



Member profile

Jim L'Estrange

standout exhibitor of 2008

Interview by Marilyn Harrington

Photographs by Nola Bradford

There is no doubt that Jim L'Estrange was the standout exhibitor in NSW in 2008—overall winner of both the Platinum Wing Award and the Open winner in the inaugural Champion Exhibitor Competition.

Jim started the year off winning Champion Open Young Bird at the 2008 BSNSW Annual Show. By the end of the year he had won five Grand Champions and nine Champion Young Birds. Jim also had four birds selected to represent NSW at the 2008 National Championships. Three of these birds were shown—a Cinnamonwing Grey cock which ran second, and an Opaline Grey Green hen and a Normal Green cock, both of which ran fifth in their class.

Jim's results are by no means an overnight success. Like many in the Fancy he has had a lifelong love of Budgerigars. In his case, since he was five years old when he acquired his first pet Budgerigar.

Jim successfully bred Budgerigars for many years but it wasn't until Brian Swift enticed him to join the Macarthur Branch in 1980 that he began to exhibit his birds. At this stage he showed his birds for about eight years with moderate success, including one Nationals representative.

Although Jim remained involved at the Branch level and continued to breed Budgerigars, it was to be another 20 years before he got the urge to exhibit his birds again. As Jim explains, he was inspired when he went to the 2004 BSNSW Annual Show and saw Gary and Marion Watson's champion bird.

Jim was impressed by the big square faces of the Watson birds and the fact that they carried the Mannes line, as did his birds. It was then that Jim got the best piece of advice that he reckons he has ever received. It was from his good friend, Bob Wakefield, a former budgerigar breeder. When Bob heard that Jim was thinking of acquiring some of the Watson birds, he advised him to get rid of his whole line and keep the new line together.

Jim acquired 10 pair of Watson birds, keeping only two of his own stock which were also Mannes birds. He used these birds, one of which was a big Spangle

Grey cock with a good depth of mask, as outcrosses to the Watson birds. Jim was determined to get 'the face'. All his birds since then, Jim has bred himself. He attributes his success to maintaining the integrity of his line and his foundation Spangle.

Jim's aviary is full of quality birds, so much so that this year he says he will have the luxury of a separate breeding and showing team. However, he only keeps a maximum of 60 to 70 birds. He culls hard, keeping only 'the best of the best'—about half from his existing stock and half from the current breeding season. Culling hard, Jim advises, prevents a breeder from being tempted to pair an inferior bird and running the risk of going backwards in their breeding program.

Jim breeds about 100 birds per season. He usually pairs up about March (although last year it was May), and breeds all the way through to November. To pair, Jim goes into his flights and picks the 10 best hens and the 10 best cocks. Successful pairings are repeated and, given his adherence to the integrity of his line, everything is related. His other strategy is having 'another eye' when pairing, so he often discusses his pairings with his friend Bob Wakefield.

Jim takes a cautious approach when showing his birds, taking into account weather conditions and rationing the number of shows for individual birds. Once he has selected his team for a particular show, he washes the birds a week beforehand and then sprays them every day, while keeping them in the general flights. The birds are plucked about three days before a show. The night before a show Jim puts his team in a holding cage overnight and transports them to the show venue in their show boxes, packed face-to-face so the birds don't see the light.

BUDGERIGAR
AUSTRALIA'S INTERNATIONAL BIRD

Birds from the L'Estrange aviary



Cinnamonwing Grey cock
bred 2008

CHAMPION BIRD

Below:
Yellow Faced Blue cock
bred 2008



Normal Green cock
bred 2008

Cinnamonwing Grey cock
Ch. Open Young Bird
2008 BSNSW Annual Show
&
Grand Champion
2009 BSNSW Annual Show

At right:
Cinnamonwing Blue cock
bred 2008



Jim's 2008 Nationals birds



**Cinnamonwing
Grey cock
2nd place**



**Opaline Grey
Green hen
5th place**



**Normal Blue cock
(not benched)**

[Not pictured: Normal Green cock, 5th place.]

Jim has a straightforward nutrition regime and keeps preventative health treatments to a minimum. His basic seed is Watto's Mix, which includes red millet—he gets this from Leeton. He also feeds his birds grated broccoli, carrot, hard boiled eggs and dry egg biscuit. Jim prefers endive to spinach, which he gives his birds every day; in fact, his birds won't eat spinach. Other daily 'treats' for his birds include dried hulled oats mixed into the seed and probiotics powder which builds up the immune system. Shell grit and cuttle fish are also part of Jim's nutrition regime. Jim doesn't give anything extra to his breeding pairs, except spring water, but he does provide a big dish of oats and red millet separately for the chicks. Jim also adds sweet water to the water to prevent algae developing.

As many other fanciers have commented, the biggest change in the Fancy Jim has observed in the years he has been involved is the size of the exhibition Budgerigar. To be successful, in Jim's opinion, the bird must now be at least 24 cms in length.

Of the many issues now confronting the Fancy, Jim commented on the number of birds benched at the Nationals. His opinion is that all three birds in each class sent to the Nationals should be judged, but points awarded only to two birds.

When asked for some tips for novices, Jim returned to the foundation principles of his own aviary and lines. His advice is to buy from known breeders and if you can only afford one or two quality birds, so be it. This is preferable to acquiring a lot of mediocre birds from lots of different breeders. As Jim has said from the outset, don't acquire too many lines and maintain the integrity of your lines.

Jim is modest about his success in 2008, which he regards as the highlight of his life with Budgerigars. He genuinely never expected the success he achieved last year. In his words, 'I only started showing again because other breeders were acquiring my birds and asking why I wasn't showing.'

And Jim's success is continuing, winning Grand Champion at the 2009 BSNSW Annual Show with his Cinnamonwing Grey cock. This was the bird with which he started out his fabulous winning year in 2008.

There is now one main remaining ambition for Jim—to go one better and win at the National Championships.

Congratulations Jim on a fantastic year!