

The winning bird must have a future

MARIO ZAHRA takes a close look at a judging bias with serious consequences

CANARIES

THE Gloster canary presently holds the title of the most popular type canary globally, as is evident from the emergence of specialised Gloster shows across various countries over the past decades.

While the victories in these shows are undoubtedly impressive, a growing concern within the Gloster Canary Council (GFCC) revolves around the judging criteria that are employed in these specialised events. This article aims to illuminate the prevailing bias towards certain attributes, potentially impacting the overall standards of the breed.

The dilemma presented by today's winning birds

A primary concern among the GFCC is the increasing prevalence of heavily feathered winners. Despite exhibiting remarkable roundness and corona shape, these birds often lack the essential qualities of feather perfection and vibrant coloration: factors that are crucial for the breed's excellence.

Current trends in Gloster canary

judging indicate a tendency among judges to prioritise the roundness of the bird's type and the shape of its corona over crucial aspects such as feather quality, colour and the health status of the bird. Winning birds, in some instances, display an excess of feathers that compromises their overall aesthetic appeal. Furthermore, a notable number of victorious Glosters deviate significantly from the breed standard, exhibiting Norwich heads, heavy eyebrows, hidden eyes and legs and, now, even mixed coloration.

The consequences of this judging bias extend beyond the show bench, affecting novice breeders and emerging clubs within the Gloster canary community. As winning birds become role models for aspiring breeders, there is a risk that the emphasis on type over feather quality and colour is leading to a skewed understanding of the breed's true standard. Novices are inadvertently exposed to roundness and shape at the expense of the well-defined colour palette and feather excellence that characterise the ideal Gloster canary.

A need for balance between the Gloster's requirements

To preserve the integrity of the Gloster canary breed, there is a need for judges to adopt a more balanced approach in their evaluations. While acknowledging the importance of type, emphasis should be placed on maintaining high standards of feather quality and vibrant coloration. This necessary "rewind" in focus will not only contribute to a more accurate representation of the breed's excellence,



Serial winner: Fabrizio Ioppolo's variegated corona cock, winning best corona in show in 2018 (left) and best flighted bird in show in 2024 (right)

but will also guide novice breeders and new clubs toward a better understanding of the Gloster canary's true attributes.

For instance, while I was judging in Tunisia, it was evident that every breeder had a different type of Gloster. Some exhibits displayed either heavy heads, dropped wings, heavy feathers, or brown/grey feathers instead of green. Some of the exhibits had washed coloration, while others stood lazy on the perch with no energy to move, posing a significant concern that threatens the

International success and international concerns

The success of Gloster canaries in international shows is undoubtedly a cause for celebration, but concerns about judging bias need to be addressed. By promoting a more balanced assessment that considers both type and the vital elements of feather quality and colour, judges can ensure that winning birds serve as exemplary models for breeders at all levels. This approach will contribute to the preservation and enhancement of the breed's standards, fostering a healthier and more accurate representation in future exhibitions. To put it in a nutshell: "The winning birds must have a future!"

Breeding practices in the longer term

If a winning bird is not fit (jaunty in action), with good feather quality (sheen), vibrant colour, good type, and with eyes and legs showing, then that bird has next to nothing to offer to the future. To breed birds that live as long as five to seven years and can be brought back into the breeding programme, should be a serious objective. Neglect of this is leading the fancy into a disaster.

During shows, the best examples

of good Glosters are often found among the flighted classes. These birds provide valuable information about the level of the breeding programme they come from, and the skill and professionalism of the breeder. This year, while judging in the north of Italy, I came across an exhibit that caught my eyes and left me in awe. The bird was a variegated corona cock with a red ring (2018). This bird won best flighted again, and later I found out that it belonged to Fabrizio Ioppolo. Not to praise Fabrizio, but this Gloster is the perfect example of what this article is about. After six years, this bird was still showing off, ready to receive another major honour, and prepared for the next breeding season.

I had a decent discussion about this exhibit with all the exhibitors after the judging was over, discovering that the same bird received many honors in the past six years. As an unflighted bird, it won best corona in Montichiari (2018), best corona cock in Mantova (2019). As a flighted bird, it won best corona flighted in Antibes, France (2019), best corona flighted in Mantova (2020), best corona flighted and best corona cock in Montichiari, first GFCC international show (January and December 2022) and now in 2024!

In conclusion: the problems that novice breeders are facing and will continue to struggle with are all results of the winning birds that are taking the stage. The false pictures that we see on social media of different types of "Glosters" must be ignored at once, as this is nothing but fantasy in some people's heads!

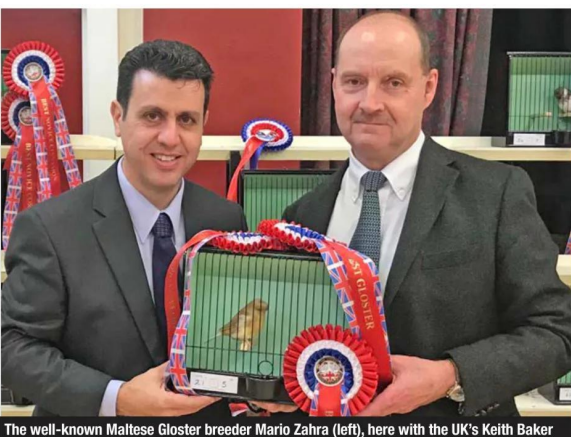
To breeders, I have one suggestion: stop mixing them now and putting your rejects on the market. To the judges, I say: "Choose a winning bird that is closest to the standard of excellence because the standard was set for a good reason: to give a good future to the breed and to allow newcomers to breed more beautiful and healthy birds."

Have a wonderful breeding season.

Mario Zahra is the international secretary of the GFCC-UK.



Fabrizio Ioppolo: what Mario loved about that variegated corona cock of his was that it coupled excellence with longevity



The well-known Maltese Gloster breeder Mario Zahra (left), here with the UK's Keith Baker

For a club that is still in its infancy, the choice of class winners leaves a lasting impact on exhibitors

future of the breed and the club.

For a club such as the Tunisie Gloster Club, which is still in its infancy compared to some established shows, the choice of class winners leaves a lasting impact on exhibitors for many years to come. The message that the judge sends to the new fanciers with their winners is that they have the right birds to continue breeding with. This makes it critical for the next judge to do their job and provide the right direction for the benefit of the hobby and the future of the club.



A different kind of excellence: Norwich characters, so perfectly suited to that breed, must not creep into the exhibition Gloster, says Mario. Inset: Tunisie Gloster Fancy Club is a young club, full of enterprise and enthusiasm, whose show Mario has taken pleasure in judging

