

# PRE-PURCHASE EXAMINATIONS OF BUDGERIGARS TO PREVENT THE TRANSMISSION AND INTRODUCTION OF DISEASE

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**P**re-purchase examinations are common place in most livestock industries. They are the first line of defence against introduction of unwanted genetics, parasites or other infectious disease into a flock, herd or aviary. It is a simple process and it is time that it became common place in every budgerigar aviary and birdroom. This article is a simple introduction to performing a pre-purchase examination and is designed to help aviculturists in their search for healthy, disease free birds.

## Distant Examination

Observe the birds you may want to purchase in the flight. Take note of their demeanor – are the bright and chatty? Are they active and full of life? If not then now is a good time to look elsewhere! Check to see how the bird sits on the perch, is it powerful and dominates the space around it? This is a desirable show quality if you intend to exhibit the chicks. The distant examination allows you to check wing carriage when then bird is relaxed and after flying. Are the wings symmetrical and held tight against the backline or do they sag and appear loose? The latter should be avoided. Check from a distance to ensure the bird flies confidently and is an all-round healthy bird that warrants closer pre-purchase examination.

When performing the exam it is easiest to do it in a logical order so as to not miss anything. It is important that fanciers find a system which works for them so feel free to adapt or modify this to suit your needs.

## Close Examination

### The Head

- Eyes – Should be clear and bright, with no matting of feathers or discharge present. Check for feathers irritating the eye itself and compare the two eyes to ensure symmetry.
- Cere – The cere should look healthy and blue on a cock bird, brown/cream on a hen and should be a relatively consistent texture. The nostrils should be the same size and clear of any discharge.
- Beak – The top and bottom beak should appose, with no malformation or malocclusion.
- Ears – The ears are located on the side of the head behind the eye and can be visualised by fanning the feathers back towards the eye. The ear canal should be clean and dry without any discharge.

### The Body

- Vertebrae -- There should be a straight line from the bird's neck down to its tail. There should be no deviation of the spine,

this can be felt with your fingers as you work your way down the birds back.

- Crop – The crop should sit snugly against the bird's body when it is perching, there should be no obvious protrusion of the crop from the neck.
- Pectoral muscles – The pectoral muscles can be felt with the fingers, overly skinny birds or birds whose pectoral girdle (the bony prominence in the middle of the breast muscles) cannot be felt should be avoided.
- The Vent – Check the vent closely for signs of diarrhoea, matted feathers or feathers which are covered in black tar-like faeces, birds with any of these signs should be avoided or further diagnostics should be performed.

### The Feathers

- Wings – Spread each wing and count the number of flight feathers – there should be eight primary and ten secondary flights on each wing. Birds missing primary flight feathers or those with overly long primary flight feathers should be avoided.
- Tail – Examine the tail closely, there should be two primary tail feathers and these feathers should be fully formed and not have retained feather shafts.
- Ectoparasites – Examine the feathers of



the wing and vent closely, sitting just next to the main shaft of the feather, you may be able to see small white / brown spots -- these are feather lice. If your property is free of feather lice then these birds should be avoided, or treated before being introduced into the aviary – see my previous article on ectoparasites of budgies for further information.

### The Faeces

Once you have performed your pre-purchase examination, place the bird in a show cage while you make your decision. Once released, most budgerigars will pass faeces onto the bottom of the cage almost immediately. Check these for consistency and shape. The dropping should contain a small core of white / cream material (urates) surrounded by black faecal material. Any birds with loose stool or tarry black faeces should be left for another day.

Investing in quality stock is an important and very costly undertaking. The information in this article will, I hope, allow you to rapidly and simply screen the stock you wish to introduce into your aviary and to avoid common disease states and unhealthy birds. It may also give those looking to sell birds a sounding board as to what is suitable for sale. If you have any concerns regarding the health of a particular bird you wish to purchase, further examination can be carried out by an avian veterinarian. This is a

practice I would encourage with high value birds or those which may form the basis of a future breeding programme. The more information you have on the disease states in your flock, the better managed you will become and the breeding and Show success will follow.



## FULL DETAILS ON BACK COVER

For further details and to place an order, contact:

The Budgerigar Society, 6 Toutie Street,  
Alyth, Blairgowrie, Perthshire, PH11 8BP.

Telephone: 01828 633030