

Western Roller Canary Association

Differences between the Sexes of the Harz Roller (Sexing the Roller)

It isn't easy to decide whether you have a male or female canary before you. It even happens to old-time breeders very often, that they cage up some hens with the young males in song training. With these females they think, at first, that it conducts itself like a male; since they are also singing in the flight cage. As a general rule the song is the surest distinguishing characteristic of the male; however, in the flights there are also some hens who can be heard producing a good Hollow Roll. Essentially all hens sing if kept separate/alone. Naturally, the hens never achieve the song quality of the males.

To be sure, I have had hens that produced a very nice Hollow Roll. As a rule though, the female song sounds like that of the young males starting training.

The old masters during the heyday of the Roller breeding in St. Andreasberg (1880-1930) caged their females before the breeding season in order to listen to their song. Then they only used those hens which were gifted in the deeper tones. They were surprised to learn that these deep toned hens produced deep toned sons. Today we recognize that these early pioneers of Roller breeding were already on the right track, since the hen really passes on the tone for good song. At best one should always keep the mother and sisters of the best singers for continued breeding.

Even the song of young Rollers after the molt is not necessarily the best way for determining the sexes. Our normal Rollers, as a rule, have a pale yellow color. (Trans. note: We refer to them as soft feather or possibly frosted yellow.) The males generally show brighter color on the head, the cover feathers encasing the wing itself (not necessarily the flight feathers) and the rump. Females are generally lighter in these areas; however, there are exceptions here too, that is, hens who show as strong a yellow as the males. Males can also be recognized by their more upright stance on the perch than the females.

When the young birds in the nest are about 9 days old, shortly after banding, one can already recognize the young males by the strong yellow feather growth on head and forward to the base of the beak. As usual, there are exceptions. In the time when the young have left the nest; but, are still being fed by the mother, the young males will already begin with song practice. They will also sit quietly swelling their throats and soft sounds can already be heard. Young hens will not do this at this age. However; who has the time to observe them so constantly? A working man definitely doesn't. If I am lucky enough to recognize a young male at this age, I immediately write down the band number. These problems determining the sex of the young canaries is also a reason why the usual pale feathered/soft feathered yellows are primarily bred. Individual hobbyists buy the males because of their song and these soft feathered yellow males are more easily recognized because of their stronger color.

My interests are directed toward the intensive yellows/hard feather yellow Rollers. With them you pair a beautifully feathered intensive/hard-feather bird with a pale yellow/soft-feather bird. The sexing among the intensive yellows has nothing to do with color, since there can also be intensive yellow hens. The offspring are usually fifty percent intensive and fifty percent pale. In Europe we refer to them as "intensiv" and "schimmel". (According to the dictionary this might imply something like moldy or mildewed.) Such an intensive yellow male who also has good song is a magnificent bird.

Because there can also be intensive yellow hens with this breeding program, determining the sex by the before mentioned criteria is difficult. Only in daylight can the differences be observed, because with the intensives the males have and even more intensive yellow than among the normal yellow Rollers.

Every canary lover knows that birds in breeding condition can be determined by the shape of the cloaca (the rear end), if you take the bird in your hand and blow the feathers back. The posterior of the hen is pear-shaped while with the males a penis can definitely be seen on the end of the cloaca.

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Yet only a few canary hobbists know that there is still another distinguishing characteristic and it is the surest of them all. Using it you can be 99% sure of the sex. The eye of the hen lies somewhat higher in the head than the eye of the male. If you imagine a line that follows the line between the upper and lower halves of the beak, the eye of the female lies on top of it; but, with the males the line runs through the eye. In practice you take the bird in your hand and with the other hand align a straight pin or needle with the line where the two halves of the beak meet. Here are examples of each:



Male



Female

Now you can clearly see the sex of the bird, since with the females the eye is lying on top of that line and with the males, as already mentioned, the line passes through the eye. That is with the males the eye is centered exactly on that beak line. The old time breeders in the Harz already knew this; however, over the long stretch of time it seems to have been forgotten.

Using this method it is even possible to determine the sex of intensive yellow Rollers with certainty.

Now I would like to wish all the American Roller Friends a successful breeding season in 2005, and in the Fall much pleasure in the song of the noble Harz Roller Canary.

Gut Hohl, Goed Hollowroll

Johannes Clauss, Wuerttemberg/Germany

-Judge in Training-

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