



Breeder Profile

Mark Chidel

Mark, how long have you been involved with the Fancy and how did you get involved? Did you have any particular mentors?

I had just about always kept birds of some sort in an aviary in the backyard as a child growing up but it wasn't until much later that I got seriously interested in breeding 'Show Birds'.

While I was studying at university I worked part-time at a local pet shop and it was during this time I first met Col Allison. I remember Col bringing in some brilliantly coloured great big dominant peds that immediately caught my eye. Col explained that he had many better birds at his place and invited me over for a look. I wasn't disappointed and it was from here that my true fascination with the exhibition Budgerigar began. I purchased a number of birds from Col and on his advice joined the Hills District Branch in 1992.

The people I associated with the most in the early days were Col and David Allison, Geoff Wood and Gary Hyslop. These guys were all part of the Hills Branch and I really admired their birds. I learnt a lot from these guys and they were all very good to me.

How did you develop your stud? Where did you source your birds and why?

I joined the hobby at a time when bird prices were at a premium. The importation of stock from the UK had recently commenced and bird prices were going through the roof. I avoided the cheaper colonial stock and bought English stock that was affordable.

As previously mentioned, I started with birds from Col & David Allison but I also bought birds from Geoff Wood, Gary Hyslop and Laurie Cauchi. However, the two birds that had the greatest influence on my stud were purchased from Mark Finnimore. The first in 1993, a Normal Sky Blue Cock from 'Binks/Moffat' breeding, can still be traced to around 80 per cent of my birds. In 1996 an Opaline Grey 'Mannes' Cock, also from Mark, had a major influence on my stud. The latter bird produced for me the feather and head qualities that now feature strongly in many of my birds.

Another notable influence on my birds was stock from Bill and Jeanette Hancock as they became more affordable.

Although my birds came from a variety of sources, many had similar UK origins. I made no attempt to keep bloodlines pure; rather, I blended the features from different lines that appealed to me to give the outcome I desired.

It was in 1996 that I struck my first bit of 'magic' with the birds. I paired the Opaline Grey 'Mannes' Cock to a strong Cinnamon Grey 'Binks/Moffat/Pilkington' hen I had the year before. This pair produced some super birds and started me on my way to being truly competitive. Even today it is difficult to recreate the quality that this combination produced.

After developing a strong line in the early days I went for a number of years without introducing any birds into the stud. In recent years I have introduced birds to add features, a new variety and new blood to the stud.

What varieties do you specialise in and do you have any preferred varieties and why?

I keep what I call the main varieties; by this I mean Normals, Cinnamons, Opalines and Opaline Cinnamons. On top of this, I breed Yellow Faced Blues, Spangles, Dominant Peds, Fallows and a few Lutinos and Albinos. I breed these varieties because I like them, but I don't call myself a specialist variety breeder.

My main focus right from the time I first started breeding exhibition Budgerigars has always been to breed a good bird. So given that many of my birds are related I pair a proportion of best to best. The result is any of the varieties above or some combination of these; I have bred some great Dominant Pied Spangles and Yellow Faced Spangles in the process. The exception is the Fallows and Red Eyes as I try to restrict their breeding to Normals and Opalines; but I have been known to add Spangle to these also. So you can see the priority is to breed good birds and if I breed a good variety bird along the way even better.

My favorite variety would have to be Dominant Peds. Even as a kid I thought they were great. Funny enough, this is the variety in which I have had least success.

How do you pair your birds, visually or on pedigree?

As previously mentioned, I pair a good proportion of my birds based on appearance. However, this aside, the answer to your question depends on the purpose behind the pairing. All pairings should have a purpose and this need not necessarily be to breed a National winner. I pair birds together for four main reasons: to breed a champion; to maintain a certain family (bloodline); to improve a feature/s; and to produce numbers in a particular variety.

When it comes to breeding show birds I pair my best birds together so this would be considered a visual pairing. I pair my best cock to the best-suited hen almost regardless of variety.

Some pairings are based on bloodlines. I line breed my birds for the purpose of entrenching desired features in the birds. This is especially beneficial if you have a strong line of birds. I also pair related birds together to maintain numbers within certain family groups. Some families, while not being visually outstanding themselves, produce good birds when paired to other families. Hence the numbers need to be maintained.

Some birds are paired together to improve certain features. Some years ago I realised that I needed to get more 'type' into my birds if I wanted to be competitive. For this purpose I probably used some birds that were not really the ideal Budgerigar that I was striving for but excelled in the feature I needed. With time I have been able to improve the 'type' in my birds.

Finally, I pair birds together to produce birds of a particular variety. This may be so I have something to work with and improve in the future; to produce birds that will be useful for improving other varieties; or to produce something that I can show as part of the Branch's State Challenge team.

Please describe your feeding and preventative health regimes.

When it comes to feeding I go by the 'keep it simple' philosophy. I think one of the most important things is to ensure you feed a good quality seed. From Elenbee Bird Seeds I get a standard Budgie mix, a specially mixed Cockatiel mix and Tonic seed. This is fed to the birds in jar feeders in the breeding cabinets where they are given unlimited access. I also feed French white millet sprays and used to be a great fan of 'Pepper's greens & grains', but unfortunately this is

now extremely difficult to get. I use a range of supplements that are predominantly water-based. I'm also a big fan of Vetafarm's Sweet Water and Aviclen.

Birds in cabinets are given a combination of tonic seed, combined with Vetafarm Breeding Aid and Rob Marshall's E-Powder and Turbo booster. I find the use of French white millet sprays extremely beneficial for fledgling birds. I believe the added enticement of these are invaluable in encouraging young birds to feed themselves.

Silverbeet is fed on a daily basis and I give carrot, corn and mung beans when time permits. When available I feed seeding grasses, docks and routinely give the birds eucalypt branches, which they love to chew and play on. All birds have unlimited access to shell grit and calcium blocks.

I do not feed soft food to my birds. This is not because I do not think that it would be beneficial, but because it does not fit in with my routine. I am often away from home on business and rely on my wife to look after the birds while I'm away so I need to keep things fairly basic.

I generally avoid giving medications unless there is a specific need (e.g. positive test to a disease). I get droppings from my birds tested throughout the year and treat them when necessary. There are a few exceptions to this – I use a preventative to Coccidiosis particularly during wet weather and treat the birds routinely for lice, mites and worms.

How has your aviary design evolved over the years? Please describe your current aviary set-up, including any special features.

My aviary is fairly new as we only moved to our current place about three years ago. The design is something I came up with after visiting many breeders and giving it much thought. I must have come up with close to a dozen variations before settling on my design.

My aviary is enclosed within a large 'Australian Barn' style shed. The front half of the shed is for general storage and workshop and the back is for the bird room and flights. Within the shed I have constructed internal walls and ceiling from cool room panel. I chose this because of its excellent thermal properties and its ease of maintenance. The birdroom has a large stainless steel bench with twin sinks and hot and cold mixer taps.

There are 36 breeding cabinets with storage cupboards underneath, a small internal flight and a seed drawer that has space for eight separate mixes. Above this there are two nappy cages and shelving for show cages.

The birdroom is adjoined to the four large external flights by a glass sliding door. The outdoor flights have a fully enclosed roof but have an open front and half open sides. The sides have sliding doors that can be closed at night or in bad weather. Apart from the flights the floors are tiled throughout. I could easily fit in another 12 breeding cabinets but find 36 keeps me busy enough.

I'm lucky because we have plenty of space where we live and I was pretty much able to build the design and size I wanted. There is still a bit of finishing off to do, but overall I'm very pleased with the way my aviary set-up works.

What have been some of your highlights/major achievements?

I have been fortunate enough to have had many wins but there are a few that really stick in my mind. In no particular order, the first is winning Champion Novice at Hills Annual Show at my very first show. The next is my very first Grand Champion at Riverlands Annual Show in 1998. I have twice won the BSNSW Annual Show in 2003 and 2005 and, finally, each of my five National wins are very special to me.

I have a couple of special personal achievements. One is winning Grand Champion in three consecutive years at the Cumberland Annual Show. This was achieved with a father, son and grandson

combination. The other is the compliments I receive from fellow exhibitors about my birds and how I have been able to develop a distinct look in them.

I'm not sure if you have traveled overseas to view Budgerigars. If so, in your eyes, how does the Australian Budgerigar compare with overseas birds?

I have traveled overseas, but it was back in 1994 when I was still a novice so my perspective on things back then was probably a bit different to what they would be today. I visited Gerald Binks in England, William Kohoht in Austria and Jo Mannes in Germany. My feelings at the time were the best birds going around in Sydney were equal to those I saw in England and Austria. Jo Mannes, on the other hand, was quite a different story. The birds I saw during my visit are still impregnated in my mind, like nothing else I had seen before. The best were far superior to what I had seen in Australia. In recent times I have had to rely on pictures to judge the quality of overseas birds. From what I can gather the very best birds over here would still probably be competitive in most places overseas. But my feeling is that the 'super' birds are probably more numerous abroad.

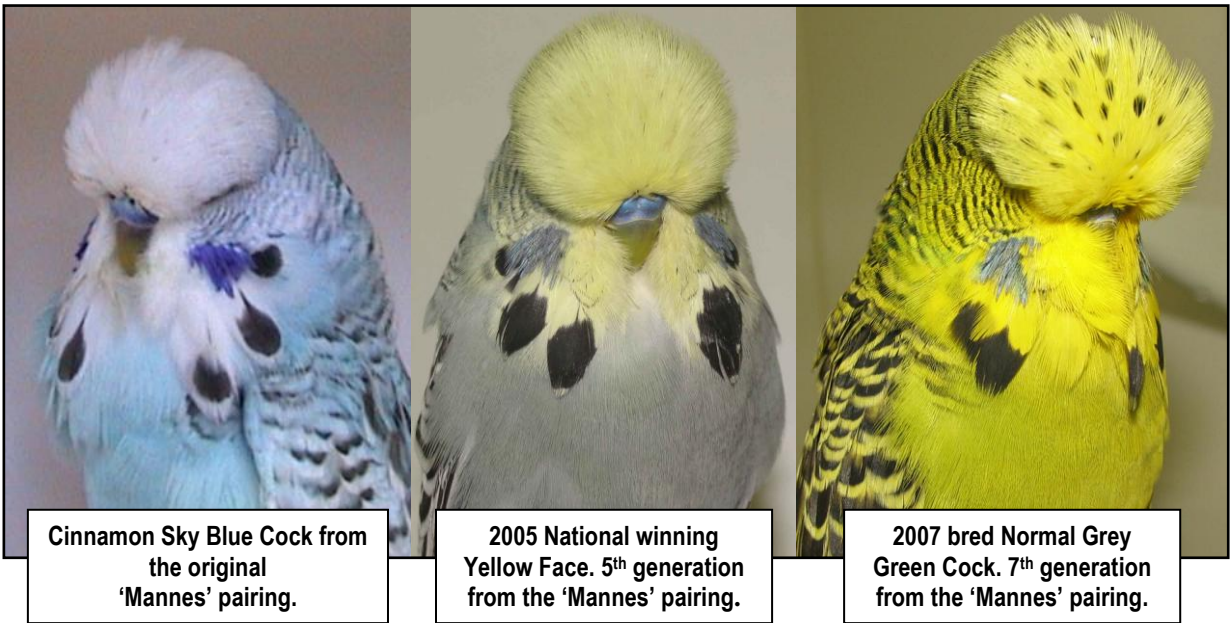
What is the most memorable advice about the Fancy that you have been given?

No one piece of advice stands out but what the company I kept in the early days has instilled in me is a psyche that the 'Budgerigar' (quality) always comes first.

Interview by Marilyn Harrington

The Chidel Aviary



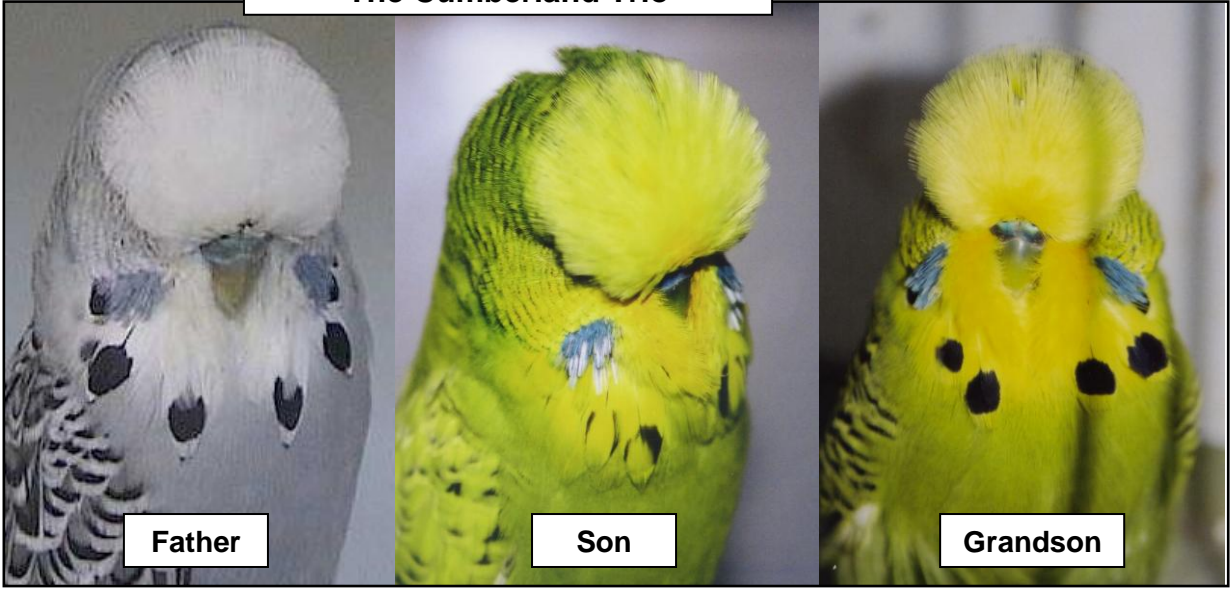


Cinnamon Sky Blue Cock from the original 'Mannes' pairing.

2005 National winning Yellow Face. 5th generation from the 'Mannes' pairing.

2007 bred Normal Grey Green Cock. 7th generation from the 'Mannes' pairing.

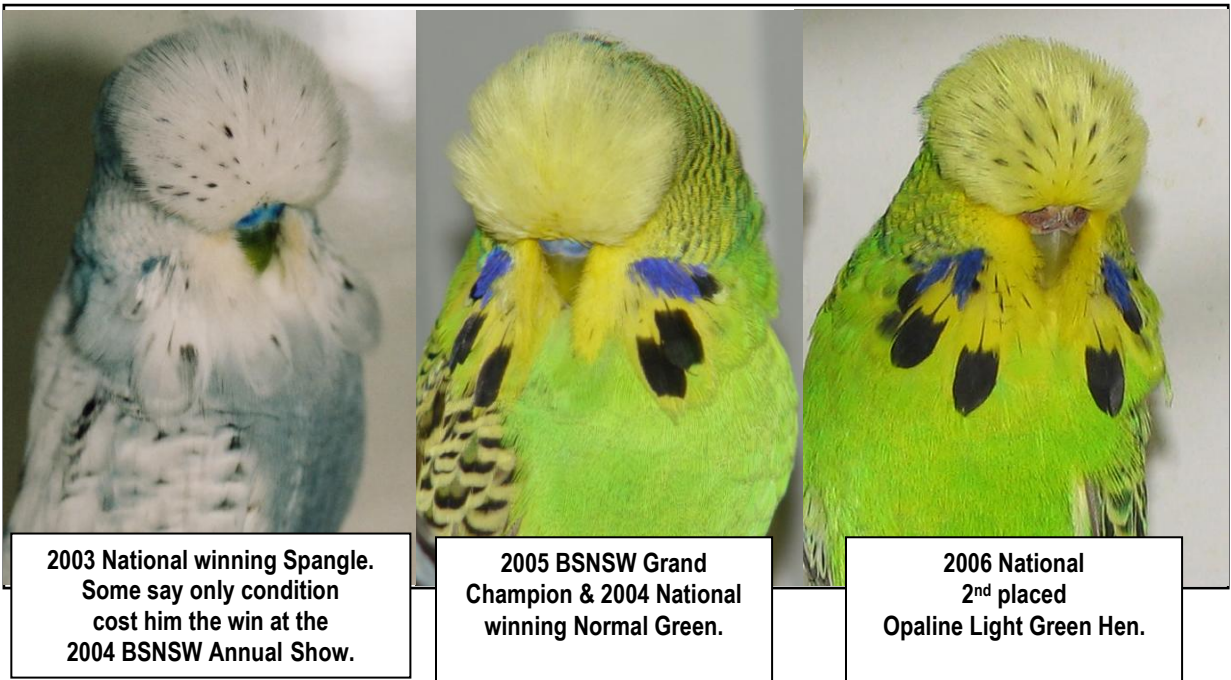
The Cumberland Trio



Father

Son

Grandson



2003 National winning Spangle. Some say only condition cost him the win at the 2004 BSNSW Annual Show.

2005 BSNSW Grand Champion & 2004 National winning Normal Green.

2006 National 2nd placed Opaline Light Green Hen.