

Preparing Borders for Breeding

January 2007

A Border Convention Journal Supplement



Alan Harper

**Alan Harper Interviews
well known Border fanciers:
Ron Baker,
Malcolm Barnett,
Paul Huyghe, John Barwick**

Dear Fellow Fancier

I am sure you may agree that when it comes to preparing our Borders for breeding many of us often tweak the procedure we adopted the season before. Either because of poor breeding results, some wonder supplement a friend now recommends or simply to try something different.

I am the first to put my hand up and say I am always looking at ways in

which to improve the general welfare of my birds throughout the four seasons encompassing Preparing prior to breeding, Breeding, Weaning and Moulting and finally Exhibiting. Hence I discussed with four leading fanciers how they prepare their Borders prior to breeding. I trust you find their comments interesting.

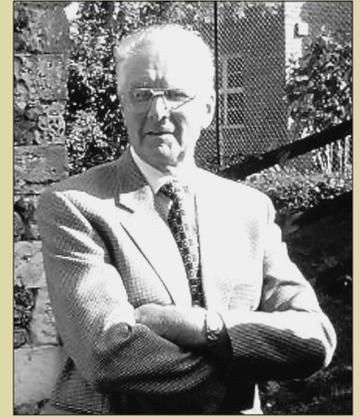
Good Luck for 2007.

Alan



Interview with Ron Baker

Ron lives in Kent and has been breeding Borders for 37 years, a very well respected Judge both in the UK and Europe. Here is what Ron had to say:



LIGHTING & TEMPERATURE

As from 1st January my Full Spectrum fluorescent lights are on to match standard daylight hours. From 1st February I increase the automatic lighting time switch by half an hour every week until I start breeding in the third week of March.

As for controlling the temperature of my birdroom at this time of year my thermostatic heaters are set to maintain a room temperature between 8-10C. Perhaps more important within a birdroom is Humidity, whilst our Borders are quite comfortable in freezing weather, being confined in a damp birdroom is not conducive to good health hence I make good use of a de-humidifier throughout the winter period that is set to maintain the Relative Humidity around 55%

HOUSING COCKS & HENS

During the pre-breeding period I house the hens in very long flight cages and cock birds are kept individually in double breeding cages.

COCIDIOSIS & MITE PREVENTION

I use a pigeon remedy Coxoid and for Mite protection I am a great believer in DETTOL antiseptic. I soak nest felts and bowls in Dettol and use same when washing cages and all surfaces within the birdroom and have been mite free for the past 3 years and keep my fingers crossed for the ensuing year for I appreciate mite can occur at any time.

TRIMMING CLAWS AND EXCESS FEATHERS

I have always trimmed claws, but have only just started trimming vent feathers, I am sure if this has made any difference at present.

DIET & ADDITIONAL PROTEIN

Personally I feed the same seed mixture all year-round along with grit and charcoal in a separate pot. I add to 3 lbs of mixed seed 1 tablespoon of Omega Oil which is a blend of natural oils rich in essential Omega-3, 6 and 9 fatty acids which are well known for their role in supporting the immune system, skin, joints and reproductive system. I also use ORLUX Vitamins, which seems to keep my birds in top condition all year.

I feed all year round Eggfood and Condition seed once a week. My Borders also relish Garden peas that are very high in protein and calcium; these are added to the eggfood. As from February I increase the eggfood to twice a week and three times a week in March until the birds are in full breeding condition.

PAIRING-UP. WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

Alan, this is a very difficult question, the signs can be very miss leading. When the hen is squatting and the cock is singing is as good a sign as any. I run a cock with several hens and I do have some setpairings when I think the hen is the better bird. As for trying to ensure a perfect mating I run the cock with the hen as many times as she will allow until she lays her first egg. I have had fertile eggs after one mating but have also had clear eggs after many matings. When the latter happens I try another cock, as sometimes the hen is attracted to his song.

I remove the eggs as laid and replace all on the 3rd night and store the eggs meanwhile in a partitioned box lined with sawdust.



Interview with John Barwick

John Barwick lives in Norfolk and has been keeping Borders for 11 years. A very enthusiastic breeder who by the way is applying to become a Judge this year. John explains in great detail his method of pre breeding season preparation.



LIGHTING & TEMPERATURE

My brick birdroom is 24 x 10ft with two 6ft windows, a stable door, top half opening for ventilation. I use two double fluorescent full spectrum daylight tubes; there are also two daylight bulbs. I use a fan heater when weather is really bad for a prolonged period; thermostat is set to maintain a temperature of 50° F. I start extending the period of lighting within my birdroom from around the 22nd of December. Lights start to fade in at 7.30am and fade out at 3.30 pm so the birdroom is dark by 4pm. Lighting times are increased 20 minutes per week 10 minutes am and 10 minutes pm. All being well my birds will be ready to start breeding by the end of March 2007.

HOUSING COCKS & HENS

This year I retained 20 hens and 8 cocks; cocks are housed individually in 24" wide cages. Hens are housed in small groups of 3 or 4 in 48" wide cages. For mite prevention I treat birds with Frontline four times a year. Cages do not have bottom drawers so when cleaning birds are run into show cages. Cages are washed and sprayed thereafter with ARDAP anti-mite repellent. Grit is placed on the fresh sawdust.

COCIDIOSIS & MITE PREVENTION

For mite prevention I treat all birds with Frontline approximately four times a year. My cages do not have bottom drawers so when cleaning my cages the birds are run into show cages while the weekly cleaning takes place. Cages are washed and sprayed with ARDAP anti-mite repellent before returning the birds. Grit is placed on the fresh sawdust.

DIET & ADDITIONAL PROTEIN

My standard sofffood mixture is made up as follows:

1. 1 large cupful of sausage rusk plus the cupful of hot water; left to soak for around 15 minutes.
2. 1 large cupful of Haiths Rearing and Condition food, plus a small handful of porridge oats, pinhead oatmeal and a single Weetabix crushed in the palm of my hand.
3. To this mixture I add 1 teaspoon of SA37, the only Supplement used in my birdroom! Plus 1 dessertspoon of Natural Wheatgerm from Holland and Barrett Health shop to assist fertility. Finally two hard-boiled eggs finely chopped.

I vary this basic mixture by adding Sprouted and Condition seed, Grated carrots and chopped Broccoli; my birds absolutely love this mixture. I recently purchased a pair of mutation Northern Bullfinches that gleefully accepted the same sofffood.

During December and January I feed sofffood twice a week, February three times a week and in March daily. When the hens are sitting I continue feeding small amounts of sofffood. In addition to sofffood I add 5ml of White Cider vinegar to 1 litre of drinking water and feed once a week.

PAIRING-UP. WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

At the beginning of March I single up all of my hens into 24" wide cages. This size of cage is used, because I use wooden square nest boxes, hung onto the inside of the cage front and I can hang a second box onto the opposite side of the cage ready for the second round. When the cock birds are "dancing" on the perches as if they are red-hot they are ready to offered up to the selected hens cage. If the hen does not squat as soon as she sees the cock I do not bother to run the cock into the cage. I find the best time to run the cocks with hens is about half an hour before nightfall. If they do not squabble after mating I leave the cock in the cage until the following morning when he is returned to his cage.

My best cocks are run with 3 or 4 hens. If after a successful tread, you run the cock into the cage next day and the hen does not want to know, don't worry, the hen usually knows best and the eggs frequently turn out to be full. The hens that let the cocks tread as many times as you want often lay clear eggs! I remove the eggs as laid and return them on the morning the fourth egg appears. I store the eggs on fine sawdust in small square plastic dishes. Sometimes a cock will not want to know a "dark" hen or vice versa so I use a different cock and try the intended original cock on the second round this often works, as a cock bird is often fitter and less fussy as the season progresses. For nesting material I use moss gathered from grassy banks on the country roadside. To line the nest I provide soft white nesting material purchased from "Porters of London"



Interview with Malcolm Barnett

Malcolm lives in North Lincolnshire, has been breeding Borders for 42 years. Known throughout the world of Border fanciers. I am sure you will enjoy reading Malcolm's reply to the questions I put to him likewise.



LIGHTING & TEMPERATURE

Lighting can play one of the most significant parts in bringing your birds into breeding condition. To successfully adjust lighting is a skill in itself. Adjusting lighting incorrectly causes many bad breeding seasons. I believe in having the shortest day of 8.5 hours of light around the last week of December. This should be achieved by gradually reducing the light from mid-summer high.

From the 1st January increase the light to achieve 13 hours minimum for when the birds are paired, to 14 hours when the chicks hatch. Do not extend past this point. If you do you will reduce the number of weeks the birds will breed for before they start to drop feathers and commence the moult.

I personally use Standard fluorescent tubes Heating is like light. To switch the heating on for ones own comfort and then off when leaving the bird room, causing a significant change in temperature, does more harm than good. Heating needs to be thermostatically controlled. Ventilation is fine, providing it does not cause uncomfortable draughts for the birds.

HOUSING COCKS & HENS

I prefer cocks housed individually. Hens in groups of 3's or 5's. Putting birds into large flights has no benefit what so ever.

COCIDIOSIS & MITE PREVENTION

There are a number of treatments available for coxidiidosis. They should not be administered when the birds are in their breeding cycle. January is an ideal month for the treatment.

Mite will affect all birds, no matter how clean at some time or another. Regular checking of birds is advised.

TRIMMING CLAWS AND EXCESS FEATHERS

It is essential to trim all claws prior to breeding. I trim around the vents of the cock birds to allow easy access when mating.

DIET & ADDITIONAL PROTEIN

Alan, I feel that the feeding of the stock actually needs a whole article of its own. There is too much detail for this question and answer forum.

PAIRING-UP. WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

When you feel that the birds are ready to pair, put the hens into they're breeding cages and fix a nest pan into position. Only introduce the cock when the hen starts to make the nest. This generally works but here are exceptions, as always.

I use a cock with several hens. It's the quickest way to progress the quality of birds in your stud. However, for the absolute beginner, leaving a pair of birds together should produce more youngsters than the strike pairing system.

No. Leaving a cock with a hen could cause the cock to become bonded to one hen and therefore difficult to pair to other hens.

Once a day should be sufficient if he successfully treads the hen. If not the best advise is to try again after a few hours.

You can only keep trying if the cock will not take to the hen.

Yes, I take eggs away and replace on the 4th morning.

In a small tray in a temperature between 10 - 15C



Interview with Paul Huyghe.

Paul has been breeding Borders and several other type canaries for over 40 years. He is an active Officer within the World Ornithological Confederation - COM. Paul has been visiting the UK for 20 years hence being well known to many readers of this Journal.

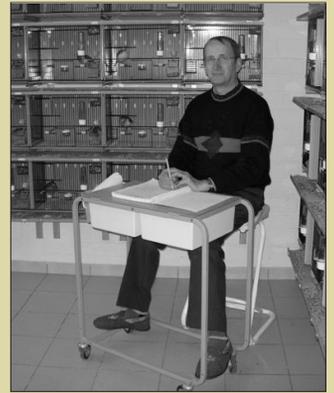
LIGHTING & TEMPERATURE

When my birds start moulting I remove half of the ARCADA Birdfluorescent tubes and bring them back in the New Year when pre-conditioning starts.

During the winter my birds are exposed to just 8 - 9 hours of light, everyone needs a rest.

After the 1st of January I start increasing the amount of lighting each week so that by mid February I have 14 hours light which then remains stable for at least 14 days. I always try to start breeding the first week of March and then increase florescent lighting to 15 hours after a couple of weeks and then keep it that way. Any additional lighting into my birdroom is natural daylight.

I have central heating in the birdroom and try to keep it between 12 and 15° C until I have the first youngsters. Thereafter I prefer a minimum of 18° C



HOUSING COCKS & HENS

Cocks and hens are housed in the same room. I keep all cocks separate in the top cages (most light) and the hens are housed 7 to 10 in little indoor aviaries.

COCIDIOSIS & MITE PREVENTION

To protect my birds against Coccidiosis I start treating my birds immediately after Christmas with ESB 3-30% a Sulphadine mixed at a ratio of 1 gram to 1 litre of drinking water, my procedure is as follows:

5 days on ESB followed by 3 days on Vitamins (FERTVIT - ORLUX) then 2 days plain water.

I then repeat the above procedure; 5 days ESB 3-30%. 3 days Vitamins, 2 days plain water

I then repeat the above procedure; 5 days ESB 3-30%. 3 days Vitamins, 2 days plain water

So in total 5 days ESB 30% - stop 5 days - repeat 5 days ESB 30% - stop 5 days - repeat 5 days ESB 3 30%.

Protecting against mite - Cages: ARDAP and OCE POU and Birds an Italian powder PARASSICID POLVERE from FORMEVET.

TRIMMING CLAWS AND EXCESS FEATHERS

I can only advise to do it in time, not just before paring-up, as some birds are then full of stress. It is better to do it just after show season.

DIET & ADDITIONAL PROTEIN

My seed mixture In January is: Premium Prestige Canary Light from Versele-Laga and grit is always available.

Eggfood: ORLUX (Versele-Laga) prepared with a little couscous and condition seed. I then add some sprouted seed as well into the eggfood. The couscous is soaked in water were I add my vitamins (FERTIVIT AND CALCI - LUX)

I feed eggfood twice a week starting 1st January and just before paring-up it is almost every day albeit just a small amount. I also feed chicory, apple, sprouts and carrots on the days I don't feed eggfood.

In mid February I increase eggfood so enabling me to start the breeding in early March.

PAIRING-UP, WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME?

The right time to pair up is when cocks and hens are ready. But that is not so easy to see or to explain. I often watch my cock birds, they have to sing and dance all the time.

Hens in the flight cages are getting more nervous and try to pool feathers from each other. At this point I move the hens in their breeding cages about one week before pairing up. Some with the cock housed in the adjoining cage. The remaining few cocks and housed alone at a distance so preventing my cock and hens pairs from being seen as I breed a lot in pairs as Hens on there own often don't sit on the eggs.

.....continued overleaf

A cock bird that is paired to several hens is mated 3 times a day to each chosen partner until the second egg is laid. I don't wait until the hen has made a nest, as some hens don't proceed in that way. I watch the pair when I bring them together if they fight I take the cock away. After several times without success I place the cock in with the hen 15 minutes before the lights are switch off and take him away early in next morning.

If you bring the cock back to his cage where you used to keep him, he has to sing immediately. I remove eggs until the 3rd or 4th egg is laid. I put them back when I have several nest to set at the same time. I store the eggs prior to setting in a plastic pot with very fine sand and put the pot on top of the breeding cage (away of my grandchildren!) Every pot is numbered to correspond with a cage. Finally I only use seed, eggfood and vitamins from 1 firm: ORLUX VERSELE-LAGA. I know the people who produce them, they are real experts and they have so much experience and they listen to good advice from breeders.

If I think I know everything better than those experts and I start to mix products from different firms then I really don't know what I am doing. If you mix everything with everything you have at the end nothing. You will spend a lot of money and time for very poor results. I learned my lesson during my 40 years of canary breeding. If you are happy with the quantity and quality please don't change it. Never change a winning team.

*Kindest Regards.
Paul Huyghe*

