

# Line-breeding with longevity

Developing your own line is the way to consistency, says **BRIAN KEENAN** – and longer-lived birds than you might expect can contribute to your programme, so think before you discard!

## CANARIES

I HAVE always believed in line-breeding, as it offers the most practical way of controlling the gene pool, and thereby producing more consistent results, regardless of which animals you are working with.

Once when I discussed this with John O'Connor from Dublin, he suggested that it was always the basis, but our birds generally did not live long enough for our studs to fully benefit from line breeding. I am not so sure.

Several years ago I visited one old Liverpool breeder, who he showed me five generations of clear yellow cocks. They were all very similar, but showing a progressive improvement, which I remarked on. "They're all off your cock bird from six years ago," he told me. "There he is in the bottom cage. I bred with him in the first year and, ever since, I have paired him back to one of his daughters, each from the next generation. They come out like peas in a pod now!"

How many canary breeders keep birds for more than a couple of years? YCC secretary Keith Williams tells me he is remarkably patient with any new birds he brings in. He had worked with one bird for five years before it produced anything, but that bird in the end had been key to his current stud. I know I would have lost

patience with any non-productive bird long before five years had passed, as I am sure many other people would also, but as Keith said, you've bought that bird in good faith, and you've bought it for yourself. Why give it to someone else if it doesn't work straight away?

An illustration of this point, I remember

**“ You need to introduce new blood into the line, but certainly not every year, and certainly not after every bad show result**

very well, came in 1971. A self green hen was offered for sale at the LYCC show, with a price of £50 on the cage. In those days, a decent Yorkie could be had for £8-10, so £50 for an old bird was a bit high.

Rumours were rife: it was four years old, it had been in two or three different birdrooms already, and had never laid an egg. It won the show, and Jim Frazer, a greengrocer from Redcar bought it. He bred from it, too. Supplements were not so prevalent in those days, but Jim managed to obtain a female fertility tablet from his local hospital, which he crushed and fed to this hen over the course of a few days. She repaid him with two nests of healthy chicks.

Sometimes, a little lateral thinking is called for in bird management!

Last October at the YCC show I met Dr Hans Classen, and we talked about our mutual friend, Didier Faessel, a canary breeder from France. Not long afterwards, Didier got back in touch with me and recalled a particular pair of birds he'd had from me, many years ago. The cock had lived until it was 12 years old, and the hen until she was 10, producing birds into her 10th year! They had consistently produced winning cinnamon birds, which did very well in his native country!

This made me think

back to Gerry Corrigan (see box-out, below right). A few of his birds when he left the hobby went to a Manchester fancier who rarely exhibited, but who knew a good bird. I visited one year and saw several young birds moulting out, and their parents, which were eight- and nine-year-old "Corrigan originals".

Today, birdkeepers tend to be far more impatient of their stock, and change lines, introduce fresh stock from multitudes of different breeders, and even change varieties, if things are not going as they would like, either in the breeding room or on the showbench.

Breeding livestock is never about instant



Brian discusses the experiment in improving feather quality conducted by Gerry Corrigan, who created a line starting with a buff Yorkie cock and a Gloster corona (examples only, above and left)

gratification, it is much more about gradual and consistent improvement. Line-breeding is a way towards achieving this, but only if you work at it. Yes, you need to start off with good-quality stock, and yes, from time to time you need to introduce new blood into the line, but certainly not every year, and not after every bad show result.

With care, canaries do live long enough to produce consistent breeding lines, particularly the cock birds. Our current YCC president, Gary Eaton, summed birdkeeping up when he wrote in our club handbook that it wasn't the judges' opinions that

mattered so much, as it was how you thought about your own birds. He reasoned that you saw your birds every day, and if they were pleasing to you, then that was all that really mattered.

And it follows, of course, that if your own birds are pleasing to you, then all you need to do is to produce more similar-looking birds, based on a line-breeding programme.

All it needs is time, patience and understanding.

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Gary Eaton: whose opinion matters most when it comes to your own birds? Your own opinion, Gary has emphasised

## Laying down a new line

BRIAN KEENAN offers a recent example to show that line-breeding following an outcross can produce good results in a couple of seasons. And you don't have to be breeding budgies!

### CANARIES

I WAS interested to read Fred Wright's article (see August 22 issue) regarding line-breeding with other winged budgies, because it is a methodology I believe in and very much in line with canaries. There are times, however, when new blood needs to be injected into any developed line, both to improve vigour and to introduce new features that will help improve what already exists.

In late 2016, I was pleased to obtain a hen bred from a friend, which related to my existing line. She produced more than that my own

typical hens and was as strongly built as any cock bird. These were desirable features and in 2017 she produced 15 chicks over three nests, all of which she raised single-handed.

The cock bird I used complemented her well, and I selected a few of the 15 chicks for onward breeding, also enjoying minor successes on the show bench with some of them. That single outcross was one of Fred's original points – namely, outcrossing bred from line-bred birds can pay power.

Much to my surprise these days about using feeder canaries, which I also believe have a place, but I have always thought that "backlines" when managed

correctly are free-breeding, self-seeding birds. My original mentor, Ewan Hendrik, often talked of the value of "back-line" birds, which are new additions that certainly provide benefit to be using her again in 2018, plus a few of her progeny, but recent that by the end of the 2018 breeding season, I currently have 46 sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters related to my original 2016 hen, after only two breeding seasons.

Putting this into perspective, I had aimed for about 40 chicks and treated the 2018 breeding season with 60, so more than half of my young birds already carry the new hen's blood.

The overall quality remains high, with three daughters proving themselves to be both specific and so reliable as their mother. They are equipped with the same vice-grip mandibles as she is. This mandible and foot quality is a single outcross can influence a whole line, if managed correctly. Another plus factor, which again



Founding parents: the original hen is the clear-headed winged bird on the left, and the cock bird is the partner of the original hen. She produced 15 chicks from that pairing.

underlines Fred's point, so that two separate birds, I suggest to two different breeds in 2017 from the first

only carrying 50 per cent of my original hen's line, but these have been paired back into my line since, so a consistent lineage is being kept, with each 2018 bird now carrying 100 per cent of my original hen's blood. I also paired the original father into one of his daughters for a single nest, which has produced some acceptable birds with which to cross breed.

The original hen was paired to a different, unrelated cock bird in 2016, enabling us to see her strongest visual features, and again, useful chicks have emerged. Brian continues his reflections and notes.

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The daughter (left) paired to the original cock bird produced the original green yellow cock in the breeding cage (right)

Refer back to the October 10 and 17, 2018 issues for more advice from Brian on line-breeding

## Line-breeding out the lumps: a fascinating experiment

GERRY Corrigan was a renowned Yorkie breeder, exhibitor and judge, who decided to learn more about feather quality. Lumps were quite prevalent in Yorkies in the late 1960s, so Gerry began by crossing a clear buff Gloster Consort hen with a buff Yorkie cock.

Each year he retained just one young hen, always pairing it back into a buff Yorkshire cock. This experiment continued for six years and, by the fourth generation, a passable Yorkie-type bird had been produced. The fifth- and sixth-generation hens could have been exhibited as they were quite typical, and were also producing birds true to type. Every

time, Gerry had paired buff to buff, always working with short hard-feathered cock birds, and never once did he produce feather lumps.

His experimental breeding was controlled: he could use the hens as feeders for his Yorkies, with the cock birds despatched to the pet trade, which was then thriving in Tib Street, Manchester. Gerry's experiments were not so much about longevity, but they were not so far removed from the experimental breedings used in recent years to help form the new London fancy, and which are being called upon as evidence as part of COM's assessment of any new canary breed.



Basing your breeding programme around the particular qualities of a selected bird (example above) is the best guarantee of producing consistent show birds (right)



YCC secretary Keith Williams is exceptionally patient with any new birds he buys in