



IN SEARCH OF CANARIES...

by Glenn A. Mitchell
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Roller Canaries

That's the one I want! Usually that is said after a seemingly never ending search for just the right Canary. All are lovely singers but the right one appears only after a search. Many people want a Roller Canary because, they say, Rollers are the best singers. As strange as it may seem, many people saying this have never heard a Roller. As common as Canaries have been, the lack of knowledge regarding Rollers is strangely confusing. Not everyone is infatuated with this little bird but these people are missing a whole world of enjoyment.

Canaries are in best song during the early fall and up to about June. This, of course, is the breeding season and the song is to attract a mate.

The molt season is basically from June to the end of August—but this varies with the weather and we have had some odd seasons these past few years. Birds normally sing little or not at all during the molt and seem to be affected by it like the flu affects us. Needless to say, this is a poor time to select a Canary.

During the molt the birds should be well taken care of. They will need a

heavy protein diet to help with feather growth. Also, good summer greens help very much at this time. Dandelion is a very good food and either Petamine or a good nestling food can be fed to help obtain a good feather coat.

Bathing is important and only cold water should be used as warm water softens the feathers. The nails should be kept trimmed but not too short as the birds need the nails to cling to their perch. Some birds never need their nails trimmed and others need it often. It takes attention to keep a bird in good trim. Any pet is at the mercy of the owner so plan your time to take good care of your bird. It pays big dividends in the enjoyment you experience.

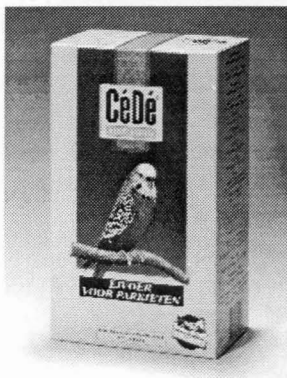
Roller Canaries stand as a breed apart from all other Canaries. This is the only Canary bred solely for its song. Color, shape, carriage or feathering do not enter into the judging of this bird. Song alone is king.

The Roller Canary was first bred in Germany as early as the 1600s, and for many years was known only as the German Roller. From Germany it moved to England and the English bred more quality into the bird and less quantity than did the Germans. Today some of the top Rollers still come from these two countries.

The Roller as we know it today in the United States is becoming almost an endangered species. With the advent of so much noise in the home, the Roller has lost favor because of his quiet song. He sings with his mouth closed and therefore cannot compete with sounds of the TV and the blaring stereo. The Warbler continues to be a favorite because he sings as Ethel Merman said she sang—belt out the song.

Fewer and fewer people are breeding the Roller because it takes a lot of time and patience. These Canaries cannot be subjected to other noises or the songs of other birds. As in all birds, they mimic and will pick up a fault. The songs of Rollers are regulated and a fault in their song means that the note or notes they have added are not of a genuine Roller tour. In the judging of Roller song, any such fault is a mark of dismerit and lowers the total points for the bird. Faults are passed on so very

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easily that any bird coming up with a faulty note must be taken from the room so other birds do not pick it up.

Rollers are trained in cabinets—a cupboard like box containing four cages. The current size of the cage is 10 in. square. These birds are stacked in a precise order each time they are taken out of the cabinet. The birds learn to sing in harmony and the stacking is changed until the best result of harmony is obtained. The birds must sing within five minutes of the time they are taken out of the cabinet or they are put back and left for about 30 minutes then tried again. They soon learn to sing on cue as this is important for judging. With many teams competing in a show, the time is limited and balky teams will be brought back for a second chance only if there is time at the end of the day. This is not good either, as birds sing best in the morning and late evening. Well trained birds, however, will sing anytime they are stacked.

Roller songs consist of 12 tours, four of which are basic. Americans judge on a 100 point system with 10 being the highest score that a bird can receive for a single tour. Europeans judge mostly on a lower point system so birds from America shipped for judging in Germany take a beating score wise. Vice versa, European birds coming to America make out like burglars.

The "tours" are the variations in the Roller song. All of the birds are trained to sing with these same variations but the number of tours and the quality of the tour varies with each bird. The tours carry the names of Base, Hollow Roll, Hollow Bell, Schoekel, Water Tour and Flutes, among others. Some breeders do not like specific tours and therefore breed it out of their birds. This is not always a good idea because it cuts short the score that is obtainable. If tours are bred out, other tours must then compensate. But, after all, a breeder does what he likes to hear and that is the name of any hobby. There is a divided camp between the group that likes the Glueke tour, for instance, (a guttural sort of bass song) and the group that does not. I belong to the group that likes the Glueke tour. I think this deep accented tour is beautiful and does not appear in any other bird.

Birds are trained with records and

tutors. Only the best tutor available is worthy for use, however. The bird with the highest points in many tours should be used. Also, if there is a bird or two that is exceptionally good in only a single tour, it can be added to the flight to give the youngsters the benefit of several tutors. Birds are great mimics and, while young, sing what they hear in conjunction with their natural song. Early training is most essential.

Sexing young birds is a time-consuming job. Young hens also sing so the first go around of sexing will include singing hens in with the males and non-singing males in with the females. It does not take too long before the song appears in the hen flight and some of the noisy birds in the male flight drop out of song. Then is the time for a second culling. The molt follows soon after and the birds are mostly quiet. After the molt, the song comes in full and at that time you can complete your sexing and be 99% right.

There will always be singing hens. They carry the song. For a good song in

the male, breed hens from good singing males.

Enjoy the Roller. He is a marvelous bird and one that requires a new supply of ardent breeder fans in order for him to survive in this country. ➔

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