

The benefits of forming a partnership

In 2001, it was time for me to head off to University and start my legal studies. Therefore, the obvious question was posed to me on more than one occasion; "what's going to happen to the birds?". I suspect that many feared that I like many Junior and Beginner exhibitors before me, that my time in the hobby would come to an end, at least for the time being. However, there was no way I had spent 8 years of my life building up the basis of a good stud of budgerigars to pack it all in and leave my cherished hobby. Thankfully, I had an obvious solution, take on a partner.

My father had always taken an interest in the birds and had supported me just like any other Junior is supported and encouraged by their parents. However, I could see that my father was just as keen as me and although we didn't always agree on issues to do with the birds, the decision was taken to form the partnership of R & M Miller. It is no coincidence that since 2001, our birds have gone from strength to strength. The major breakthrough came in 2004 when we won 4 cc's at the Budgerigar Society Club Show and both Novice section awards. The following year, we took best opposite sex young bird and the year after, the same bird returned to clinch the greatest of all accolades, best in show.

Despite the fact that I started with the birds, it is very much a partnership of two equal halves. What I mean by this is that we both bring qualities to the table which have been key to our success. My father is a true stockman whose knowledge and development of the feeding regime and aviary hygiene are second to none. My father is also self employed and therefore, can arrange to be with the birds 24 7 in order to provide essential care and attention. On the other hand, my chosen career is a lot less flexible and I cannot be there 24 7 - this is something that I do not apologise for. My argument is that if you are in your aviary, day in day out, it is very difficult to spot small changes taking place over a long period of time. However, I see the birds 2 or 3 times per week and am therefore, am able to assess them with a relatively objective eye and am therefore able to spot little changes whether it be that birds need a boost of some sort or if one bird in particular just does not look right.

My main role in the partnership is that I take care of the pedigree side of things. My short term memory is absolutely appalling; I can barely remember people's names, appointments, daily tasks etc. I blame this all on budgerigars. Essentially, I can pick a bird out of the flight and without consulting the record books, 99% of the time, I can pin point the outcross that was historically brought in to breed that bird. That level of pedigree knowledge combined with what I am told is "the eye" have complimented the many attributes that my father brings to the table.

Partnerships also provide a certain element of solace. If things are going badly or if you suffer a sudden disaster in the aviary, a strong partnership can work together to pick each other up and remind each other to focus on the future rather than sulking over the past or the present challenging circumstances. Without my father, I would have been almost certain to have packed up when such things as French Mould, red mite and other similar devastations took place in our aviary in the past. Our hobby can be a very lonely experience at times. Making decisions on your own can often be less beneficial than having two heads thinking about the same problem. By maintaining a partnership of two or more people, the stud has the ability of sustaining a relatively objective eye whether it is in respect of the decisions which need to be made on pair selection, surplus stock or aviary design.

You only have to look into the past and the present to see a long list of highly successful partnerships, which have been at the top of their game consistently in all aspects of the hobby. At present, inspiration can be drawn from the likes of Chris Huxley and Alan Marchant, Mick Freakley and Ian Ainley and Alec and Dave Woan to name but a few. However, the ideology of a partnership doesn't always lead to success. There are many examples of where a partnership has not worked or has worked for a period of time but has broken down acrimoniously. I can think of one example relatively local to me where one partner was doing all the work and making all of the decisions and yet the other was taking half of the credit in return for contributing very little. The partnership was dissolved and the hard worker and stockman went on to win show after show until he retired from the hobby whereas the other disappeared into the abyss returning to the fancy later but achieved very little in comparison to the partnership years.

Forming a partnership was one of the best decisions I have ever made in budgerigars. However, anyone contemplating this move, should take a good long look at the person or people they are thinking about going in with. As long you can identify common ground and a similar work ethic, the prospects and long list of benefits of a partnership should prove to be fruitful. However, choose the wrong partner(s) and you could find you hold yourself back and lose a longstanding friendship just because it does not end up working out for the best. Despite this element of caution, I can only speak from my experience where a partnership has proved to be a union that has brought out the best from both parties and lead to a common achievement in our wonderful hobby and a relationship between father and son that any parent and sibling would be proud of.

