

# Judge and club man

In the last of four articles, Peter German poses some final questions to the great British bird man **TERRY McCracken**

## FANCIER PROFILE

**F**OR several decades, Terry McCracken has been chairman of various clubs, writes Peter German. That includes more than 30 years at Wigan Cage Bird Society, more than 30 years at the Lancashire Mule and Hybrid Club and seven years at the NBBMC. I asked him why he became chairman of the last-named club.

**TMcC:** V.A.V. Carr asked me to put my name forward, after I had spent 30 years as a committee member.

**PG:** With all this expertise you've gained, at all these important clubs, what do you think makes a good chairman, and what are the main attributes that people should aspire to?

**TMcC:** First, a sense of responsibility. Two, total commitment. Three, communication. And four, trying to

promote the hobby and support other shows.

**PG:** Are you still on the lecture circuit?

**TMcC:** No, but I still write the odd article for *Cage & Aviary Birds*.

**PG:** I would like to ask you about your judging credentials.

**TMcC:** I have judged the English National three times, the Scottish National once, the Welsh National once and Dublin twice. Six or seven times I have judged at CBS shows in Ireland.

I have also judged at all the specialist British bird shows several times, in Malta four times and on one occasion on the island of Gozo.

**PG:** You have also done a lot of winning. Please list your most notable results.

**TMcC:** Best in show at every specialist British bird and mule club, some three or four times. Best mule or hybrid seven times, with five different birds, at the NBBMC.



Right at the centre of the fancy: Terry McCracken with Jack Lloyd and friends

At the NBBMC show I have won the treble with best hardbill, best mule/hybrid and best in show. I believe I am the only one who's ever done that, although I could be wrong.

At the 2019 NBBMC show I managed to do the double with best mule/hybrid and best current-year greenfinch cock, which also took best hardbill in show. I won the Scottish National twice.

All the birds at all those shows were owner-bred, barring one. That bird was passed to me for exhibition by the late Derek Oldknow, who sadly passed away soon after the show.

In 1981, I was lucky enough to stage best bird in show with a greenfinch cock at the Inverness centenary show. The area is a hotbed for British bird breeders.

**PG:** I understand from the grapevine that you have had a World Show gold medal dedicated to you.

**TMcC:** Yes, by Roderick Abela, for helping him with his greenfinches in Malta.

**PG:** Do you still do the write-up of winners at some of the shows you're involved with for *Cage & Aviary Birds*?

**TMcC:** Yes.

**PG:** Over the years, what has been the most worrying aspect for the British bird world?

**TMcC:** That has got to be the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act – but a lot of positive things came out of it, namely all the specialist clubs that opened up dedicated solely to British bird breeding.

**PG:** If I remember correctly you was a government wildlife inspector for a few years.

**TMcC:** Yes, a few top British bird breeders held that position, an interesting job, it came in with the 1981 Act, a type of self policing.

**PG:** After so many years of keeping and

breeding British birds, what do you think it has given you back, and have you still got any challenges?

**TMcC:** Well, in the first instance, I don't keep the birds, they keep me. In the second, it has given me friends all over the country and other parts of the world. As for challenges, the first one is to breed another clear yellow greenfinch mule, and that's just the start.

■ After 12 hours of interviewing and more than 200 questions for this article, there was always going to be one question that I knew I mustn't forget to ask Terry: "What happened to that budgie you found on the railway line?"

● Peter German's extended interview with Jack Lloyd will begin in a shortly forthcoming issue.

*Peter German is a founder member of the North-West British Bird Breeders' Society.*



March 2019: Terry accepts the IOA's Order of Merit from Richard Lawson



Never to be repeated? Terry's famous light mule is a once-a-generation bird. Now he says he wants to breed another one!

# Timing over prep

Is the calendar the key tool for those who look to produce young birds that win? **JON ASHBY** ponders the question

## CANARIES

**T**HE Budgerigar Society releases the rings to those members who have preordered them for the forthcoming year shortly before Christmas. Generally, they are with UK fanciers by Christmas Eve, meaning you can begin ringing birds bred and hatched on about the tenth of the month, if you have them ready for ringing. That means for that round of babies the parents should have begun laying on approximately

November 22 and so should have been paired up in a cage with a nest-box, on about the last weekend of October, give or take.

During a budgerigar trip out (we know them as our safaris), I posed the question to my pal Kevin Pestell: by what date are babies too young to be shown in the show season later in the year, which runs from mid-June, gets really going in July and August and then runs down till the end of September? That got us both thinking.

Well, ideally, we agreed a bird needed to be six months old as a minimum and long moulted out of its nest feathers to stand a real chance at the end of September in the young bird classes at the BS Club Show in Doncaster. So, any birds born after the March 25 will be "useless" in that show calendar year, unless they are being bred for the following breeding season. Basically, you have only four months in which to breed birds for the young classes at championship exhibition shows. That is not long at all!

I have never really paid much notice of the time-span confinement in which I am working in this regard. I have always simply got on and bred in order to get as many current-year-bred birds onto the



Mark of distinction: a young budgie bearing a BS ring. Challenging arena (right): the champion young bird section at last year's Club Show



perch as quickly as I can, from my best pairs, and then if pairs are throwing good progeny, to keep them down for extra rounds, maybe until September.

My best result to date was with a good pied. It wasn't a world beater, but it did well at my level, locally, and won me a young bird CC at the Club Show. It was ring number JDA1 2019 Number 1. I have no doubt that birds bred in the

same ring year will, in their second year, have become better and grown on past the standard of my bird; but for that year, my bird was winning. It was a good bird, clean, complete and stylish, with six full spots. It liked a show cage. But it was born on about December 15 and so had a massive advantage in terms of growth time over the majority of other birds of other breeders that it was up against on

the show bench.

Conclusion? Forget about preparing your birds better against those "bigger guns" within the same sections as you; just get your birds to outgrow and outmature theirs by getting your hatching timing spot on!

*Jon Ashby is the show coordinator and publicity officer for Bedfordshire BS.*



Hitting the heights: best young bird at the 2018 Club Show, the Millers' grey green cock

## Sexing Lizards: answers from page 10

1. Colour-fed gold cock Lizard.
2. Natural-coloured silver cock Lizard
3. Colour-fed silver hen Lizard
4. Natural-coloured gold hen Lizard.
5. Colour-fed silver cock Lizard.
6. Colour-fed gold hen Lizard
7. Natural-coloured silver hen Lizard.
8. Natural-coloured gold cock Lizard.

**NB:** Number 8 was a trick question. This bird has exceptional rowings for a gold cock and could easily be confused with a hen. Well done if you got this one right.