

## The Importance of Spangles

Whilst coming through the ranks of the budgerigar fancy, I have often come across breeders who dislike the Spangle variety and simply refuse to have anything to do with these birds. The most common criticisms seem to be along the lines of “once you have one spangle, you end up with a shed full” or that “spangles ruin the spot quality in your normals”. Both of these allegations may have some merit but in my view, such sweeping gestures completely ignore some significant benefits of having spangles in your aviary.

One of my first experiences of the variety was when my father and I visited Frank Silva in 1999. Frank had awesome spangles, the likes of which I had never and perhaps will never see again in such numbers. The feather through the body, the feathered width across the brow and the lift in the top of the head stood out. Frank’s spangles also possessed a real natural style on the perch. When looking at Frank’s pairings on the various visits that Dad and I made to his aviary and watching his video, it became clear that these birds were not only significant for their variety but also for developing key features in other varieties within Frank’s stud.

After acquiring some spangles from Frank, I began to appreciate the natural qualities of the variety. The main feature, which was clear in abundance, was the feather content. I soon came to realise that if I could establish a line of spangles in our aviary, I could use them to introduce a significant improvement in feather quality in our birds. The theory that I established and which was backed up by Frank’s breeding methods was simple: you use spangles to put feather on to your birds. Unlike a lot of theories in Budgerigars, I am pleased to be able to show that this has consistently worked for our birds:



The special features of the spangle mauve cock are there for all to see but in particular, note the lift at the top of the head and the long feathers overlapping his feet. He went on to produce this mauve cock:



Disappointingly, this bird did not acquire some of the key features from his father. However, the level of feathering was maintained. This bird was paired to an opaline grey green hen and produced:



As you can see from looking back at the first picture, this cock has inherited the rougher spangle feather from his grandfather. He has also been lucky enough to develop the same lift in the head as his grandfather. You can also clearly see from this picture that the grey green cock has very good spots – contrary to one of the common sweeping assumptions about spangles ruining spot quality.

The most obvious comparison which can be drawn between those who refuse to tolerate spangles in their aviary is with fanciers who will not keep flecked headed birds regardless of their quality. Of course, we would all love to have an aviary full of beautifully clean headed birds and still be able to produce the feather features that we desire for the modern exhibition budgerigar. However, the reality is that many of the features which we strive for such as spot size, size of head and body structure are often found in birds with flecking.

Therefore, if we discard these birds, we miss out on an opportunity to breed out the flecking in the majority of the offspring whilst trying to maintain and develop the key advanced features. Flecking is simply an excess of melamine in the feather content of a bird. However, I have come across some breeders who think of it as some form of silent killer. Indeed, we cannot use flecked birds recklessly so as to run the risk of having an aviary full of birds possessing the same fault in the same way that not all of us would be happy with a shed full of spangles. The reality is that when flecked headed birds and the spangle variety are observed closely, we can identify features which our other birds may be lacking.

I appreciate that not everyone will agree with my theory behind spangles. Just because spangles have worked so well for our stud of birds and other fanciers which my father and I have visited over the years, it may not work in the same manner for everyone else. However, to summarise my argument, I will adopt some advice, which was offered to me by a very good friend of mine when I started in the hobby; “let your birds do the talking for you”. Therefore, if it had not been for spangle birds in our aviary, my father and I would not have had the following birds:



