By JUDY HIGGINS

THE clearwing has been around since the 1930s, having first appeared in the aviaries of Harold Pier in NSW.

The variety gained popularity due to the striking contrast of the yellow or white of the wings against the green or blue of the body colour.

Clearwings are small birds compared to normal varieties seen on the show bench but, due to the dedication of some breeders and the formation of special clubs to cater for clearwing breeders, they are showing signs of improving in size and quality.

There are many theories on how to improve clearwings.

As a breeder of clearwings I can say with confidence and from personal experience that it takes a lot of time and patience.

The aim when breeding clearwings is to breed perfectly clean wings that do not display any markings.

Because of the contrast between white wings and a violet body or yellow wings and an olive body, those colours are popular among clearwing breeders.

The dark factor tends to lead to smaller birds, so breeders have to make wise pairings when they outcross in order to introduce and retain size in their line.

If you own a clearwing and would like to use it to build up a clearwing line there are a few options to improve on the quality.

I prefer to use normal birds.

I feel that it is important to use a pure normal, not one that is carrying any other variety in hidden form.

A cock bird could be carrying both sex-linked (for example opaline) and autosomal recessive (for example greywing) genes without it being evident.

A hen can carry recessives, but not any of the sex-linked varieties.

Because it is preferable not to introduce any of those varieties into the line, careful selection of partners to pair with your clearwings is important.

If the greywing is introduced to a clearwing the result is a composite bird which is not a true clearwing.

Any clearwings with greywing in them have varying degrees of “dirty” wings and you would not
I expect to breed quality clean-winged clearwings from them.

Having started by breeding clearwing to normal, all chicks produced will be split for clearwing.

When they are ready to breed the next step is pair the best split back to its parent and make some brother-sister pairings.

The clearwing to split pairing will produce visual clearwings and the rest of the chicks will be splits, so that is an economical pairing.

The expectation from the split to split pairing is for only one in four to be a visual, but if the splits are of good quality that is still a worthwhile pairing at this stage.

Having increased your stock so that you now have both visual clearwings and a number of splits it will be important to select the largest of the splits and the largest normals to pair back to visual clearwings so that you can continue to produce better quality birds split for clearwing as well as more visual clearwings.

I have been told that another variety that may be used as an outcross is the spangle, which I use to establish your clearwing line is vital.

I recommend selecting your largest normal bird or your largest spangle to pair to your clearwing and then line breed with them until you produce a worthwhile line to continue with.

When I started my line of clearwing splits a few years ago I exhibited a normal split for clearwing at a show as an unbroken cap and the judges were so impressed with the chick that he was awarded best young bird at show.

When I told them it was split for clearwing they were very impressed and were anxious to see any of his offspring.

He is a very large normal green with a deep mask and plenty of back skull, which is a particular trait missing on most clearwings exhibited today.

That cock has now produced some good quality clearwings that are being used in my five-year breeding program.

Retaining good breeding records is important to any breeder who has birds that are normal split for another variety.

Most breeders who have a number of recessive varieties use plastic coloured split rings to differentiate between their splits.

They are available in a range of colours and the breeder creates colour codes to cater for the varieties bred.

Split rings are placed on the opposite leg to the closed aluminium ring and can be applied with an applicator to young chicks or adult birds, which makes identification of splits easier.

Breeding split to split has advantages and disadvantages. On the plus side the visuals produced may be of good quality if they come from two large splits.

On the down side the statistical expectation is for only one chick in four to be a visual clearwing.

Of the others one in four will be pure normal and two in four split for clearwing, but because it is impossible to differentiate between them without breeding them on they are sold off as normals.

I don’t waste time or breeding cabinet space on such long odds.

Breeding visual to split produces all birds that can be potentially used in the ongoing program because they will be visual clearwing or split for clearwing.

I like to introduce a new blood line each year, again selecting the best normal available – hopefully one that is superior to the first normal introduced.

Some breeders may feel new blood should not be introduced as often as that, but I have found that by breeding split to split the chicks improve more quickly and I can see the faults that require attention.

The Clearwing Budgerigar Society of Australia has representatives in every state, who will assist in acquiring clearwings to breed with, together with breeding information.

Clearwing society state contacts are: ACT Geoff & Ann Hand 02 6238 1629, NSW Warren Wilson 02 9747 6642, Qld Sth David Cook 07 3277 8996, Qld Nth Peter Wilson 07 4777 3057, SA Barbara Fisher 08 8288 7936, Tas Derek Poole, 03 6391 2065, Vic Bruce Wilson 03 9702 8070, WA Judy Higgins 08 9402 7161, clearwing@budgerigar.com.au

People who join the clearwing society will receive a free pair of clearwings to help to get them started.

Reprinted from the February 2006 edition of Talking Birds