



Normal Cock
Cordon Bleu Waxbill

RED-CHEEKED CORDON BLEU WAXBILL MUTATIONS

By Richard Chilton

The Red-cheeked Cordon Bleu Waxbill (*Uraeginthus bengalus*), more commonly known as Cordon Bleu, or just Cordon, in South Australia, has been a popular and frequently bred species in Australian aviaries for many years. Over the last fifty years occasional mutations have occurred in South Australian aviaries, but none seem to have been successfully established.

In the March, 1958 edition of the *South Australian Avicultural Society Magazine* (p.14) an article by Mr. W. Reval reported one such occurrence, the article reads as follows:

CINNAMON CORDON BLEUS

By W. Reval

Unusual birds are always worth recording, and with this in mind I propose to describe a cinnamon from the lovely Cordon Bleu bred in my aviaries. The story is not completed, and this, like many such occurrences, has been fraught with setbacks and disappointments.

These birds were first noticed when a young hen bird left the nest and appeared much lighter than the normal birds, but unfortunately before much could be done this bird died. The same pair from their next nest reared two cinnamon young, one male and another female. Both birds grew nicely and started to moult into adult plumage, then when almost fully coloured, disaster again struck, and the male died, but not before a description was noted as to what an adult cinnamon Cordon looks like.

The bird carries a normal amount and depth of blue feathering, has maroon ear patches just as a normal bird, and equally as bright. It appears to lose some depth in beak colour, and has rich fawn body and wing colour. The feet appear lighter, but this could be expected. Further progress if any with these birds will be recorded as it takes place.

Unfortunately no further record of this mutation can be found.

In the early 1960s Mr. Frank Barrett, of North Brighton, obtained a pair of Cordons from the late Bill Shepherd of Hove. These birds quickly went to nest and produced young of a light silvery-fawn body colour. The blue and maroon areas were as in the normal bird; but the legs and feet were much paler than the normal. Mr. Barrett went on to breed a number of these attractive birds but was not inclined to distribute any to other fanciers; and as often happens when the total gene pool of a new mutation is kept in the one aviary complex and not separated into multiple colonies, disaster struck and the birds died out.

My next encounter with a Cordon mutation was in about 1991, I was working

for an Adelaide bird dealer at the time; and one day received a phone call from an aviculturist in the northern suburbs about some unusual Cordon Bleus he had bred. From his description they sounded very much like the ones bred by Frank Barrett in the 1960s. He was keen to identify what they were so I suggested he bring one in when they were weaned.

Several weeks later on a day when the temperature was about forty degrees and we were just about to close for the day because of the heat, he turned up with all three youngsters in an all wire budgie-type cage. All of which were the same light silvery-fawn mutation as Barrett's birds. The birds had obviously knocked themselves around in the cage and were extremely heat stressed. I gave the breeder a few suggestions on propagating the mutation, gave him some anti-stress medication for their water, and a seed bag to cover the cage on the return journey; and advised him to get them home as quickly as possible, place them in a cool spot with seed and medicated water and not to disturb them until the next day.

Because of the stress incurred I doubted the birds would survive and I asked him to let me know how he got on. But as I have heard nothing further of the birds, or the mutation concerned, I guess they either didn't pull through, or he was unsuccessful in breeding more.

If any member has, or knows of, these mutations I would appreciate them letting me know, so an article and colour photo can be published, as there is no known photographic record of the birds mentioned above, and the Society would like a slide for our *Tom Jolly Memorial Photographic Library*.