The Elusive Feather
*by Stephen Mow, Champion Breeder of the Horsham Budgerigar Society, Victoria Australia*

It's the 3rd Sunday morning in May and approximately 10.00 am.
I have been given the Grey class to judge in the Frank Gardner Shield.
There is approximately 65 entries. Lets go.
Looking at the middle row of cages, I move the 1st, 2nd, 6th, 9th, 10th, 13th, 17th, 19th & 20th positioned cages in that row slightly forward.
My steward. who is following behind relocates these cages to the top staging.
My attention then turns to the bottom row of staging where the 3rd, 7th, 11th, 13th, 16th, 18th, 21st & 23rd positioned cages are moved slightly forward and relocated by the steward on the top staging.
All exhibits that haven't been looked at are placed on the middle staging and once again sorted, with the 4th, 7th, 9th, 11th, 14th, 19th & 22nd positioned cages finding themselves included on the top staging. We must keep in mind that none of the 24 exhibits on the top staging have been thoroughly exam- ined in all aspects of an exhibition budgerigar, but they all stand out as being ahead of the rest of the field. Why?
After watching the classes being judged at any Diploma Show, it always seems that the winning birds are just that little extra ahead.
And they are. Quite often there is not a lot of difference between the placegetters in terms of overall budgerigar but we will always notice that the winner has that extra on top.
What Is that extra on top?
What is that extra that places a budgerigar on the top staging at a shield or places it first in a class at a Diploma Show?
Of course it's that extra feather.
Okay so how do we obtain this extra feather length that the leading exhibitors have on their budgerigars?
Easy. Buy the feature in.
There is only one problem here and that is I am not aware of any breeder who will sell this type of budgerigar as it will required by the breeder to perpetuate this feature in his or her own stud.
So we need to breed it ourselves!!!!
Where do we start?
Let us assume that we have a reasonable overall standard in our stud already.
What we need is to locate within this stud, six (6) specific birds.
Three (3) of the birds will be required to have extra cap feather, {type A} and three (3), will be required to have extra width of face, {type B}.
Type A - we require one (1) cock bird and two (2) hens which have the cap feather required, (this is the yellow or white feather which covers the top of the head).
This cap feather must extend back past the eye, the longer the better.
Type B - we require one (1) cock and two (2) hens which when viewed from the front the feather is wider between the cere and eyes than at the back of the head.
The shape created should look triangular with the widest end at the beak.
In year one (1), we pair Type A together and Type B together in order to double up on their feature.
eg:
Cock x Hen = Offspring
Type A x 1a = Ala
Type A x 2a = A2a
Type B x 1b = Blb
Type B x 2b = B2b

Assurning that we have good breeding results, year two (2) will see pairings of 1/2 brother and 1/2 sister.
We will also cross the two (2) types together which creates Type C.
Personally, I would not pair any of the offspring back to the original parents unless the parents were of exceptional quality.
eg:
Cock x Hen
Type A1a x A2a
1/2 brother 1/2 sister
Type B1b x B2b
1/2 brother 1/2 sister
Type A1a x Blb Type C
Type A2a x B2b Type C

As I mentioned earlier, I would resist breeding the offspring back to the parents but would re pair the original pairs again as a safeguard against disasters.
At the completion of year two (2), ruthless culling must take place.
Any offspring from Type A not having cap feather that extends past the eye should be discarded.
Any offspring from Type B not exhibiting the extra width of face required should be discarded and any offspring from the combination pairing Type C not exhibiting both width and cap length should be discarded.
Year three (3) is the year when we hopefully reap the benefits of our feather program. It should be remembered at this point that the offspring from Type A and Type B should be prepotent for their feature, cap length and width.
Pair off- spring as our example shows.
Type A crossed with Type C Type B crossed with Type C.
The results should be birds with that desirable feather length and width.
Any bird worthy of breeding from Type A or B that is not used in Type C should be mated to an out- cross that has another feature your stud may require, and the process starts again.
As you can see, this is maybe a more simplistic explanation compared to many other articles we have seen over the years.
Although simply written,it is not simply a matter of pairing two (2) birds together and hoping for the best, rather it is a matter of building pieces' together to create and end result.

Good luck
Stephen Mow