**A Guide to purchasing birds, by Alan Rowe**

Alan Rowe is a Champion Breeder, National Judge and one of the leading breeders in Australia.  
The following article is a guidline to the newcomer to our hobby in what you should look for when purchasing birds.

It is essential for the newcomer to the budgerigar fancy to establish a clear understanding of the characteristics of a bird needed to become competitive on the showbench.  
The published Ideal Standard (available from clubs to buy or borrow) fully illustrates the required bird, and beginners must establish a mental picture of this in their minds at all times if they are to be successful when buying, then mating their purchases.  
To develop an "eye" for the bird they must do the groundwork required, that is, study this pictorial standard of perfection put out by the ruling body of the fancy and read as many books and magazines about exhibition budgerigars as possible.   
Videos of English exhibition budgerigars are available at many clubs or owned by their members and are well worth viewing. Attend as many shows as possible at club, Diploma, State, Interclub Championships (Shields) and National levels to gain a good insight into the standard of birds required to compete at such competitions.

Beginning at your club level, volunteering as a steward is a rewarding way to gain an insight into how the judges interpret the standard and determine the placings. Most judges are very willing to pass on their expertise to keen beginners (but ask your questions after the judging!) and the show experience gained is very worthwhile. Make appointments wherever possible to visit the aviaries and breeding rooms of experienced fanciers who are consistently doing well on the showbench. Even established breeders usually learn something from such visits, and it usually enhances the social side of our great hobby.

After determining which variety you'd like to breed you should endeavour to obtain birds of that variety from a specialist breeder or exhibitor consistently producing winners or highly placed birds at Diploma,Shield or National shows. You of course cannot expect to buy these particular birds but you may however be able to purchase family members or offspring. Quite often the lesser bird from a good family is the bird which produces the best young ones. This bird would be of reasonable standard, with a good outline but perhaps down a little in size, mask or spots. Smaller birds of the required shape are more valuable than big birds with obvious faults.  
I believe size in the cockbird is more important than in the hen, a big 'buffy' cock mated to an intermediate feathered medium sized hen is the way to go. 'Intermediate' to 'intermediate' is also a favoured mating, never 'buff' to 'buff' or 'yellow' to 'yellow'. The large buffy cock-headed hens are usually poor breeders, and you'll generally find that best results are gained from the lesser hens from good nests. These 'cobby' hens, as the English expert Jeff Attwood describes them, should have a slightly concave backline, good follow through under the perch, plenty of width between the eyes and be a little flat on top compared to a cock's head.

From the stud of an exhibitor doing well on the modern showbench these birds will have the desired 'English' features, large spots, good feather around the face and mask and tight primary and secondary flights. You should also be looking for very active, strong off the perch, thick shouldered birds with big feet (without spindly, bent toes) and in good general condition. I don't consider feather condition to be so important at the time of purchase. A small tucked-in-beak is useful since budgerigars with this trait usually show good deportrnent. Ask the seller's permission to handle the bird yourself. It should be a 'handful',carrying good body weight, since lack of such bulk in an otherwise well sized bird may indicate the beginnings of a health problem. Check hens in particular for dirty, swollen or discoloured vents as any of these conditions could affect their breeding potential. Only buy young hens (current year rings) and cocks no more than two years old. The younger the bird, the more chance it has of improving as it matures, at least up to eighteen months old and perhaps even later in the case of many of the budgerigars of English pedigree which tend to be slow to develop their full potential stature.

To achieve the best results from your purchase the birds should be paired as recommended by the breeder (mated pairs). The best birds available will not produce those winners for you if they are not mated properly or if your own breeding room management is at fault. Discuss with the supplier of your birds the treatment, routines and particularly nutritional needs that has been successful with them and that they have been accustomed to all their young lives at his place and try to maintain it for them at yours. The quality of the stud usually determines the price asked for the birds from it. When choosing birds from those made available, it's a far better policy to use the sum you wish to spend on the purchase of one or two pairs of quality budgerigars rather than buying a larger number of inexpensive inferior birds, quality is better than quantity.

Birds from a reliable stud come complete with full details of pedigree, and if your judgement has been correct it makes a great deal of sense when buying future stock to select related birds from the same stud. The principal idea is to initially breed some useful hens, then if possible buy a couple of better quality related cocks from the original stud the following year and progress from there.

In conclusion, a word of warning to our beginners.  
Anyone starting in the hobby expecting to be a force on the showbench in a short time is in for a rude awakening! (Quality studs are the result of usually at least five or ten years of careful planning and studious breeding. Be patient. Persevere with well bred birds and if you manage them well enough to establish numbers, cull and mate properly then you'll be well on the way to being competitive on the showbench and successful in this wonderful hobby of ours.