

## BREEDING BLUE QUAKERS

By Linda Greeson

About five years ago I had a telephone call from a local bird breeder, a long acquaintance of mine, asking if I would be interested in seeing some Blue Quakers he had for sale.

Was I ever interested! That was the understatement of the year. I had long been looking for some of the blue mutation to add to my large flock of normal greens. The only specimen I had actually seen was a drab, puny little bird in a cage of equally puny, sick looking normals at a wholesaler's. My reply to his question as to when would be a convenient time was "Right now!"

Over coffee at my kitchen bar, with a carrier cage of four beautiful Blue Quakers between us, the owner told me his tragic story. His only son had recently been killed in an accident and he had found himself unable to shake his deep depression. He had sold all of his other birds in preparation for moving to another part of the country. He hoped that a complete change of scene would help him to adjust. He treasured these Blues and said that he wanted to be sure that they would go to a breeder who would care for them properly and institute a good breeding program. The birds had been imported from Holland and no start had been made in setting them up for breeding.

These Quakers were a soft, powder blue with silver cheeks, throats, and upper breasts. They looked plump and healthy. The price of \$5000, although it would strain my budget, was a fair one. I was soon the proud and happy owner of four Blue Quakers.

I had the birds thoroughly examined by my Vet who gave them a clean bill of health. Surgical sexing revealed that I had two males and two females. I couldn't believe my luck when this was discovered.

The birds appeared to do very well, but nearing the end of their thirty day isolation period, I was completely dismayed one morning to find one of the females dead in the bottom of the cage. Even after a necropsy

the cause of this death remained a mystery. The other three continued healthy.

The necessity of starting my breeding program with two males and one female seemed a disaster at the time, but proved to be a blessing in disguise. The loss of the one female forced me to breed one of the males with a normal green hen. The greens split to blue resulting from that mating were noticeably larger and all around better specimens than those from the mating of the two visual blues.

When the splits were mated to visual blues I had a 75% production of large, healthy blue chicks. My breeding program was thus established. Although the mutations have not been as prolific as the normal greens, I could not help but

be pleased with the progress of my program. In spite of the fact that the blues produced an average of four eggs versus the seven to eight of the normals, in three years I had bred twenty two blues and forty splits.

Thinking that the lower hatch rate typical of the blues might be caused by the habits of the parents I tried several times exchanging eggs with good normal parents. There was no change in the hatch rate of the fostered eggs.

The following table indicates the results that can be expected with this breeding plan. Surprises, either pleasant or disappointing, are not unusual.

blue x green = 100% green/blue

blue x green/blue = 50% blue, 50% green/blue

\*green/blue X green/blue = 25% blue, 50% green/blue, 25% normal green.

\*In the last case, there is no way to identify which of the greens are split to blue except by the results of subsequent breeding.

I have observed that the new chicks show a slight difference in the color of their down. The blue mutations appear more white than the pale yellow of the normals. Your guess cannot be confirmed until pin feathers appear after about twenty one days. It is a delight to first spot the little blue tail feathers and count the number of visual blues you have been lucky enough to have produced.

Because I had been having considerable success with my normal Quakers, I decided that what had worked well with them would work just as well with the blues. We made no changes in diet. We provide them with standard cockatiel nest boxes, just like the rest of the flock. All Quakers are great nest builders and supplying them with straw for building rather than the usual shavings keeps them busy and happy. The Blue babies are just as easy to hand feed and are just as quick to wean.

I have enjoyed exhibiting my Blues at shows. One of my own breeding has made it to the top bench. They always elicit comments from the judges and a great deal of interest from the many spectators who are seeing the familiar green Quaker in new colors for the first time. Breeding these charming little birds has been an exciting and satisfying experience