

THE ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE BFCC

The origin of the Border Fancy Canary is still left in doubt, although many articles and letters attempting to fix its ancestry have been published in the general and Fancy press. Previous to the year 1826 we have only circumstantial evidence to go by. Certainly we have proof that the domestic Canary existed in this country early in the eighteenth century, and was then known as the "Canary Serin".

The former part of the name indicates its country of origin and the latter its true name, meaning Serin Finch. The original colour, we are told, was between green and grey. From the drawing of the Serin Finch we may see that our "Wee Border" still maintains its true outline and basic characteristics in general more than other variety of its progeny which appears on the show bench. We have therefore to thank the original breeders for much that is graceful and beautiful in the Border Canary.

Nowhere in the early days of this century could you find keener fanciers than the shoemakers and weavers of the Border Counties of Scotland. Among them, the bird was bred in great numbers and what they did not know about the breed in general was not worth knowing. Each town or village had a distinct variety, some favoured clears, others the even marked variety, and a very few greens. Cinnamons at that time were very rare. The bird was known then as the Common Canary of Scotland. The bird is said to have been introduced into England by a shoemaker who took his birds with him from Langholm into Cumberland.

About that time the variety began to spread from its stronghold throughout all the counties on both sides of the Border. Its outstanding charm when exhibited at the local shows captivated all who saw it, but its chief supporters were still to be found around the Border Counties of Dumfries, Roxburgh and Selkirk.

From the year 1882 to 1890 (when the Border Fancy Canary Club was formed) a very long, keen and heated controversy took place in the Fancy Press of that time between the breeders of Scotland and England. The bird was exhibited in Scotland as the "Common Canary" and in England as the "Cumberland Fancy" each country claiming to be its birthplace. The late Mr. J. B. Richardson, of Dumfries, writing under the nom-de-plume of "Veritas" clearly proved the fact that it was bred in Scotland long before it was known in England.

Perhaps an account of the formation of the Border Fancy Canary Club may be instructive and interesting to readers and to any members who are not quite clear concerning its origin. On 23rd June 1890 a circular was sent out

by the late Mr. Thomas Arnot, of Hawick, to all secretaries of shows asking them to elect a delegate to represent each district at the meeting to be held in Hawick on 5th July to decide on a suitable name for the variety and to discuss the desirability of forming a club to draw up a standard of points and further the interests of the breed.

A large number of delegates attended and appointed Mr. Richardson chairman. After a friendly discussion a resolution was passed disapproving of the names "Common Canary" and "Cumberland Fancy" and declared that on and after that date the bird should be known as the Border Fancy Canary. A club was then formed and called "The Border Fancy Canary Club" Mr. J. B. Richardson was appointed president, and Mr. Thomas Arnot, of Hawick, secretary, with a committee of six. Messrs. Richardson and Arnot were largely responsible for the formation of the club and the drafting of the rules, and I can confidently say that without their enthusiastic leadership the Border Fancy Canary would never have reached the high state of perfection to which it has attained.

At a meeting in Langholm in 1891, held to select a model from the leading birds shown that season, the two leading judges appointed were Mr. Bell of Jedburgh and Mr. Davidson of Dumfries. The bird finally chosen was shown by Mr. McMillan of Langholm. This model is one of the wonders of the Fancy and a portrayal of the bird was for some years contained in the rules as a guide for the aspirant to follow and attempt to equal.

In the year 1893 the club procured a challenge cup by subscription. The conditions of competition decided upon were that it must be won three times in succession, or four times in all. In 1893 it was won by Mr. Bell, of Ecclefechan, with a clear buff cock; and by Mr. Welsh, of Hawick in 1894, with a yellow clear cock. Mr. Downie of Carlisle won it in 1895 with a clear yellow hen. Mr. Bennet, of Kelso, then won it outright three years in succession, each year with a clear bird. Clear birds at that time were superior to the variegated and dark varieties.

In 1895 a motion that a uniform or standard cage be adopted was rejected. In the same year at a special meeting, a motion that colour feeding should be entirely abolished was proposed, and also that all birds showing type and quality should count before good marking. At the general meeting in 1896, held in Carlisle, after a long discussion it was agreed to let the colour question remain open. In 1897 the question of standard cage was again brought forward, but again rejected. In the year 1900 a proposal to bar colour feeding was once more rejected, but in 1901 it was agreed to by the membership. In 1936 the question of standard show cages and spars were resolved.

From all this, one can gather that the Border Fancy has made many recruits to its ranks, proving how popular the Border Fancy Canary has become. It has continued to evolve to respond to changing demands, but throughout has remained consistent to its basic ideals.

Researched by Bobby Parker (1993)