

THE ORIGINS OF THE BLUE PRINCESS PARROT

By Richard Chilton

Over the years I have heard several stories about the origins of the Blue Princess Parrot, all seemed to agree that this mutation originated in South Australia, but often differed in a number of ways, particularly in regard to the time the mutation first appeared. The most common version is that the first bird was bred by a Mr. Ruddle of Ridleyton South Australia in 1951; and from that bird the mutation was established.

Recently I was glancing through some of my very old Society magazines and came across an article from February, 1951, in the South Australian section of *Australian Aviculture* (in those days our Society used the last few pages of the Victorian Society publication), dealing with the breeding of a Blue Princess Parrot, from the timing of the article it would appear the bird was bred in the 1950 - '51 breeding season.

The article reads:

ANOTHER BLUE MUTATION

In this country we have heard of the Blue Masked Lovebird and the Blue Indian Alexandrine Parrot, but none have so far reached these shores. The latest Adelaide sensation is a Blue Princess Alexandra Parrot, bred at Fullarton, and viewed by your Editor last week. This remarkable bird has not the appeal of the normal coloured Princess, but is very nice, and should be given every chance to establish itself.

The colour of the bird is as follows:- Body, slate grey, the wing patch and under wing feathering, light green in the normal bird is a rich sky blue and the pink feathering of the normal bird is changed to white.

The breeding took place in a large flight cage containing some twenty pair of Alexandras, but Mr. G. Ruddle, who bred the bird, has rung the parents and nest mates which numbered four. It would be a tragedy for aviculture if this bird, belonging to such a free-breeding species, was allowed to vanish like so many abnormally-coloured birds in the past,

when a little effort over a period of a few years could easily result in establishing the mutation.

For those interested, the sex of the bird is at the moment doubtful, but at least one parrot breeder favours female, while your Editor leans to the opposite.

This article confirms both the time span and breeder of the mutation, but firmly establishes the suburb as Fullarton and not Ridleyton.

The various versions of the fate of this bird either say it was the progenitor of the Blue Princess we have today, or was sold overseas, probably to the late 12th Duke of Bedford who was at that time considered to have the most comprehensive parrot collection in the world at his Woburn Abbey estate.

However, an anonymous short article [most probably written by the then Editor, the late Mr. Eric Baxter, it's certainly his literary style.] in the February, 1962, edition of *Bird Keeping In Australia* dispels the theory that the 1951 mutation was established in Australia and was the ancestor of today's birds; and confirms that the bird went overseas.

This article reads:

BLUE MUTATION OF THE PRINCESS PARROT

Possibly one of the greatest thrills any aviculturist can experience is the appearance of an abnormally-coloured bird, particularly should this be the first or a feat accomplished after a lapse of a number of years. With the appearance of a blue mutation of the Princess, this being the second occasion over a period of many of years, prospects or the possibilities of birds of this nature are a great stimulant to aviculture, particularly if the species are of a reasonably prolific nature, and in this category the Princess is well to the fore.

On this occasion Mr. Bill M^cMillan, of Croydon, was the successful breeder, and the bird bred this season follows the one bred last season from the same pair, but unfortunately the bird bred the previous season failed to reach maturity. However, this season results were better, the bird bred is now independent of the parents, and according to the latest reports is doing well. On nesting the parent birds had a clutch of five eggs, and as time went on it was noticed that only one egg of these was fertile, and this egg eventually produced the blue.

The blue of this bird is very pronounced on the wings and immediately underneath the wings. The body colour is not nearly so bright, but still features a blue shade, and no doubt will intensify as the bird attains its adult plumage.

Previously when a bird of a similar mutation was bred by another breeder, this appeared in an aviary containing a number of this species, and it is doubtful whether the parentage of this bird was ever traced from among the numbers housed. Eventually the abnormally-coloured bird was sold to an overseas fancier, and finally when the breeder of this bird passed on the entire stock was disposed of, and the event of the blue mutation almost completely forgotten. However, in this instance conditions surrounding the breeding of this mutation are absolutely definite. Which again commends this method as eliminating all traces of doubt. Our congratulations to Mr. M^cMillan, who incidentally also extends an invitation to anyone interested, to come along and view this bird.

It would therefore appear that over time the two breedings have become intertwined. The overseas disposal of the first bird, quite legal at the time, after the ban on the importation of birds into Australia in the late 1940s almost certainly proves that today's Blue Princess are descended from the second bird and not the first. As to the fate of the bird sent overseas nothing seems to be known. Perhaps it was established, as the second breeding of the blue mutation occurred after the ban on the export of native species in 1960. If the latter was the case there may well be two separate strains of Blue Princess: the European and Australian. Who knows? But one thing is certain South Australia can claim the Blue Princess Parrot as its own.