

How Much is a Budgerigar Really Worth?

By Jim Calder

Putting a monetary value on a budgerigar can be a very difficult thing. Common pet shop standard budgies in Australia sell from \$15 - \$25 depending on the attractiveness of the colour variety, but when considering the value of an exhibition bird the situation is often more difficult to assess.

Recent auctions in Brisbane have achieved prices ranging from \$10 up to several thousand dollars. The Australian record set at auction in 1992 by Henry George is \$10,000 for a cobalt cock bird bred by Barry Cantel which had won best blue at the National. Prices over \$1000 are achieved from time to time for exceptional birds however this is the exception rather than the rule. At these auctions the price is set by open competition between competing purchasers and market forces of supply and demand set the price.

Often these auctions result in inflated prices being paid for stock that could be obtained as breeder's culls for a fraction of the price. Alternately, sometimes bargains can be had if excessive numbers of birds are offered and too few genuine buyers are in attendance.

Auctions are generally not the best way to purchase stock if you are a beginner. Auctions tend to favour experienced breeders who know the market well and know just how far to go to get the stock they want.

So getting back to the central question, How much is a budgerigar really worth?

This depends on a number of factors, the main ones being:

Age

Sex

Variety

Bloodline

Visual qualities

Reason for selling

Choice of alternatives

Breeding history of the bird

Amount of money buyer is willing to spend

Perceived effect the purchase will have on the buyers stud

Age is a factor in the price as the average cock bird has a 4-year effective breeding span and an average hen only 3 years. This means that an adult bird of 12 months age, which has not previously been used for breeding is the best value, as it can potentially be used to greatest effect.

Sex is important as young hens of quality demand a premium over cocks, however once they have been used for breeding will probably sell at a discount to a similar cock.

A cock bird can be mated to many more partners than a hen bird therefore this enhances the value of a top quality stud cock over a hen of similar appearance.

Variety. Certain varieties are in demand depending on the current "fashion". Others seem to be out of favour. Market forces dictate that those "in" varieties attract a premium over those that are "out". Currently Australian Dominant Pieds are in and are enjoying a strong resurgence on the show benches. These fashion trends change from time to time.

Some colour varieties such as greygreen or opaline greygreen often sell at a discount to their true quality because they are relatively easy to breed in numbers and considered by many to be less attractive. Often times these varieties can be the best value for a beginner starting out and if paired wisely will produce more attractive coloured offspring.

Bloodline plays a huge part in setting the demand and therefore the price. The top established bloodlines are always in demand and command a premium over birds with similar visuals. Top bloodlines invariably produce higher numbers of quality young and fewer major faults. The young from these bloodlines are also in greater demand and can attract a premium price. You will only get out what you put in and one of the smartest ways to invest your hard earned dollars as a beginner is in stock from good bloodlines.

Visual qualities should always be a prime consideration. Birds displaying major faults should not attract a high price and buyers should be wary of paying good money for faults. This applies to birds from good bloodlines too so don't just buy

on bloodline but make sure that the bird is actually showing the good features you want without any of the faults which can go with them.

Reason for Selling. Many breeders have an annual sale or auction. Other times it may be a clearing auction due to death or giving up the hobby. Premium prices are usually achieved if it is a "once off" type sale such as a clearing auction rather than an annual sale. Higher prices are also achieved if the entire stud is sold at the same time. The market seems to instinctively know when the best half a dozen birds have been squirreled away and not offered with the bulk of the stud. Buyers want to have a chance at the best birds and if these are not available may stay away from the sale entirely.

If the breeder has an annual sale try and come to an arrangement whereby you target particular families which appeal to you and build up stock from these families over a number of years, returning each year after relatives of stock you purchased the year before.

Perceived effect the purchase will have on the buyer's stud. The same bird will be of differing value to different breeders. A breeder who is established with a reasonable line of birds may need that little bit of something extra to give his birds the additional appeal to catch the judges eyes. Often it could be a bit more size, or head feather or maybe just slightly larger spots. It may even be that style or showoffishness that some birds have. If this breeder is able to obtain a bird he needs which is from a compatible or related bloodline and has the one quality he is after this bird will be worth more to him than to another breeder with stock of a different standard. Sometimes a single import of the right quality and bloodline if use wisely can lift an entire stud. How much such a bird is worth to the owner of that stud is impossible to calculate.

It all comes down to a simple fact that in reality the buyer sets the price. If the buyer is willing to pay the price asked by the breeder then a sale will result. If the buyer is not willing to meet the sellers price and they cannot negotiate an agreed price the sale will not occur.

Can a bird be underpriced? I am often reminded of a story told to me by Herb Heath about his attempts to help a beginner in the fancy. This particular person seemed very keen on birds and attended local club meetings and was always asking lots of questions and seemed to be doing all the right things. Herb's birds were in great demand and he had trouble keeping up with the requests for stock and could ask almost any price he wanted for a good bird. With this particular beginner he decided to give them a big hand and sold them a top quality mated pair (which had bred many show winners the previous season) for a fraction of what they were really worth, say \$40 in today's money. 12 months later he asked the beginner how he had done with the pair.. The beginner replied that he hadn't used the pair Herb had sold him. Why not? Herb inquired in amazement. It turned out

that this beginner had been on a buying spree and had approached all of the top breeders for pairs of birds. He ended up with more pairs than he had cages for. When it came time to breed he paired up the most expensive first. He didn't bother to breed the best pair as he had only paid \$40 for them and in his mind they were less valuable than the pairs he had paid \$100's for.

The more money you have paid for a bird, the more likely you are to value it highly and place it at the top of your pecking order or take it to a vet if it looks sick! This is a funny quirk of human nature. Whilst we should care for all of our stock with equal attention and quality of care it is a fact of human nature that those individuals that we have paid big money for invariably tend to get most of the attention.

Other factors to consider when deciding just how much that bird is worth!

Prices paid for other quality livestock .

Time investment - savings in years by starting closer to the top

Relativity between cost of veterinary care etc.

Real cost to produce a budgie

If you look at the high prices paid for top quality breeding stock in cattle, horses or even stud rams it seems to the uninitiated that the people paying these huge sums must be crazy. On occasions they are, but more often than not these people are very astute and wise with their money. They recognize the time and effort that has gone into building up a stud of quality. They also recognize that by purchasing individuals from these lines they are shortcutting the amount of time and effort that they have to put in. These people value their time and effort and are prepared to pay more to save time to get where they want to be.

A short visit to a vet with a bird will cost you at least \$60. How much does this then make that bird worth?

The real cost to produce a budgie is higher than most people imagine. Apart from the obvious ones such as feed costs consider the following.

Cost of establishment - building aviaries and breeding cages

Initial Stock- purchasing quality stock to commence breeding

Seed , greens and foodstuff

Vitamins and supplements, grits, cuttlebone

Veterinary care and Medicines

Time spent feeding, cleaning and maintaining

Costs associated with showing such as cages, entries and travel

Costs associated with knowledge- books, videos, Internet etc.

If one was to keep accurate records and tally up all the costs associated with building up a stud of quality budgerigars, they would find that the vast majority of birds offered by breeders for sale are at prices less than the cost of production.

In summary , the price one pays for a budgie is the value the purchaser places on the individual based on his or her own judgment. There is no set price or market norm. The price paid depends on many factors and it is impossible to generalize and make a global assessment as to an individual birds worth. Value like beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Having said the above , I will now do a backflip and end by giving a rough guide to what one may expect to pay for a budgie in Australia today (1999).

Price Range

\$10-\$25 Pet Shop Standard

\$25-\$50 Cull from Reasonable Quality Stock

\$50-\$100 Cull from Good Quality Stock

\$100-\$500 Quality Stock at clearing sale or non cull purchase from breeder

\$500-\$1000 Champion Bird

Over \$1000 National Winner, Exceptional Features