

The hobby in Russia: past, present and future

Several British and European judges have officiated at budgerigar shows in Russia: a sign that the exhibition hobby there is now well established. **TATIANA OKOROKOVA** describes how the budgie fancy survived the restrictions of the Soviet era and can now look forward with confidence

BUDGERIGARS

THE budgerigar first appeared in Russia in the 18th century, having been brought into the country from Western Europe. At first nobody bred them, but over time they have become increasingly popular and many people wanted to have budgerigars at home as pets.

Moscow Zoo began breeding budgerigars in the 1930s and, later on, a few enthusiasts also began to breed them. The first exhibition budgerigars came to Russia in the second half of the 20th century and were brought from the Czech Republic. (This is why the exhibition budgerigars in Russia got the name "Czechs".)

In the USSR there were bird clubs, which included sections for budgerigars. In the 1980s, the Leningrad Club of Bird Fanciers and the Moscow Club of Bird Fanciers were both active. In Leningrad (now St Petersburg), budgerigar shows were held in the House of Nature on Zhelyabova Street. Meanwhile, in Moscow, they took place at the Exhibition of Achievements of the National Economy (VDNKh). Training courses for judges were organised in Moscow, and so there were Russian judges who assessed the birds according to European standards.

After the disintegration of the USSR, the situation worsened and the clubs broke up, leaving breeders to work alone. In addition, the political climate in the country at that time did not promote dialogue between budgerigar fanciers and their foreign colleagues. Russian

fanciers lacked information on all aspects of budgerigars and there were not many exhibition birds.

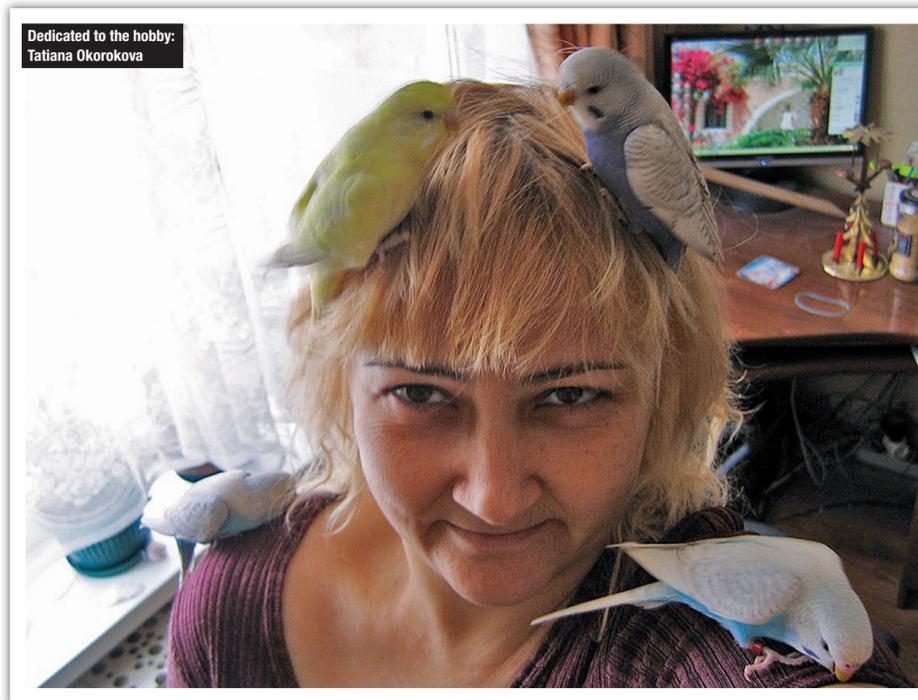
When the borders opened in the 1990s, enthusiasts could once again start to get exhibition budgerigars from Europe. However, there were only a few fanciers who could do this because of certain difficulties, including financial and legal requirements. So breeders continued to work in isolation, with only a small circle of communication.

It was only as recently as 2009 that the first Russian budgerigar club appeared in Moscow. This was the Bird Fanciers Club APOGEE, with Svetlana Folomeeva as its chairperson. In 2010, the club joined the World Budgerigar Organisation (WBO) and organised its first championship of exhibition budgerigars in 2011.

The event was successful and the judges were Gerd Bleicher and Tibor Gyerkó. The second championship was judged by Ghalib Al-Nasser in 2012, and the third was in 2013, with Martin Stieglmaier as the judge.

Another important event also occurred in 2009. Budgerigar breeder Olga Potatueva, from St Petersburg, who had 20 years of breeding experience behind her, bred the first rainbows in Russia. She continues to breed them now and her rainbows have become the foundation of rainbow lines for other breeders.

The next key event took place in 2010. This was an information breakthrough for breeders because material from the WBO website was translated into Russian onto a forum



Dedicated to the hobby: Tatiana Okorokova

(www.parrots.ru) in the autumn. Later on, the Russian mirror site (<http://world-budgerigar.ru/>) was created. Enthusiasts from the forum translated numerous articles about budgerigars, which gave Russian fanciers the opportunity to learn current views about budgerigar genetics and breeding techniques throughout the world.

In St Petersburg in 2012, the Russian Budgerigar Club was formed, with Anton Shipovalov as its chairman.

This new society united exhibition budgerigar fanciers and breeders of budgerigars of colour from different regions in Russia.

Today, the hobby in Russia is developing rapidly with breeders working to create their own blood lines and purchase foreign birds for outcrossing. It has its own website (please see: <http://budgerigars.ru/>).

Budgerigar breeders

The size and geographical locations in Russia certainly influence all aspects of activity in our country, including budgerigar breeding. The climate in the South of Russia promotes budgerigar breeding in summer houses or open-air

colony breeding. There are about 200 of these breeders and they are not club members, do not participate in shows and breed mostly budgerigars of colour.

The breeders in the central and northern regions of Russia need to consider cold weather conditions.

Consequently, the majority of breeders in this part of the country keep their birds in their apartments, with some moving them to a summer house in the warmer months. This is why these breeders, of which there are about 40, only keep an average of 30-100 birds. They breed

selectively, they possess knowledge of genetics and breeding, and they make up breeding programmes, but they are generally limited by the number of birds they can keep.

Problems and ways of development

The main challenges for the development

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cages. Therefore, in the South, there are many commercial “backyard” breeders who breed numerous birds for delivery to other regions of the country. These breeders are not interested in pedigree selection; their purpose is just to breed a considerable number of youngsters. Their aviaries consist of between 500-2,000 birds and they practise



There's plenty of room: a glimpse of Elena Ivanova's birds. Elena is one of about 40 exhibition breeders in Russia. All photos: Tatiana Okorokova



Russian fanciers, such as Irina Sergeeva, have studied overseas breeding methods



Showcase: breeder Irina Gorbunova has her own website dedicated to her birds



Breeders including Svetlana Folomeeva tend to keep an average of 30-100 birds

Specialist budgie feed: what and how much?

BREEDERS from the South of Russia buy feed at agricultural fairs by the bucket – a standard bucket is 10 litres in volume and on average will hold 8-9kg (18-20lb) of seed. Millet or oats costs 90 rubles (88p approx), canary seed is 400 rubles (£3.93), panicum is 400 rubles (£3.93) and flax is 400 rubles (£3.93). They also offer vegetables, fruits and greens.

Breeders in central and northern regions get 25kg (55lb) bags of prepared seed mixes of Russian manufacture. The cost of a bag is about 2,000 rubles (£19.60 approx). Some breeders prefer to buy imported seed mixes. The birds' diet also includes softfood, sprouted seed, fruits and vegetables. Tree branches are provided, as well as vitamin and mineral supplements.



A crest, bred by Olga Feofanova

of enthusiasts all over the world to show the beauty and elegance of a remarkable bird – the budgerigar.

Tatiana Okorokova is one the foremost Russian breeders of exhibition budgies.



Examples bred by Yana Osyka, a fancier based in the Tyoply Stan district of Moscow



Protection: many breeders in central and north Russia keep their birds indoors and move them to summer houses in warmer months. This flight belongs to Svetlana Folomeeva



Breeding talent: from Svetlana Folomeeva



This bird was bred by Marina Kulieva



An example from Anna Sarycheva's stud



BIRDKEEPER AT LARGE

by Dennis Webster

HAVE JUST returned from exhibiting at the Zebra Finch Society (ZFS) 2015 Club Show, which was held this year in Bilsborrow, a few miles north of Preston. We had decided to make a weekend of it since visiting involved a round trip of about 450 miles, and nothing will persuade me to get up at 2 o'clock in the morning in order to go anywhere!

My first problem was to find some birds to take to the show. As I have explained before, the start to my breeding season had been delayed, and the consequence was that a lot of my current-year-bred birds are not yet fully mature.

In addition, the strange weather pattern that many of us have experienced this summer has led to many birds going into an almost continuous moult. Birds that I had earmarked for this show a few weeks earlier were now looking decidedly scruffy! Nevertheless, I managed to find four pairs for the adult classes, another four for the breeder classes, and two single birds.

The trip to Preston did not start auspiciously. Leaving home immediately after lunch on Friday, the first third of the journey went very smoothly. But then we hit that well-known car park, sometimes referred to as the M6 motorway. As a result the journey took over six hours.

The following morning, we made our way to the show hall and unloaded the birds. From this point, things started to improve dramatically. In my opinion, zebra finch people are a very friendly

bunch, and so I was shaking hands and saying hello to a number of old friends and acquaintances before I had even booked the birds in!

The show itself was well supported. Exhibitors from Scotland and Wales joined others from all parts of England, many of whom had endured considerably longer journeys than mine.

My day was further improved by the catering arrangements. I do not know of many places where it is possible to get a full English breakfast, with coffee or tea, and later a three-course lunch, and still get change out of a tenner! The three judges (who included C&AB regular Dave Brown) appeared to be working efficiently and had plenty of helpful stewards, so I was able to talk to many more exhibitors, including three visitors from the Arabian state of Bahrain.

By the time of the presentations, my wife said that I was starting to sound quite hoarse! At the end of the afternoon, I reflected that, although I had not won anything, I had thoroughly enjoyed a great, well-organised show, and all thought of the previous day's horrific journey had been dispelled. And you will be pleased to know that the journey home on Sunday morning took just over half the time it took to get there!

My thoughts are now turning to Sunday's National Exhibition at Stafford. That will also be a long, but thoroughly enjoyable day, and I look forward to seeing and chatting to many friends from various other parts of the fancy. ■



Dennis at last year's National, an event he's looking forward to this coming weekend

Birdkeeper at Large with Dennis Webster will be back on November 4