

The best of Bavaria: a British perspective

How do the winning specimens from the Bayern show (report, left) look to the eye of an experienced UK judge? **FRED WRIGHT** discerns abundant quality, and chooses his shortlist of birds with points that breeder/exhibitors in this country would do well to emulate

BUDGERIGARS

PHOTOS only tell part of the story, of course, but it's still a pleasure to study the images from last month's Bayern Cup show in Germany. One point to mention for clarification to British budgie fanciers: **the spots have not been pulled in these birds** and that is a policy of the show in question. So, the images look strange to us on first sight, but we can still discuss the good and bad points.

1. Best in show: cinnamon opaline cobalt hen

This super hen is well spotted with a lovely deep face. There's plenty of feather in the top end and that's why she has such good spots – you don't get big spots on a small-feathered bird! There is a hint of flecking in the cap, down the middle of the feather, but it's only very slight.

This is the best-in-show winner and I am sure many fanciers would wonder if this is the best bird of all those pictured on the page, in their opinion. It's never easy to judge a hen against a cock, but forget that for now. This is a wonderful hen and the judges have seen the quality in her and, in their view, she is better than the cocks on the day. That's fine by me.

2. Recessive pied dark green cock

I have a bit of a weakness for a good recessive pied and this one is a great bird. He has the qualities of a top budgie, with beautiful feather quality and the colour contrast is excellent.

Unless you have bred and kept recessive piers, you would be tempted to say this bird lacks length of feather, but as a recessive pied he lacks nothing!

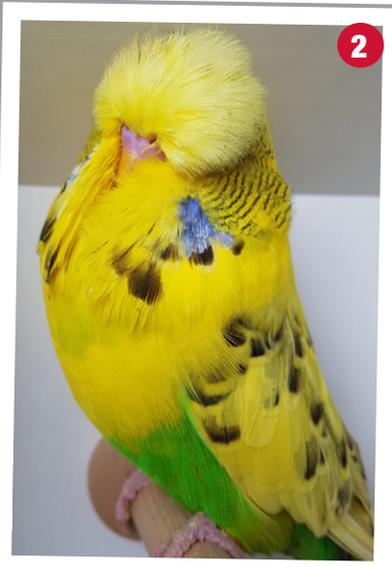
I especially love the roundness of the top end. There is that directional feather, but it is not over-the-top length of feather that tends to make a top bird a bit untidy. I just love him.

3. Grey green cock

I really like this bird. It has a clean, clear cap, but the feathers here show all the directional feather we want on a top show



Left: Fred thinks this super cinnamon opaline cobalt hen rightly took home best in show. Right: 'a great bird' is Fred's view of Daniel Lütolf's best recessive pied All photos: Daniel Lütolf



budgie. The feathering even extends and tries to wrap around the top of the cere.

I like a bird with a small beak, which this bird has. It's made to look that bit smaller, because the feathering tries to hide the beak. I remember when I first started with budgies and was told to look for a bird with a small beak and that punched-in face. This one has the lot.

The spots look good, are well placed and deep. It's difficult to talk about the body of the bird from this picture, though.

4. Light green hen

This is a lovely hen, but she lacks the character of some of the cocks at the show. We have to admit that hens don't always have the show qualities of the cocks. To me, this looks like a great breeding hen, albeit she might not be such a show bird. She has a deep face and plenty of spots, but I think she lacks the fullness and width in the face. However, she is not multi-spotted, clean in the face and in the cap, too.

5. Cinnamon grey green cock

This is a really top-quality cinnamon grey green. It has good length of feather in the body, mask and cap, plus a lovely deep

face and good-sized spots. Many judges tend to forget good, deep solid colour and this cinnamon excels in this. It's so important and should never be forgotten by breeders or judges.

This cock has a good head with plenty of width in the face. I like its fullness behind the head. It is a real power bird and very difficult to fault.

6. Pair of double factor spangles (opposite page)

In Germany, the pairs section is always highly competitive. I love this pair of double factors. Before we talk about the birds let's agree they are in super show condition. The cock is exceptional.

Both have a solid colour and there is no hint of suffusion in the body on either bird. The cock is a real show bird for me. He has that bit of extra feather in the cap and shows all the qualities of a top exhibition budgie. To me, the hen does not excel in the extras that many of the cocks carry. She is a good solid breeding hen. This pair typifies the exact problems of selecting a pair for those pairs classes.

Fred Wright has been a regular contributor to Cage & Aviary Birds for almost 30 years.



This grey green shows all the directional feather needed in a top show bird, says Fred



Fred comments: 'A lovely hen that would certainly be useful in the breeding cage'



Cinnamon grey green cock: good length of feather, a deep face and nicely sized spots



Whooping it up: red-crowned cranes have a beautifully synchronised courtship dance, which reinforces a lifelong bond between the birds in the pair © Shutterstock.com/Josh Aron

THE red-crowned crane (*Grus japonensis*) is known in Japan as *Sarurun Kamuy* or the God of the marshes. It is a sacred bird and is seen as

a symbol of love and fidelity. The wild distribution occurs as two main populations: one is resident to Hokkaido in northern Japan and the second breeds in China, Russia and Mongolia, but migrates to eastern China, and North and South Korea for the winter. One of the rarest of the crane species, its total world population is approximately 2,200 individuals. Red-crowned cranes are tall, elegant birds, about 1.5m (5ft) in height with a wingspan of 2.2-2.5m (7-8ft). They have a mostly white plumage, with black lower wings. The cheeks, throat and neck are black in male birds, but soft grey in the females. Juveniles are similar, but lack the red crown.

Historic populations of the red-crowned crane have varied widely. It was once a widespread species and, as a prey animal, the meat was reserved for emperors. However, in Japan following the political revolution of 1868, such feudal restrictions were lifted and birds were slaughtered both for the meat and, at the beginning of the 20th century, for their dramatic plumage. They are now protected throughout their range by international

agreement, but habitat loss is an ongoing problem and the species is classified as Endangered. There are several hundred birds in zoos and bird collections around the world, and in the UK they can be seen at places such as Slimbridge and Pensthorpe.

They are very dependent on wetland habitats and feed in much deeper water than other species of crane, with a preference for pasture lands in summer, but moving to coastal and freshwater marshes or rice paddies and river habitats in winter. The diet includes a mixture of vegetation, such as grasses, seeds, acorns, aquatic weeds and animal foodstuffs, from insects and fish to frogs and small rodents.

The species is known for the beauty of its synchronised courtship dance, which reinforces a lifelong bond between partners. They throw their heads back and let out a fluting call. Gifts of vegetation may be exchanged. The female chooses the nest site, but both partners will build the nest, usually among dead reeds. Normally two eggs are laid, which hatch after 29-34 days. Chicks are covered with a soft yellow down. Both parents will incubate the eggs and feed their young. The chicks may leave the nest after a couple of days to forage with their parents. Usually, just one of the chicks will survive to maturity. Cranes kept in captivity can be aggressive towards other birds, particularly during the breeding season and so need a careful eye kept on them.

Aviary birds are sometimes reluctant to breed and may have fertility issues. In China, cranes are believed to live for 1,000 years, but actually, 20-40 years old is more likely in the wild, with 60-70 years possible in captivity.



Red-crowned crane: this isn't the only crane with red on the top of its head, but its alternative name of 'Japanese crane' isn't wholly suitable either, since it isn't found only in Japan. It is, however, probably easiest to see wild in that country

Gail Harland lives in Norfolk with her family and a variety of birds.

Gail's Webbed Feet column returns on September 26