

Our Day with Henry George

By B&S Thompson Partnership

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Our first encounter with Henry George was as at an auction dedicated to the sale of his birds in Melbourne. We didn't introduce ourselves as this felt like serious business - serious prices of birds, serious bidding and a serious reputation of a great breeder. As beginners, we just observed everything and joined the thrill and fear of bidding out of our depth. Bella did end up getting a bird as the crowd and auctioneer seemed to momentarily get distracted by a young girl bidding confidently for a double factor spangle and the hammer fell. More on this bird later...

Whilst on holiday in Queensland, Bella encouraged me to seek an invitation for an aviary visit as we had done last year with another breeder on the Sunshine Coast. We sent an email to Henry introducing ourselves and we crossed our fingers. A few days later, Henry called with a warm invitation.

Bella learns best when doing so we arranged to visit on a Friday that would see us being involved in the all day cleaning routines rather than just drop in. This turned out to be a fabulous choice.

When Henry greeted us at his aviary, he was the most welcoming and a gracious host; nothing like the imposing figure, that as beginners, we perceived at the auction.

1. First connection through the blood

We started the visit by looking at the pedigrees of three Henry George birds that we had previously bought at auctions and found the related birds in the breeding cages. We would often read advice that it is the brothers and sisters of the most striking individuals who breed the special winners. One of our birds is the full brother to the August 2012 Pine River Champion bird (picture at end). We also saw the sister who was a fabulous cinnamon grey green hen. Henry allowed us to take a photo of the pedigree cards and nest cards of siblings. This, combined with a picture of birds, was a fabulous opportunity to get a sense of the potential of the bloodline. We could see the similarities with our bird and the missing components (giving us the opportunity to buy).

2. Changing the Nest and Chatter

For most of the visit, we watched Henry inspect and clean each nest which prompted observations, comments and questions. We also got to hold chicks and candle eggs. Below are a few take-outs for us to remember:

Breeding Preparation

- Uses e-Powder and F-vite in seed.
- Has stopped using Budgie Starter.

Pairing Selection

- Remember the parents of the birds being paired not just the bird being paired.
- Doesn't recommend breeding too close, such as parent to chick even if you have only a few birds from one breeder.

Breeding

- Pairs up progressively and is surprised by people who pair up in one go.
- Puts both birds in at the same time and is patient with them finding love. He waits up to 2 weeks.
- Fertility is often better in the second round so he is not discouraged by low fertility in the first.
- Plucks heavily the vents the size bigger than 50c piece (a full Brazilian!) and advises to make sure you remove the long side feathers also.
- Is deliberate in breeding double factor spangles as the pairings are different (uses Cinnamon and Opaline Spangles).
- Doesn't;
 - o Run cock birds,
 - o Breed yellow face greens, double factor Yellowfaces or two double factor Spangles,
 - o Recommend the deep litter approach; he uses sawdust rather than sand on breeding cabinet floors to minimize bacterial risks with humidity, nor
 - o Re-pair past successful pairs - he always wants to move forward.

Eggs & Babies

- Does mark eggs. This is important if say the first 3 are clear to take action to help prevent the hen throwing the eggs out by fostering an egg due to hatch.
- Places eggs close to hatching in warm water if the weather is hot to help with hatching.
- Places eggs on his lips to test nesting temperature to avoid fostering eggs to another nest that has a different incubation temperature. Bella thought this was very interesting!
- Only moves eggs when first laid and two to three days before hatching.
- Recommends using a little bit of spit to get on late rings rather than Vaseline.

Culling

- Henry culls by colour. This was interesting to us as he pairs almost irrespective of colour, but we guess he needs some way to deal with the volume of birds.
- He thought that looking at all the chicks and parents together would be a good way to cull a small stud as beginners.
- For beginners, keep if it has one really good feature.
- Wait for 10 months before culling as the birds can change quite a bit
- Keep the hens!

The other observation was the relatively high number of grey green and grey pairings. A lot of articles we have read advised against this to avoid double factor greys. This was explained by the qualities of the birds and bloodline reasons. It was a reminder to us as beginners not to get too focussed on colour.

All the time we were checking the nests, Glenn was sweeping, scraping, vacuuming, mopping, scrubbing and mopping the white aviary tiles. It looked like hard work but he did it with a smile. Henry used to use sand but believes the high humidity is too risky for bacteria in Australia (except for Tasmania!). Bella and I currently use sand and will rethink this practice.

Glenn had put on the kettle and it was time for cake and conversation.

3. Cake and Conversation

We had prepared a list of questions, which not surprisingly, were mostly answered by nest box 97!

We sat at a round table in the front room and pulled out the lamington cake that we had brought along. Like club nights, the conversation became free flowing and Henry noted that we had the added benefit of Glenn's opinion.

Bella asked Henry about “runners” as a few of her favourite chicks has lost their tail and wing feathers. She was concerned that we could not breed with the affected chicks in case this was passed through the bloodline. Whilst there is lot of inconclusive opinions in articles, none provided any insight in what do we do with the chicks. Henry suggested we keep the chicks separate from unaffected chicks, but if they recovered we should introduce them to the main aviary to build up future resistance of the flock. In short, they could benefit us. This was a big relief and reminded us to be open with problems rather than worry, be embarrassed or act without first seeking advice.

The topics over cake were varied. Here were a few take-outs;

- Breeds Cinnamons with dark wing colour to lacewings (many articles have confused us on this) but doesn't recommend Dominant Pied or Spangles or a proxy for normal.
- Sister birds are observed to come into breeding condition the same time.
- Hens seem ready to breed on their first anniversary of hatching.
- If showing, don't put hens in breeding cabinet cages as they get a bit too excited. Instead he puts them in an all wire cage.
- Breed your own hens (said 3 times!).

4. Down to Some Manual Labour

It was time to work off the lamington cake. Bella joined Glenn in scraping the floor trays and replacing it with fresh sawdust. Glenn gave Bella the nickname "Sawdust Girl" from her dedication to the role. I also had a go scraping the trays and was surprised how heavy they were.

There were moments during the day when Bella was exhausted. I would pull up a chair facing the aviary and ask her to pick out a special bird. It was like looking into a “budgie lolly shop” where you wanted one of everything. She spotted an amazing Recessive Pied that Henry caught and moved to the best bird's flight. It also gave her the chance to take it all in and see things that you miss when focused on one task.

5. Working Relationships

Since Bella changed her junior membership into a partnership with me, I have given a lot of thought about how we can be equals whilst bringing different contributions and how to surround ourselves with others who share partnering attitudes.

When we first arrived, we were first met by Glenn who works with Henry every Friday. Henry treated Glenn with great respect, encouraging him to share his own stories, sought his alternative opinion and pointed out things he showed us. This was most unexpected. Henry showed he was a natural leader of people as well as of birds.

Whilst scraping trays together, Glenn commented that good working relationships are about clarity on role and the ability to have interesting and constructive debate around ideas. He was very happy with his role. We were inspired by his insight and it reminded me how this hobby provides great perspective for other aspects of your life.

Interestingly, in conversation Henry said he never had a mentor. We wondered if there was a sense of loneliness at the top like that experienced of high performing CEO's. However, he seemed to be a man very content surrounded by natural beauty of his farm, trophies proudly displayed around the walls and his inspirational birds. He seemed to be a proud man who constantly looks forward to the next pairing allowing past trophies to collect dust.

The Big Takeouts;

- **Breed your own hens.**
- **Know the genetics of yours birds when pairing.**
- **Don't be afraid to seek an aviary visit invitation and think about getting involved in some way.**
- **Like winemaking, there is romance in the brand but there is a lot of hard work in the background that matters. This is where a good working relationship with partners and/or helpers is fundamental.**

Our parting learning experience was how to put down a sick bird humanly. In many ways this was representative of the authenticity of the visit - the reality of hard work and making hard decisions to continually improve budgerigars.

Finally, back to the double factor Spangle that inspired the visit; Glenn now owns the father and he and Henry both agree it is a super bird. Despite spending beyond our limits at auction, our day with Henry showed us first hand all the effort that goes into the birds and we feel we got good value for our double factor Spangle. Most importantly, I will cherish great memories spending a day with my daughter and hope we connect up with Henry and Glenn again.



Bella at entrance to Aviary



Bella in front of past trophy and future Champions



Inside the amazing breeding room and essential trolley



Indoor flights



Cleaning trays



Bella ("Sawdust girl")
with Glenn



The Henry George Budgie "lolly shop"
(Look at that Lutino!)



Full brother to our bird