Is a "PINK" Budgerigar Possible?

by F. N. Clews

Many years ago in the U.K., in the 1950s I think, there was hot debate on the possibility of breeding a pink budgerigar. It even got to the stage of one of the major seed companies offering a prize of 1,000 UK Pounds to the first person to do so. I doubt if the prize was ever claimed since there don't seem to have been any records kept to that effect and I'm not aware of anyone who even claims to have seen such a dazzling bird. But let's face it, the British breeders aren't idiots and they'd hardly be taken in by such a debate if it was as foolish as it initially sounds, so maybe we could look at what creating such a possibility might entail, rather than just waiting for another mutation to drop in on us.

For a great many years canaries were restricted in colour to just Yellow, Buff, Cinnamon and Green. Then it was found that canaries would breed with Red-hooded Siskins and that certain hybrid cocks from such matings were fertile. Through these birds the red colour of the Siskin was introduced into canaries. Could such a red factor be introduced into budgerigars through crossing it with other small members of the parrot family who carry that colour naturally?

If so, what options are there for experimental breeders? Perhaps the most promising such bird is the Splendid Grass Parrakeet (Neophema splendida). They are similar in size to present day budgerigars and perhaps a start would be to raise some of their babies in the same nest as young budgerigars. Reared this way they would establish a close affinity with budgerigars, making hybridising that much easier. Splendid Parrakeet cocks appear to be rather amorous and I don't think much difficulty would be experienced in crossing them with hen budgerigars. Then the wait for fertile eggs but an even more excruciating wait to find out if any cocks from such a mating were to be fertile! The general consensus at the time of the UK discussion however appeared to be that if or when there was to be a colour break in the pink direction (using pure budgerigars), it would be most likely to occur among birds which have the Violet character in their genetic makeup, but on what back- ground must it be blended to further the desired result?

Many arguments centered on the likely possibilities from using Violet Albinos, a variety nonnally discarded as being of little consequence. Others insisted that of the Violet forms, those which also have the Cinnamon character would be the most useful for heading towards the Pink because of the absence of the black pigment in their feathering. In the 1952-3 edition of Cyril Rodger's book 'Budgerigars and How to Breed Them' he mentioned the breeding of Albino Violets: "Periodically Albinos are bred which show an excess of suffusion and such birds, irrespective of quality, are discarded from the Albino strain. These birds however can be put to very good use in the production of the delightful Albino Violets. "If the most heavily suffused Albinos are used in the breeding of Albino Violets it will result in Albinos with a decided pink or rose tinting being bred. A few years of careful selective breeding could give the breeder a stock of really beautifully coloured birds. The few specimens I have bred and seen did not come about by selection but even then they were striking in their unusual shade of colour".

Although such Albino Violets do show a rosy-pink suffusion in varying depths they cannot be called Pink Budgerigars as the colour is mainly confined to the flank and rump areas. They are extremely attractive when seen flying in an aviary and do reveal the possibility of a Pink or Red mutation occurring. Albino Violets are quite easy to produce by pairing heavily suffused Albino Skyblue cocks to Violet Cobalt (Visual Violet) bens. All the young hens will be Albinos, with a proportion being Albino Violets. These birds can be identified by the colour of their suffusion when in adult feather. If in turn they are paired to further heavily suffused Albino cocks there will be a proportion of Albino Violet cocks and hens. When making these pairings the Albinos used should always be 'bad' coloured specimens and the Violet Cobalts those which have the reddish- violet tone as opposed to the bluish- violet shades.