21 June.

Another tip from Wayne is to use all-wire cages, which are easier to clean and better allow fresh air to circulate—Wayne has 30 breeding cages and an aviary consisting of two flights, each 12 ft long by 6.5 ft high.

The Cusack Aviary



Wayne has been breeding Black Eyes for ten years and started breeding them simply because, as he explains, 'The Mid-State Club needed someone to breed them for the Interbranch, [so] I put my hand up.' The background of Wayne's Black Eyes are birds from the studs of Peter Dodd and Garry Hyslop—Garry gave him 6 or 7 birds, which were bred from Peter's in 1999 and which included Garry's 1999 Nationals winning bird. Most of Wayne's Black Eyes are yellow but he does have some whites—the father of his 2007 Nationals winner is white.

According to Warren Wilson, President of the BSNSW and keen advocate of the rarer budgerigar varieties, the Black Eyed variety is virtually only found in Australia and 'the rest of the world has lost this wonderful and most beautiful variety.' In seeking to ensure how we can retain the Black Eyes and never lose them in their true form, Warren put the following questions about breeding Black Eyes to Wayne.

What are your typical Black Eyed pairings in a season? I breed 15 to 18 pairs a year. Most pairs are Black Eyed x Black Eyed, two or three are Black Eyed to Grey Yellow and two or three are Black Eyed to suffused birds.

Do you ever mate Grey Yellow/Whites together, which may or may not be split Black Eyed, and do you find the Grey Yellows/Whites give you a better quality bird than other matings? No, I never mate Grey Yellow to Grey Yellow—I don't want to double up the Grey factor. And, no, the Greys don't breed better quality birds at my place—the 2007 Nationals winner was bred from a White Suffused cock to a Black Eyed Yellow hen.

How many Black Eyes do you put to other varieties to create splits and what varieties do you use? I put two to three Black Eyes to Normals each year. I use Light and Dark Green Normals, Light and Dark Green Cinnamons and Cinnamon Skys. The second best split I have is Cinnamon Sky.

BUDGERIGAR
AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL BIRD

How many Black Eyes would you breed per season? Other breeders have reported over 85 per cent wastage—is your experience similar? I breed about 50 to 60 Black Eyes a year. The wastage is smaller than 85 per cent because I never use Spangles, Opalines, Pieds, etc. However, if you are talking about wastage in quality birds, it's probably 90 per cent (only about 10 per cent are quality birds).

How do you maintain the semi-buff feathering you seem to have on the better quality birds and even the AOSV birds you exhibit? The semi-buff feather on my Black Eyes and AOSV birds has come about with good feathered Normals and Cinnamons and some nice feathered Black Eyes I got from Peter Dodd in the early 2000s.

In responding to general questions from Warren about breeding, feeding and exhibiting Black Eyes, Wayne advised that he basically treats them much the same as his other varieties. He breeds them all year round, when they are ready to breed. All his birds are 'equal' when it comes to feeding—they all get plain Canary and white millet seed, Jap, oats, carrot, celery, hard boiled eggs and soaked seeds. Regarding show preparation, Black Eyes actually require less preparation because there are no spots to pluck.

Why is it that the Black Eyed variety is so hard to breed and to maintain its variety features? Maybe it is because the Black Eyed is bred to so many other varieties and, being a weak variety, it is easy to lose the variety's features. To keep the variety true, pair good Black Eyed to Black Eyed.

Do you feel there is a place for Opaline Black Eyes to be exhibited in the Black Eyed class and not in the AOSV Opaline class where they have little chance of winning? Yes, Opaline Black Eyes are still a Black Eyed—Opaline Lacewings, Spangles, Yellow Faces and Pieds, etc., are allowed in their respective variety classes.

Would you like to see the AOSV class have Nationals status? Yes, it may help the judges if people can show AOSVs at the Nationals—everything may then not be put into the Black Eyed class.

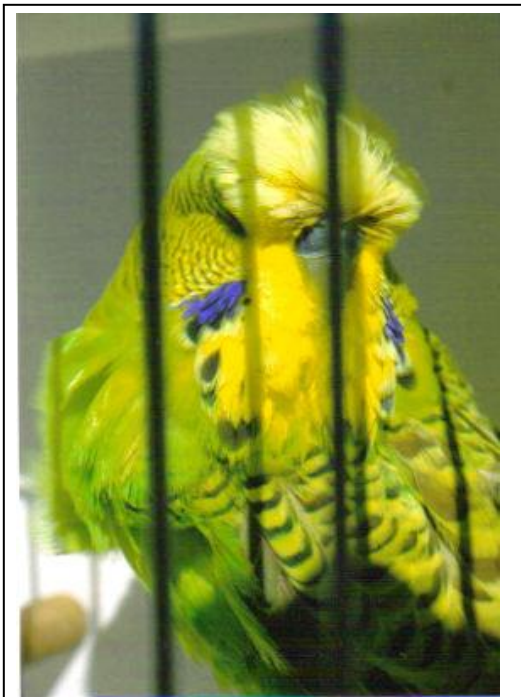
Wayne Cusack's Nationals Black Eyed Line



**Winner
2008 National Black Eyed Self
Colour**
Judges' comments: Lovely width of face,
good feather and strength through the body.
It was a clear selection



**Winner 2006 National
Black Eyed Self Colour**
Judges comments: First place getter is a very
good Hen- up to size with the depth of mask and
good width in skull.
Very good variety content and colour.



**Split Black Eyed Cock
Father of the
2008 National Black Eyed winner**



**Black Eyed Cock
Brother of the 2007 National winner**

According to Warren Wilson, the Black Eyed variety is one of the most beautiful varieties of Budgerigar that we have and, if we are not careful, this variety could meet the fate of other rare varieties that have disappeared. He makes a plea for the variety:

The Black Eyed variety is one of the most beautiful varieties and one which we, as a country, need to foster and support. No one else has them anymore and many people in several countries would like to have them again.

The breeders of this variety should be applauded every day for the effort they put in. We as a Society should work harder to ensure the variety survives and in fact moves forward for all to enjoy. Forget about the 'Great Dane' Normals and help breed the Black Eyed Yellow and White for what it is—a beautiful and most appealing variety of Budgerigar.

BUDGERIGAR
AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL BIRD

More birds from the Cusack aviary



**Cinnamon
Grey Hen
9 weeks old**



Spangle Grey Cock



**Opaline
Yellow Face
Grey Cock
2007 bred**