

The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Lizard canary: Episode 3

Of all the 'scaly' feathers that give the Lizard its character, it's those on the back that catch the eye – and rightly, says **HUW EVANS**, for perfection in these spangles is a thing of wonder

CANARIES

THE Lizard is bird of pattern, and by far the most important of all the patterns is the spangling. It is officially worth 25 points in the LCA scale of points, but in practice it can be much more valuable than that. Why? Because spangling at its best is enchanting; even the most rational of judges have been known to fall under its spell.

A single spangle is a dark feather with a light, crescent-shaped fringe. The colour of the fringe is either gold or silver, according to the feather type. The pattern comes to life when you see a chain of spangles with the colours alternating from dark to light as each feather overlaps the next. The stronger the contrast between light and dark, the more striking the pattern becomes.

The spangles start on the head, run down the neck and extend right across the back. Thanks to a combination of anatomy and feather structure, their appearance changes along the way.

Those spangles on the head, for

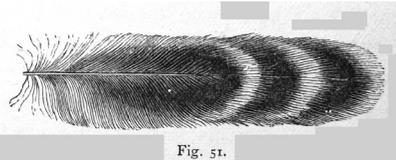


Fig. 51.

Spangles, as illustrated in Blakston (1878-81), are caused by feathers overlapping

example. You don't even see them on a clear cap Lizard because there are few, if any, dark feathers present, but in broken caps and non caps the dark feathers should look like miniature spangles. It's a tiny but attractive detail which is often absent.

The spangles on the neck are more difficult to see, simply because the feathers don't lie flat, and, to make things worse, the neck is always moving. Nevertheless, there should be lines of small spangles running down the neck when the bird stands to attention, even if their definition is rather hazy.

It is the spangles on the back that stand out. It is here that they are most visible, running in parallel chains from the shoulders down to the rump. The design



Spangles: 'strings of black pearls with the light winking at the brim' All photos: Huw Evans

is very striking, like strings of black pearls with the light winking at the brim.

The top specimens have the ability to display this pattern to perfection all the time. Even if disturbed, they quickly recover their composure and their spangles look as immaculate as ever. It is a fantastic asset in a show bird.

Alas, perfect spangling is so precise that even a tiny fault can stand out. Every

Lizard breeder will have encountered these problems at one time or another:

■ **Spangles that don't line up.** It may be just one chain that isn't straight, or even just one feather, but they will spoil the regularity of the design. There is a variation on this theme when the spangles line up beautifully on some occasions, and look a mess at others. Good show training is essential if you want them to line up in front of the judge.

■ **"Tramlines"**. A fault whereby the light margin to the spangles is so fine that it fails to separate one spangle from the next. The result is a continuous dark stripe rather than a chain of distinct spangles.

■ **Plucked feathers.** A feather that has been plucked tends to regrow with a wider light margin than the original. You might think that this helps the spangle to be more distinct; it does, but not in a good way. You end up with a line of spangles that are nice and regular apart from one that has a broader margin than the others. It might only be a millimetre or two wider, but I can assure you it will stand out.

■ **Split back.** This problem occurs when the two central lines of spangles spread apart, leaving a broad gap in between. It

is a temporary defect and quickly rectifies itself, but it will spoil a bird's chances if it happens in front of the judge.

Frustrating? Undoubtedly, but it says something about Lizard fanciers that the greater the challenge, the more they rise to it.

The beauty and the precision of the spangling is so enchanting that once you have fallen under its spell, you will always seek perfection.

Huw Evans is author of *Fine Spangled Sort*, a blog on the London Fancy and Lizard canary: www.finespangledsort.com

When spangles emerge

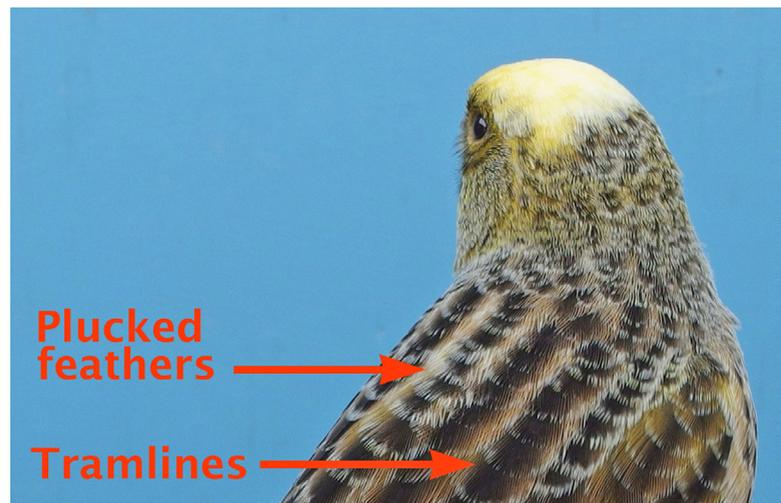
LIZARDS look like sparrows in juvenile plumage. The spangles only reveal themselves as the new feathers emerge during the first moult. The moult is one of the most exciting and frustrating times of the year for Lizard breeders. You can see the individual spangles forming, but they tend to look an unruly mess right up to the end of the moult, when they suddenly settle into place and the true pattern is revealed. Oh joy!



A transformation: the same silver hen before and after the first moult



The changing nature of a Lizard's spangles as they flow from the head, down the neck, to the back. There's endless visual delight here



Two of the most common spangle faults, causing visual irregularities that a judge won't miss



A gold Lizard: notice the rich golden fringe to her spangles