

Rectification

NEWS

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Engraving discovery could be early example of the world's oldest canary breed

By Laura Welch

CANARIES

A 1748 GERMAN canary engraving may be the oldest known illustration of the Lizard, predating an early English illustration by almost a century, reports reader Huw Evans.

The exciting discovery in 2017 by Michael Monthofer, a German author on canary history, shows an engraving of a canary pair, together with their skeletons.

The bird on the right of the engraving caught Mr Monthofer's attention: it possesses a clear cap combined with dark markings on its back, dark wings and tail, and a ground colour similar to that of a silver Lizard canary.

The engraving was published in Germany in 1748 and produced by artist Johann Daniel Meyer (1713-

1752), who worked in Nuremberg, a major centre for publishing works on natural history during the eighteenth century. It raises the question whether the Lizard canary originated in Germany, rather than France or England, which both have

After careful study Michael came to the conclusion that the bird was 'a Lizard, or at least very Lizard-like' – Huw Evans

claims to be the birthplace of the breed.

Mr Monthofer's findings are published in the German birdkeeper's union magazine, *Der Vogelfreund*.

"Collecting old canary bird books from England, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, Germany and

other countries has been my hobby since 1974," Mr Monthofer told *Cage & Aviary Birds*. "My special interest is the researching of canary history in Europe."

His findings were highlighted to Huw Evans via his blog on the London fancy and Lizard canary. Mr Evans commented that Johann Daniel Meyer's engraving is intriguing. He said: "After careful study Michael came to the conclusion that the bird was 'a Lizard, or at least very Lizard-like'."

"I think he was right to be cautious because for all the similarities with the Lizard canary, the markings on its back have only a remote resemblance to spangles.

"My own studies have shed further light on Meyer's canaries and how they came to be published in Nuremberg, but the origins of the Lizard canary remain a mystery."

A NOTE FROM HUW

MICHAEL Monthofer's discovery is the latest example of the contribution that European enthusiasts have made to our knowledge of the oldest British breeds. The discovery of the oldest known stuffed specimen of the London fancy (CS48, September 2, 2020) came thanks to Hein van Grouw (the Netherlands) and Didier Nerveide (Belgium).



Zwei vögel Vorstellung des Canarienvogels (Presentation of a pair of canary birds) depicts a pair of canaries together with their skeletons. This 1748 engraving by Johann Daniel Meyer was discovered by Michael Monthofer. It was part of a study of skeletons comprising 100 plates of various birds, animals, reptiles and fish. Each were portrayed in colour with an accompanying skeleton in a matching pose. Photo: Michael Monthofer



Visit www.finespanglador.com for a detailed account of the 'Nuremberg Lizard'



BIRDKEEPER AT LARGE

by Dennis Webster

IN A COUPLE of months, I will celebrate 50 years of breeding zebra finches and Bengalese in the second phase of my birdkeeping career – the first being as a Junior some 25 years before. This long experience has taught me the importance of record keeping. I think it was the late, lamented Roy Stringer who once posed the question: "If your birdroom was on fire, what would you save first?" The answer is to save as many birds as you can, of course, but for many, including me, the next priority is to save your records. The majority of birdkeepers keep their records in a drawer in the birdroom.

There are a number of reasons why record keeping is important,

not least of which is to avoid the accidental pairing of two birds that are too closely related. Occasionally, a breeder might want to do this deliberately for some specific reason, but in the main that should be avoided.

Another reason is when you are trying to build a particular strain or strains of birds, for which knowing the pedigree of your birds is essential to success. It is also useful when selling birds to other fanciers to be able to talk knowledgeably about when the birds were bred, from which pair, etc. Some breeders, especially of the zebra finch, like to combine several mutations – many of which may be autosomal recessive in their genetics – into one bird, and here

you choose either to keep good records or trust lady luck. For me an essential part of record keeping is the ringing of the birds I breed. I believe the Budgerigar Society was the first to champion closed ringing of young birds, but I

66 Knowing the pedigree of your birds is essential to success

am uncertain about the date. Certainly, the ZFS has for almost 70 years adopted the practice, with the National Bengalese Fanciers Association following on just a few years later. British native bird

breeders have also needed to ring their youngsters. It seems increasingly that canary breeders are now ringing their young birds too. These closed rings come with a surprising amount of information stamped on them, so that each ring is unique. It can tell you who was the actual breeder of the bird, and how old it is (to the nearest year). For the breeder, the ring has a sequential number which can be copied to the record book. One argument used in the past against ringing is that even within a species (budgerigars, zebras etc) today's top exhibition birds tend to be bigger and have thicker legs, whereas those birds bred for pleasure or for their interesting

combination of mutations tend to be smaller and have thinner legs. From a couple of years ago, the ZFS and NBFA have been offering two sizes of ring to accommodate this problem. Another objection has been that as birdkeepers get older our fingers start to stiffen or we develop arthritis. I have that problem, but still ring my birds every year; it just takes a little longer than it used to.

My message to fanciers who don't yet ring their youngsters is: "ring the changes, ring your birds!"

Dennis Webster is a panel judge for the Zebra Finch Society.

Birdkeeper at Large returns on April 28