

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 show-winning budgies, because it is a methodology I believe in and very much favour with canaries. There are times, however, when new blood needs to be inserted 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 privileged to obtain a hen bird from a friend, which related to my existing line. She possessed more length than my own

typical hens and was as strongly built as any cock bird. Those were desirable features and in 2017 she produced 13 chicks over three nests, all of which she raised single-handed.

The cock bird I used complemented her well, so I selected a few of the 13 chicks for onward breeding, also enjoying minor successes on the show bench with some of them. That again underlines one of Fred's original points – namely, outcrosses bred from line-bred birds can win prizes!

Much is made these days about using feeder canaries, which I also believe have a place, but I have always thought that Yorkshires, when managed

correctly, are free-breeding, self-rearing birds. My original mentor, Edwin Henshall, often talked of the value of "vice-free" hens, which my new addition had certainly proved herself to be.

Using her again in 2018, plus a few of her progeny, has meant 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 finished the 2018 breeding season with 66, 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 prolific and as reliable as their mother. They are equipped with the same vice-free maternal instincts as she is. This illustrates just how quickly a single outcross can influence a birdroom, if managed correctly.

Another plus factor, which again

adequately hydrated is vital. Yet, unfortunately, it is not considered safe to drink tap water there. So what do local people rely on? Yes, bottled water, sold in plastic bottles, with numerous roadside stalls ensuring that it is readily accessible.

A ban or tax on plastic bottles? Well, that would inevitably come at a high price for people there, in terms of their health. There needs to be greater acceptance from politicians that these are complex global problems which cannot be solved by simplistic knee-jerk solutions.

That is definitely the case with the concerns around dog-breeding, too. We are due to leave the EU in a matter of months now. Would it not have been better to address the issue at that stage, rather than trying to do so now in the guise of the AAL?

There is no joined-up thinking within DEFRA, either. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 was an over-arching piece of legislation, which covered all groups of animals apart from invertebrates. You might have expected the AAL to take a similar approach, but you'd be wrong. In this case, fish for some reason are excluded. It's simply not logical. There are hobbyists breeders with valuable collections of koi worth thousands of pounds, just in the same way as there are those who keep and breed macaws and expensive parrots.

Under DEFRA's definition, though, it is not only parrot breeders who could find themselves falling foul of the AAL, if they have more than £1,000 of "trading income" each year – which is basically equivalent to selling a young multi-coloured macaw.

It is all very well DEFRA stating that breeders will not be affected by the AAL



Founding parents: the original line hen is the clear headed variegated bird on the far right, says Brian. She produced good results in 2017 and 2018. Left: the original line cock, which is the partner of the original line hen. She produced 13 chicks from that pairing. All photos: Brian Keenan

underlines Fred's point, is that two separate birds I supplied to two different friends in 2017 from the first

only carrying 50 per cent of my original home line, but these have been paired back into line-bred birds, so a consistent likeness is being seen, with each 2018 bird now carrying up to 75 per cent line-bred genetic background. I also paired the original father into one of his daughters for a single nest, which has produced some acceptable birds with which to move forward.

The original hen was paired into a different, unrelated cock bird for 2018, doubling up on her strongest visual features,

and again, useful chicks have emerged.

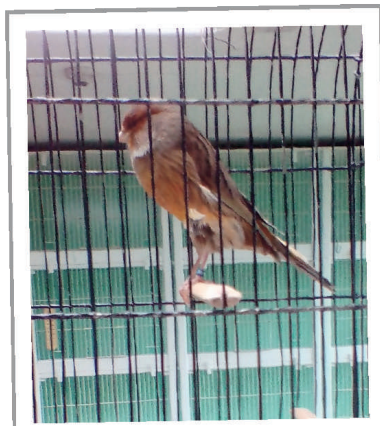
• Brian continues his reflections next week.

Brian Keenan is the publicity officer of the Yorkshire Canary Club and chairman of Liverpool & District YCC.

By the end of the 2018 breeding season, I currently have 46 sons, daughters, grandsons and granddaughters related to my original 2016 hen

13 chicks have each gone on to produce good quality chicks in their new homes during the 2018 season. Both have told me these are their best birds.

But back to the line-breeding component. The 2016 hen's chicks were



The daughter (left) paired to the original father, which produced the unflighted green yellow cock in the training cage (right)



Alderton's Observations

How has the new Animal Activities Licensing legislation come about, and what does the future hold, asks David?

BY THE time you read this, the latest piece of animal-related legislation from DEFRA will have come into force, in the guise of the Animal Welfare (Licensing of Activities Involving Animals) (England) Regulations 2018 (hereafter, AAL). The driving force behind this legislation has been the well-publicised welfare concerns regarding puppies (and, to less extent, kittens) being imported from other parts of the EU to the UK, at a very early age in most cases, and sold to unsuspecting purchasers here.

Some would argue that, rather than bringing in costly new regulations, changes to and better enforcement of existing legislation – notably the Breeding of Dogs Act, which has already been amended in 1991 and 1999 – might have achieved better results with less bureaucracy. But in

this digital age, when government policies are, it seems, increasingly driven more by internet Twitter storms than reality, it is perhaps unsurprising that England's birdkeepers are being burdened with yet more bureaucracy.

Since becoming DEFRA's Secretary of State last year, Michael Gove has instigated a broad raft of what could be described as "populist" policy initiatives, covering everything from plastics and ivory to dogs and a proposed ban on petrol cars. The question that never seems to be asked is how well thought-out these policies are when translated into legislation.

It is so simple to stand up and say let's ban single-use plastics, for example. I've just returned from filming on the beautiful Indian Ocean island of Sri Lanka. It's hot, tropical and humid, especially out in the countryside there. Being able to keep



At the back of it: commercial sales of puppies have driven the development of AAL

– but the facts of the matter means that this is inevitable. Those who are likely to breach this £1,000 limit would be well advised to keep accounts of outgoing and income – ironically, in just the same way as a business, but in order to show that they are actually *not* trading as a business!

The only other option would be to stop their birds breeding, which is counter-productive when it comes to maintaining captive-bred bloodlines and could also represent a breach of DEFRA's Animal Welfare Act, especially if they have been breeding regularly in the past. Under section 9 (2c) of that piece of legislation, an animal should be able to exhibit normal behaviour patterns.

The way in which local authorities enforce DEFRA legislation has rung alarm bells previously, but once again, DEFRA has

ignored the grossly unfair treatment meted out to various animal keepers under the Dangerous Wild Animals Act. The fees charged by some local authorities have seemingly been totally disproportionate to the inspection costs, with the only sensible conclusion being that they are seeking to deter applications.

Birdkeepers should be very grateful for the behind-the-scenes lobbying that this publication, along with former Parrot Society chairman Colin O'Hara, have undertaken with DEFRA regarding the AAL. Now that the matter is once again effectively out of DEFRA's hands, however, only time will tell whether the intention not to interfere in the lives of genuine hobbyist birdkeepers will be respected and upheld by those who will be responsible for enforcing it. ■

Prolific results with 'home-bred hens'

BRIAN KEENAN picks up where he left off last week, with further thoughts on line-breeding and how vitality and diversity in your stud can still be maintained when using this technique

CANARIES

WHEN using the method of line-breeding (see October 10 issue), I realise that some people will be talking about hybrid vigour at this point. This may have certainly played a part in my original 2017 pairing with the new hen, but the rearing feats she performed were all her own work. They were down to nature, nurture, environment, food quality and management. Her strengths as a Yorkshire canary aside, it is her maternal abilities I most need to preserve and build into my own stud.

Working alongside this prolific line, another favoured 2016 hen produced only two chicks in 2017, both of which

were cock birds. Space constraints meant that I retained only one of these and I subsequently lost the hen during the 2018 breeding season. The son I kept has, however, produced 11 very nice 2018 youngsters, which will be complementary for use with my "prolific" line. The best of the old with the best of the new.

In 2019, my 2017-bred cock bird from "Line Two" will be paired to the original 2016 prolific hen, as well as to one of her granddaughters and to one of his own daughters. This will preserve his own line, while attempting to introduce the prolific breeding factor back into the second line, from the "Line One" hens. I had not made this pairing in 2018, because the cock was an unproven bird – and you never know when using an

adult hen if the next nest will be her last!

Due to the high numbers of birds from my 2016 introduced hen, at this point, I could quite easily make up my entire 2019 female breeding team using her, her daughters and granddaughters. But I am resisting this approach. I believe in running two, three or even four lines simultaneously, because this way, reliable outcrosses are available "in-house", without the need to get the chequebook and pen out too often. Vitality and diversity can be maintained, if at least some of the pairings are kept within self-contained lines for use as controlled outcrosses across the other lines, whenever required.

The trick with any breeding programme is to maximise output from any newly introduced birds, because it is



Three green Yorkshire canaries from Brian's original 13 first-generation birds Photo: Brian Keenan

only by assessing numbers of birds that consistency can be established. If this exists, it is safe to move forward with newly acquired birds by merging their progeny into established lines.

This is another reason why many fanciers use feeder canaries when working with new birds, but fertility and good breeding habits are both traits that can be bred for, as I have indicated, and as many long-established fanciers will know. If these factors exist within a stud, you are halfway there!

It is one reason why many fanciers insist on working with home-bred hens, rather than trying to obtain hens from outside sources. The habits and natures of their own birds are far more predictable than similar birds produced

in different birdrooms.

Most breeders continually adapt their own line-breeding programmes, adding features they require or feel may need strengthening within their own studs. Many will also run "a little experiment" in a quiet cage, too! I remember those well-respected Yorkshiremen, Jack Mason and Joe Hirst, both insisted that fertility and maternal instincts could be bred into birds, just as any other features can be improved and "fixed" into breeding lines over time. This is something I plan on working with to a greater degree in the future.

Brian Keenan is the publicity officer of the Yorkshire Canary Club and chairman of Liverpool & District YCC.



Two unflighted yellow cock birds – both cousins – which are second-generation bred from different sons of the original pairing, explains Brian Photo: Brian Keenan



Brian Keenan (right) on the Yorkshire Canary Club stand at the 2017 National Exhibition. He believes that fanciers favour home-bred hens as their habits and natures are more predictable than similar birds produced in other people's birdrooms

A superb show bird

FRED WRIGHT's bird for discussion this week is the opaline grey cock (right) staged at the 2017 BS Club Show and photographed by Mick Freakley. He finds plenty to say about it!

TAKE ONE BIRD

THIS looks like a special bird to me. Opalines are lovely budgerigars, but unfortunately, there are few good ones about these days. Decades ago, the opaline classes were full of birds, competition was ferocious and the Best of Colour winner frequently went on to take major awards.

They seem to have almost disappeared from the show bench now, though, so what happened? During the 1960s and 70s, opalines excelled in lovely, bright colour. They were well marked and birds usually had large spots with wide faces. These quality birds also

offered up lots of helpful features in the breeding cage to improve normals.

Opaline is a sex-linked variety, so individuals make interesting breeding subjects. Any opaline cock will produce all opaline hens, whatever the mother. All the young cocks will be, as a minimum, opaline carriers. If the hen is an opaline, all the cocks will be opalines, too.

Most normal cocks are opaline carriers and when these are paired to an opaline hen, both young cocks and hens can be produced. It's easy to see how studs can quickly become dominated by opalines. This factor seems to link up with cinnamon and then lots of opaline cinnamons are produced. Cinnamon is sex-linked, too, so cinnamons also

became popular in birdrooms.

I fear that spangles had a role to play in the demise of the opaline. When spangles entered the UK, they were instantly popular and nearly all breeders were keen to get some. They were easy to breed due to their genetic nature as partial dominants. If you had one spangle partner in a pairing, half the youngsters would be spangles. This popularity may have led to the fall in favour of opalines.

In my view, flecking is the biggest factor that has influenced the lack of popularity of opalines, however. There is little doubt that flecking – that unpleasant black spotting in the cap – is linked to this variety. It seemed that the increase in spot and blackness (what we call melanin) filled the spot feathers and any excess appeared in the cap. It has always been difficult to control and most breeders have done this in their birdrooms by eliminating opalines or at least cutting numbers back. We have now reached such a situation that many leading breeders try hard not to use an opaline cock in their breeding team – only opaline hens.

The opaline grey cock in the picture is a superb budgie and show bird. It carries just the right amount of feather in the body. The cap is clean (not flecked) and there is ample lift of the cap feathers to make the bird appealing to the eye. The spot is more



This opaline grey cock benched by the McGovern partnership has 'ample lift of the cap feathers to make the bird appealing to the eye,' says Fred. Inset: flecking is a problem with opalines, in particular



than adequate. Perhaps it could do with being a little rounder in shape, but the shape of the spot mirrors the shape of the feather in the mask.

It's time that we see the reintroduction of opaline breeding specialists that we are currently lacking. It seems to me that breeders are thinking about breeding good opalines, but many are produced more by accident than intention. I believe opaline breeding would go well with cinnamons

and the specialists could well become opaline and opaline cinnamon specialists.

If a few people make the effort to breed quality opalines, we will hopefully see more in the classes at top shows and they will return to taking the top awards once again.

Fred Wright has been a regular contributor to Cage & Aviary Birds for some 30 years.



Opaline is a sex-linked variety, which makes breeding these birds interesting



Opaline cinnamon: another variety that Fred would like to see more of at shows