

The Melanistic Spangle

by Jeff Attwood

On my last visit to Australia during May 1991 I heard of a new form of the 'Spangle' which had been produced in Brisbane, and decided to travel there and see it for myself.

These birds in question had been produced by Garry Heuval who I had met on a number of occasions at the Australian Nationals.

The birds showing the melanistic markings had been originally produced from conventional Spangle stock but the youngsters in question had appeared as normals in every respect except for the tail which was clearly Spangle type.

They appeared in both cocks and hens, and on reaching the second moult, the appearance of the birds changed dramatically to that of what I have since named the 'Melanistic Spangle'. Similar to the standard spangle form but clearly quite different. Spots were very prominent and solid in appearance, not bulls eyes as in the accepted Spangle form, and cheek patches were clearly defined, not white flecked as is so often with Spangles.

The tail remained original in the Spangle form, but the most eye catching change was in the wings and flights, which took on a very clearly defined contrast, which I have heard commented upon as 'almost a Spangle in reverse'.

I took several photographs and returned to England. I heard nothing further of this new Spangle form.

During the 1998 breeding season, I produced from a Spangle Cinnamon Grey Green cock x Dark Green hen, fifteen youngsters over three rounds. In the final round one young cock appeared which in all respect was a normal Grey Green, but with a clearly defined Spangle tail. The bird eventually reached adult plumage and remained unchanged and my interest waned. Six months passed and once again the bird moulted and with the passing of six weeks the appearance of the bird changed completely. It now took on the feather form of the birds I had seen at Garry Heuval's birdroom in Brisbane.

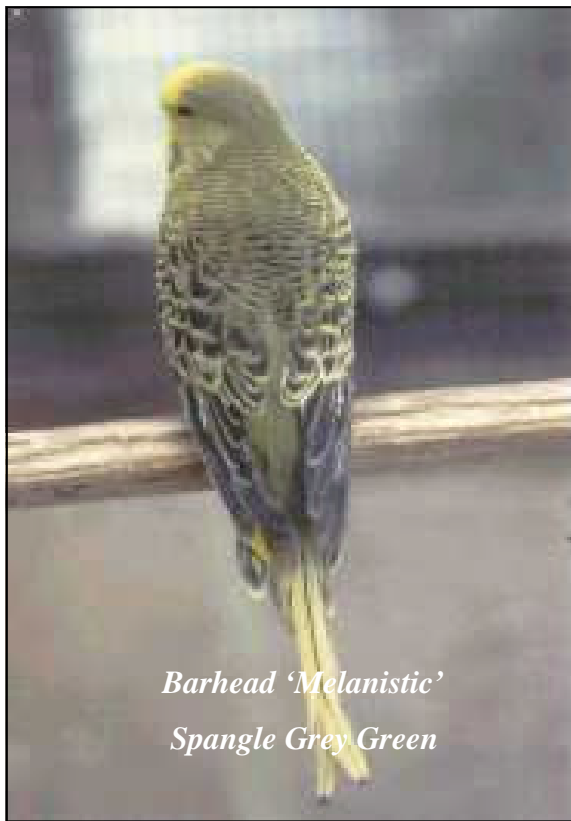


The bird became adult and during the 1999 season I paired him to a Dark Green hen. Several youngsters were produced and among them three visual normals with spangle tails. One Grey Green cock, and two Grey hens. It is interesting to note that normals with conventional tails were also produced and remained unchanged.

In due course these three youngsters developed in the 'melanistic' form and were paired in the breeding cage for the 2001 season. Up to now only one pair have produced; a Grey Green cock x Melanistic Spangle Grey hen. Three youngsters, one conventional normal Grey (black tail), one normal Grey Green (spangle tail) and one strange youngster which appears to be a recognisable Melanistic Spangle.

I have since produced more of these youngsters, which in every case are always well marked conventional Spangles, which do not change their appearance in any way when reaching the adult stage.

A number of similar birds of this melanistic form have now appeared in different UK aviaries, and also in Europe indicating that the mutation is here to stay.



*Barhead 'Melanistic'
Spangle Grey Green*



*Adult 'Melanistic'
Spangle Grey Green*



*'Melanistic' Spangle Grey hen with clear tails.
As a barhead (left) and moulted through (right)*

Photographs – Jeff Attwood ©

Note: The Budgerigar Society Colour Standards Committee have decided that this type of bird should be exhibited in the Spangle classes and penalised accordingly.