Assessment of Stock  
*By Geoff Lowe*

Before you start assessing your birds each year, check what your goals were for the previous year and stick rigidly to them.   
If you have a long term breeding plan for your birds, don't let your mind wander from it during the course of your assessment, it is easy to let this happen if you find you are a little disappointed with some of your results.  
Keep a note pad with you at all times to record your own thoughts on specific birds.

You should start assessing your young birds after your breeding season ends, with any very poor quality birds sold off.   
Constantly study the quality of your birds as they mature, and you will hopefully see both cocks and hens that show the desirable qualities you that you had worked so hard to achieve.

The main assessment should occur soon after the major moult, with every bird being put in a show cage and left to settle to show its true potential.

Look for birds that relate to the Standard for size, deportment, wing carriage, head quality, wing markings, colour, spots, etc., and always have the current Standard to refer to, if necessary.   
Your "Breeding Records" should be studied very carefully at this time, to see which lines have given you the results you were hoping for.

If you want to make comparisons, a good idea is to put the parents in a show cage with their offspring and evaluate them against one another, to see if the youngsters are better than the cock or hen or both. This can be a guide to which is the stronger parent if you are thinking of pairing one or both of them again.

Check through the culled birds, as there may be some birds slip past you, who were not showing their best during culling, and put them in a cage again.   
If a particular bird is catching your eye in the flight, but won't steady in the show cage, put it in with an older bird that you know is a good show bird, this will sometimes do the trick.

If, while assessing your birds, you believe you have slipped back, then you have to decide what went wrong. In a case such as this, seek the assistance of an experienced member in your Club and between the two of you, you should be able to arrive at the cause of the problem. Two heads are sometimes better than one in this type of situation, but make sure you advise your helper what you were trying to achieve to end up with the result you have.   
Have an enquiring mind, dont be frightened to ask questions, they are your birds.   
By doing this, you learn the basics, and eventually will be able do the job yourself. Better to be sure than sorry later.

Always keep more hens than cocks, a 2 to 1 ratio is a good formula to adhere to. The cocks can then be used to gain the maximum advantage from your breeding programme.   
When you have determined what you are going to keep, you can then continue with your long term breeding plan, carefully mapping your matings for the coming breeding season.