

Old Variety Canary: Belgian Fancy

HISTORY

The Belgian Canary is by far the most important of all the Old Continental breeds not only for its own sake but also for the influence it had upon the development of some English breeds, notably the Yorkshire and the Scotch Fancy. Its origins were in the old Dutch canary of the eighteenth century which gave rise to the various "frilled" and "posture" breeds that we have today. In its own country a flourishing fancy soon developed with bird clubs being organized early in the 1800's. In Britain by mid-Victorian times it had become the most highly prized of all fancy breeds of exhibition canaries and at one time it even had its own specialist society in this country.

A decline in its popularity as a show bird towards the end of the last century which continued throughout the present one has been attributed to its use for crossing with other varieties, although losses could always be made good up to 1914 by importation so of pure-bred stock from Belgium. Two world wars fought across its homeland almost brought about its extinction and it has only just survived in a somewhat reduced and degenerative form.

CHARACTERISTICS

The essential points of the Belgian Canary can be listed under two headings, shape and position, for it is a bird that can take up a typical posture in the show cage. It has a small, neat head and a long, slender neck which is capable of being such extended when in full pose. The body is long and tapering but is fairly deep though from shoulder to chest. The back is quite straight and the wings are long and compact, being carried close to the body. The tail is long and narrow with the feathers tightly folded, the legs are long and straight and tend to show quite a length of thigh which should be well covered with feathers. The great feature that distinguishes the Belgian however are the high prominent shoulders which give rise to the breed's continental name of "Bossu Belge" (French, "Belgisch Bult" (Flemish) which means Belgian Humpback.

In show position the bird "pulls itself together", gripping the perch firmly, stiffening its legs and reaching up with its shoulders to attain its fullest height, the line from shoulder to tail then being completely perpendicular. At the same time the head is depressed and the neck stretched out to its limit until the beak is pointing directly downwards.

BREEDING

As this was such an important breed it was usually dealt with at considerable length in the older standard works on canaries. These should be consulted for information.