



## *The Avicultural Society of New South Wales (ASNSW)*

*(Founding in 1940 as the Parrot & African Lovebird Society of Australia)*

*PO Box 248, Panania NSW 2213, Australia*

## **Peach-faced Lovebird Mutations**

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*Lecture by Terry Atkinson*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The members of the Agapornis family are the only true lovebird in the world. At the moment they would be one of the most popular birds in Australia.

I have kept lovebirds for a number of years now and I breed them in wooden aviaries. They are 6' high x 6' deep x 3' wide. I try to run four pairs in each aviary. I feel that because they are a colony bird, this number stimulates them to breed well. All the aviaries have concrete floors as this keeps the worms under control and makes my job of keeping it clean so much easier.



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### **THE NEST BOX:**

These birds use a nest box. I prefer my boxes to be made from solid timber and not from the compressed wood that I have seen others use. The box is 12" square x 9" wide and the front wall is set back 3" from the edge and the lid covers the whole top. This allows the side walls to create a verandah effect so that as they sit at the front of the nest entrance, they cannot see birds in adjacent boxes. This means there is not as much stimulus to fight each other and they cannot see birds above them if they land on the lid. I think they feel more secure as well. There is certainly a lot less fighting than is normally seen.

On the lid of each box, inside the nest box, I have a metal lid (as from a peanut butter jar or the like) with a few holes punched in it and I use this to hold a half inch square of Shelltox pest strip. The nest is a haven for all sorts of insects because the birds keep the humidity in the nest so high. The pest strip helps to keep the parents and young in perfect feather by killing all these insects. Every three months I unscrew the lid and replace the pest strip.



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I use bamboo for nesting material. These birds are fantastic nest builders.

They build a little changer at the back of the nest box and put up a wall of bent [bamboo](#). They do so to try to keep the nest reasonably clean. I don't let them build more than twice on each nest, then I pull it out and let them start again. I grow the bamboo in my backyard as it became too much of a hassle to have to go out and pick it. It grows to about 18-20' high and is able to be cut off green. They will take it when it is completely dry, but do prefer it green. There are a lot of other things you can use for nesting material such as [Kikuyu grass](#), [willow](#), [Palm fronds](#), and just about any of the wild grasses. The only problem with grass is that after a while it throws off a lot of powder and dust. The bamboo will powderise but not as quickly as the grasses. The bamboo gives a good strong nest while the grass collapses after a while.

## DIET:

For dry food I like to mix up a seed mixture I make myself. I don't like to buy the seed already mixed. I use 1 part [canary](#) (as it has all the vitamins and minerals in it), 1 part French white [millet](#), 1 part [panicum](#), 1 part Japanese millet and 1/2 part [sunflower](#) seed (I don't give them too much sunflower, but I feel they need a little bit - they get the bulk of their sunflower in the soaked seed).

For soaked seed I use 1 part sunflower, 1/2 part seed [oats](#) and a little bit of [wheat](#) and [milo](#). I soak this for 24 hours, wash it, put it in a strainer, and let it sprout for another 24 hours and then wash it again before it is fed to the birds. In another situation I soak cracked [corn](#) and hulled oats and I wash this very well. I then mix the two together and feed it to the birds while they have young. They fill the young up with this.

I also give them Vogel bread (12 grain). 1 Slice every day and 1/4 of a piece of apple. They do get a few green peas in the pod, but when they go to around \$4 a kilo they don't get too many.

Because I live in Mascot, I don't have access to [dandelion](#), [thistles](#), and all the good seeding grasses. I use [endive](#) or Italian [lettuce](#). I buy a few bunches at a time and cut it up, wash it, and put it into a plastic bag in the refrigerator. I also find [chicory](#) a favourite with the birds - a bunch costs about 69 cents and lasts about two days. The reason I use these green feeds is that I can get them all year round. The big problem is when you are feeding thistles and dandelions and they die off from the hot days, the birds will refuse anything new. They also get a bit of orange every now and then - I don't like to give them too much.

I make my own Vita Blocks. I must stress that if you want to make them you must be very careful as it is made from rock lime. When I make these blocks, I always wear goggles and long rubber gloves and long pants. This is because when you add water to the rock lime it will boil and splatter and fume. I take a two gallon metal pail and half fill it with the rock lime pieces. I then wet it down until it is a sloppy paste - it is not runny and it is not as thick as you would have concrete. I let this cool down for about 20 minutes, and then I add the fine shellgrit used for showing. The amount to use is about two ice cream containers. I mix in some charcoal pieces to form a nice smooth piece with the shellgrit. These are then made into little patties and placed upon a piece of wood in the sun. It takes about two days for them to go rock hard. Then they are stored in my garage. This amount lasts me about two years.

I use stainless steel nest pans with small holes in them to hold the soaked seed. If you put the soaked seed into a container that does not drain, it will become pungent and go off. On the other hand if you put it in a container that allows the air to circulate it stays sweet.

In the cages they have shellgrit and cuttlefish, and every 10 days I give them a dose of Ornithon in their water. I don't give it to them regularly, I try and do it every second week. Because these birds have a habit of carting their grass and food pieces into the water it is essential that fresh water is provided every day. They really like a high humidity to help with their hatching so they are always bathing as well.

## BREEDING AND SEXING:

They usually lay between four and eight eggs. Usually they are very fertile breeders. You don't get many infertile eggs. There may be a problem if you have a hen who hatches eight chicks. In this case they are a bird who will allow you to move the chicks under other pairs. If you have a pair with four young and another with eight, you can even the numbers out quite easily. They hatch in roughly 18 days and take another 5-6 weeks to fledge them. They make very good parents. I have had them rear Plumhead parrots, Fischers, Masks and just about anything you put under them with a hooked beak.

They are becoming like the Budgerigar now that there are so many colours.



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There is one problem with them; the inability to correctly sex them. Some people use the width of the pelvis but I find it is unreliable. I have had young cocks that were as wide as a hen but as they matured the bones closed up. The way I pair my birds is to put a large number into an aviary and let them pair themselves up. This means that I end up with compatible pairs and they will breed much better. I know there are certain times that you need to control the matings because you are breeding to a line or a colour, but you can have a little bit of a problem that way. If I am going to set up a new colony of say blue Peach-face, I will get them all into one aviary and when the pairs roost in their box at night, I catch them and look at them and feel their pelvis to be sure all is well. I find the best way to catch them is to sneak out before dawn and put a hankie or similar in the entrance hole and leave immediately before I disturb any of them. Then in the morning I take the box and put it into another aviary. This is repeated until I have four compatible pairs.

The one problem I see from time to time in a colony is if you lose a cock or a hen. The remaining single bird becomes a rogue and harasses the remaining pairs. They will try to split up one of the pairs by competing for a new mate. I try to colour code my pairs with rings so that I can identify any odd ones. I then remove this bird and introduce another pair in the near future. You won't have much trouble introducing new birds into a colony as long as they are pairs.



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If you have a problem where you have 10-12 eggs in a nest you know that they are really two hens. Likewise if you get no eggs at all it is likely that they are two cocks.

Another tip off for pairs is that once you have a pair sorted out and look closely, you will notice that the hen is a little larger. This is much easier in mature birds.

If you look at a map of the distribution of the Peach-faced lovebird in Africa, you will notice that the Tropic of Capricorn that runs through their area also runs through Australia. I am certain that this is why they breed so well in this country. The people in Queensland do a lot better than those down here in New South Wales because they have good weather all the time. We are just a little lower than their normal range. In Africa they are found over quite a large area. They are in Zambia, Botswana and Angola. They breed prolifically over there and are found in big flocks.

## MUTATIONS:

There are three shades of green - the normal, jade and olive. The olive was first bred in Australia. This was the beginning of everything in this bird as it allowed you to have single and double dark factors of any colour that was available.

The piers that first came out were not a very good example, but nowadays they have improved these birds a lot and they have mealing all over them.



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The ivory is a beautiful mutation. To achieve this colour, you must mate blue to cinnamon. The offspring are all green birds split for blue and cocks split for cinnamon. Take one of these cocks and mate with a blue hen and the offspring are ivory.

The primrose came by crossing the Sydney yellow with the blue. The offspring were all green. These mated together gave the primrose. They used to be called buttercup. You can sex the primrose and the Sydney yellows, as the hens have a green mottling on their back, while the cocks are pure yellow.

Early on most of the Sydney yellows had a blue rump, but this has been progressively bred out of them.

The cinnamon mutation was also an Australian first. In the beginning they had a lot of problems with their feathers but they have sorted this out now. In America they had a cinnamon that was green but we came up with the yellow. They have cinnamon flight feathers and cinnamon tips to the wings. When the young are first born, they have red eyes, but as they get older, the red is still present but the eye turns black. In bright light you can see it is a pink colour. There is also a jade cinnamon and the mustard as the single and double dark factors are added.

Some nests will contain birds with a red suffusion in their feathers. Only a few retain the red; most lose it at the first moult. The red is more often retained in the yellow birds than in the green ones. One problem that you can see in these red birds is that they don't seem to reproduce too well.

The lutino is the colour of butter. It has white rump, toenails and a blood red face and white flights. There are a lot of birds around now that they are calling lutino that have a blue suffusion in the rump - a slight blue tinge. These are not true lutinos because a true lutino must be pure white on the rump.

The silver cherry comes from putting the golden cherry with a blue. The young are all green split for both. They pair them up and out come the silver cherry.

A new mutation is the white faced blue. There is still some work to be done with this one as there is still some green on the wings.

### NOTES:

There is a trend now to be certain that the nest is kept as clean as possible. I prefer nests made of solid timber and to use wood shavings for nesting material. Many people are finding they can get away with minimal nesting material. I do believe in the very near future that they will be like the Budgerigar and will breed on bare wood. They are now becoming so domesticated and are such a prolific breeder that they will just about breed anywhere and in anything - tins, logs, boxes; I have known some of them to breed in a patch of grass in the corner of the cage.

They can be quite an aggressive bird and it is not uncommon to see a bit of blood in a colony. They seem to be able to cope quite well with the tips of one or several toes missing.

They do prefer to roost in their nest box, but in the hot months (December, January and February) I take the nest box out so that they will not breed. I try to breed them in the cooler months so these three months without the nest box gives them a break and allows them to breed in the other nine months of the year.

When I was a young boy, the Masked and the Fischer's were easy to breed and the Peach-face was difficult, but now it has turned around and the white eye-ring birds are harder to breed than the Peach-faced. However, I maintain that the Nyasa Lovebird is the most prolific breeder of them all.



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