**When To Start The Breeding Season
*Article by Champion Breeder, Ross Loats of the Horsham Budgerigar Society, Victoria, Australia***

The most important time in any year is the breeding season. We have to consider how to get the maximum number of chicks from our birds, in particular, our best.

A good breeder will be able to breed quality birds in good numbers year in year out.

The better the exhibition stock the harder it is to breed the numbers required to keep on winning at the shows.

Every breeder has to ask himself when do I start to breed from my birds?

In Victoria this will depend on where one lives, the shows he wishes to exhibit at and the time he is able to devote to the birds in the breeding season.

Our birds are now totally different to the ones we bred from in the past. Most fanciers will be breeding from English type birds that are descendants of our imports from the early 90's onwards. These birds in general are longer in the feather and take a lot longer to mature than our older style Aussie birds.

Most of our breeders breed their birds with specific shows in mind. This will to some effect decide when they start breeding operations. If we are to breed birds for the U.B.C. shield we will need to pair up our birds in late May to the middle of June.

Where possible our bird room or breeding room would be best facing NORTH as it will get the sun all day long.

I do believe if you breed at this time of the year, May-June it is essential to get the breeding room as warm as possible as losses of young chicks are at their greatest in the cold winter months.

My new breeding room faces north and has seven louvre windows to allow for the sun to shine through.

During the last few years I've decided to pair up mid to late July as I've found my result from May to July were very poor. In some areas of Victoria at this time of the year end May to mid-July the temperature at night can drop to Zero and 3 to 4 degrees below. If the eggs are fertile and hatch the chicks find it very difficult to survive such cold conditions, with the parents generally not feeding new born chicks and they do not survive more than a couple of hours at this time of the year if let unfed.

For Melbourne fanciers and breeders in coastal areas this time of the year may be OK as the temperatures are rarely as cold and they can expect better results.

Also the show calendar sees most of the Melbourne shows held in February and March. So one does need to have young chicks old enough to compete successfully at these earlier shows. My plan for the future is going to be breeding in March for one round and then resting the birds until about August and breeding until the New Year. In my area it gets very hot in January and February and starts to cool down during March.

Starting from next year I will be breeding from mid-March hoping to get 75 to 100 chicks. These birds would then be 12 to 14 months old by the time the Young Bird Shield is held.

Each year my aim is to be able to win a class at this show which is without doubt the premier show in Victoria.

From late July onwards I will then start my main breeding season. There are now numerous breeders in Victoria starting breeding operations in February and March with some good results.

The weather is much more suitable then than the May-June-July period. Obviously the big plus for breeding in February and March is that our birds are more mature and better developed for our Diploma Shows.

This is ideal because our English type birds to take longer to develop their full potential.

It is also very helpful if we breed some of our lesser varieties. Danish Pieds, Fallows, Clearwings etc. in March as we can breed some of our better quality birds to these and obtain the essential splits to improve on these varieties.

Whenever we decide to start our breeding season we have to make sure all our cages and utensils used are clean and ready to go before we place the birds in the cages.

The birds must also be healthy and in good condition to start with. We must observe our birds closely during the start of the breeding season. When put together some birds do not agree with each other. If this is so, separate them quickly or they will fight each other with injury or death the result.

Most pairs generally settle down with each other satisfactorily, however if not, remove both birds to a small stock cage with perches only a few inches apart, so that the birds are in close contact with each other. Leave them together until such time as they bond with each other and then put them back into the breeding cage.

An odd pair here and there will never pair up and we have to have a divorce and new mates found for them.

Most breeders have the same problems in the breeding season, clear eggs, dead in the shell, chicks attacked, and hens dying on the nest. A lot of these problems can be avoided by good management and observation, so make sure you put the work into the birds during the breeding season.

I find the most rewarding period of the year is watching the young birds come through their first moult and develop into good show specimens.

Hoping you have bred a good number of these this year.

Ross Loats