

# Showing Birds

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## History of Exhibitions

For centuries breeders of domesticated birds have been interested in comparing the quality of their product with that of others breeding the same breed or variety. Their goal was to selectively breed better birds, often breeding for color, size, feather quality, etc. Competition was keen, so on numerous occasions extensive debates occurred over whether a bird was superior to the one across the street. Many of these debates occurred at Farmers' Markets where the product was on display for sale.

Occasionally an owner thought so highly of his product that he refused to sell it, indicating it was at the market for exhibition only. Soon his neighbor did the same thing; the debate was on.

In time it was a necessity that an intermediary or judge had to decide which bird of the same breed was superior. The judge would have to be completely neutral, preferably originating from another city or county, the more distant the better. There could not be any prejudice in such an important decision.

Soon these intermediaries became known for their knowledge of the breed or variety of bird that became their specialty. In due time the demand on them became intense. As interest in selection and production of various specialties grew, so did individuals become specialized judges.

The interest developed from a casual pastime to the point that a group of birds was split into many categories according to likes and dislikes. People started selecting for color, size, feather structure and general beauty. Consequently, numerous beautiful breeds of poultry were developed and, similarly, numerous breeds of canaries were developed. Exhibitions at Farmers' Markets soon developed into fairs and then into giant exhibitions

with much competition.

Thus developed perhaps the main reasons for exhibiting birds: to show the offspring of adults you the exhibitor paired and to see if these offspring indeed are better in quality than the adults. Many times a serious exhibitor would be depressed and disappointed with the production of inferior progeny, but often the happy exhibitor would be rewarded by reaping wins with progeny he produced through accurate selection.

By the late 1700s and early 1800s, there were numerous interesting exhibitions in England and Scotland, among other lands, with strong competition. Perhaps the largest and most popular exhibitions involved poultry and canaries. In the United States, the era of exhibitions began to a large extent in the late 1800s.

Cagebird exhibitions developed gradually and slowly. English exhibitors made greater strides in cagebird exhibitions than those in the United States, but as cagebirds were increasingly bred, an increase in exhibitions was even seen here.

Canary exhibitions became important throughout the country. With the advent of many canary clubs for popular varieties such as the Border, Gloster, Yorkshire, and Norwich, the shows increased in popularity as well as size. Specialty organizations such as The American Budgerigar Society created a keen interest in breeding and exhibiting this very popular parakeet.

With the advent of the 1970s an increase in the breeding of fine rare finches and parrots, as well as those not so rare, created a stir to exhibit in these categories. Cockatiel and love bird exhibitors developed their standards and soon could present specialty shows to be rivaled by few other types of cagebirds. The rush was on for better selectivity and for better type

birds so they will better conform to the standards of perfection.

In North America, there have been exhibitions occurring yearly for many decades. The National Cage Bird Show of Canada recently held their 101st exhibition in Toronto, the Massachusetts Cage Bird Show recently celebrated their 75th anniversary show and this year the Indiana Bird Fanciers will be celebrating their 50th annual show. The "Show of Shows," the National Cage Bird Show in the United States is the parent of all shows.

## The Importance of Specialty Clubs in Exhibitions

For years, the National Cage Bird Show was mainly a showing of Canaries with some Budgerigars; there was one division devoted to the showing of Foreign Birds. As the Cockatiel breeders became organized into the American Cockatiel Society and later the National Cockatiel Society, they petitioned the National Board of Directors for a division of Cockatiels. This soon came to reality. Shortly thereafter, the African Love Bird Society petitioned for a division for Love Birds; this, too became an official division. This left the Foreign Bird division for finches, softbills and parrots.

In the decade of the eighties, two more strong societies were organized and developed thereby creating a separate division of Finches and Softbills and a division for Parrots. The foreign bird category was finally scrapped. These societies are the National Finch and Softbill Society and the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors.

It is the many societies that affiliate with the National Cage Bird Show that make up the rules and regulations as well as the Standards of Perfection. These guidelines are followed very closely. In addition, each society recommends their judges to be utilized in their respective divisions. For example, one guideline, almost universal, is the disqualification of hybrids.

In contrast, there are upwards of 100 to 150 cage bird shows in the United States yearly with others in Canada, Puerto Rico and the Caribbean countries. Local bird clubs organize and develop these shows throughout the country. These local clubs, in turn,

affiliate with the National Specialty Clubs such as the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors, The National Finch and Softbill Society, The National Cockatiel Society, the African Love Bird Society, The National Colorbred Canary Society, etc. In addition to following the specialty club guidelines, they utilize that society's panel of judges and receive many special awards from the specialty clubs.

These local club shows will often award, through the National Specialty society, points to exhibitors winning in the top ten of a division as well as points to individual Closed banded birds winning in the top ten (in the case of the African Love Bird Society it can be in the top twenty) earn individual Champion points to eventually reach the status of Champion and Grand Champion. Points are decided by the total number of entries at the particular show. A show of 200 entries will give more points to the top ten birds than a show of only 90 birds. This, of course, draws exhibitors since there are greater goals.

In certain National Shows such as the Great American Bird Show, there are also large cash awards presented, thus giving more incentive for larger entries.

However, for a complete introduction to the world of showing I heartily recommend the National Cage Bird Show where there are 14 benches of judging occurring simultaneously; in addition to two closed rooms of judging the various singing canaries, namely, the American Singers and the Waterslagers. One is able to sit in the gallery to watch the judging, listen to the judges comments and view the magnificent birds. One can also attend the Specialty Club meetings as well as various seminars, and attend the large awards banquet as a finale.

If you wish to attend a National, they always occur the third weekend in November in a different city each year. In 1997 it will be in Denver, Colorado, in 1998 the National will hold its 50th anniversary show in Chicago, Illinois and in 1999 it appears the show will be in Niagara Falls, New York.

If you wish to attend a Great American Show, which is always the first weekend in October, and goes

from city to city, 1998 will be in Orlando, Florida.

### **What do Judges Look for?**

Unlike dog shows, bird shows accept all entries for judging the evening before and the morning of the show to a cut off time of generally 9:00 A.M. Judges do not show up at the hall until just before judging is to begin, generally about 10:00 A.M. in most shows. The exhibitors must have entered their birds with proper show tags, which are only numbered (the identification of owner is closed to the eye of the judge) and attached to the show cage. The exhibitor must then leave the immediate area of the show benching or be seated in the gallery.

When the judge enters the hall and is introduced to the gallery he or she makes a few comments, then proceeds through the benching area with the show steward to inspect the birds to insure they were entered in the proper sections and classes. Birds must be judged by class, for example, all Senegals are judged together; then the winners are eligible to proceed to be judged in a section, again, an example would be the Senegal against the Best Meyer and the Best Red-bellied Parrot. The next progression is the Sub-Division which would include all the Section winners of the Afro-Asian Parrots. Finally, the best of each sub-division proceed to be judged for the Division and the top ten Parrots in the Show. In some Divisions, there are no sub-divisions, only class, section and division. The judge always judges from left to right, the best bird will end up to the far left. This is uniform in all societies. Another uniformity includes the five major characteristics of judging:

### **Conformation**

How does the particular bird presented to the judge conform in symmetrical balance to the Standard of Perfection for that bird? The bird must have a smooth topline from the head to the tip of the tail. The throat and chest area should be well rounded with no pits or double chests. The wings on the bird must be carried close to the body with no crossing at the tips (a few exceptions include Conures and Ringnecks where wings

are allowed some crossing). In the Cockatiel, size is considered 50% of the total for conformation as the larger Cockatiels have the advantage. This is not so in the Parrot for in some species such as the African Grey there are different sizes in different geographical groups. Almost all other characteristics of conformation, however, are very similar in the various society standards. Conformation is the heaviest weighted characteristic in judging. This is often 50% of the total.

### **Condition**

Damaged feathers of the wings and tail are definitive in all societies when condition is mentioned. Severe soiling, particularly in the tail of white and lightly colored birds can be a condition problem. Birds that are too fat, exhibiting the crease down the keel area are out of condition, as is the bird that is too thin. Condition is the next heaviest weighted characteristic often making up 30 to 35 percent of the total.

### **Department**

This characteristic is worth about 15% but is extremely important because if a bird flutters at the judge, or spends all of its time on the floor of the show cage, its department is bad. The exhibitor can work in advance with show birds to train them to perch perfectly beautiful on the perch. The judge has to know what stance is correct for specific birds. For example, the Cockatiel stance should be about seventy degrees while the Lineolated Parakeet can almost stand at a horizontal level on the perch. A judge can often tell if a bird has been trained properly; if they are on the floor of the cage, often just a tap on the cage will bring them to the perch. In finches, the waxbills are not supposed to stand perfectly still as most birds must; they must move from perch to perch fanning their tail as they move.

### **Color**

Color is worthy of 15% generally with brightness and quality of color most important. In the case of the Peachface Love Bird, where there are now 106 various colors and patterns with more each day, the color differences will occur in the classes more so

than throughout the entire series of Love Bird Sections. In the Pied Cockatiel, a dirty face Cockatiel which indicates gray coloration about the face is considered a serious fault. In some dimorphic birds, the brilliantly colored male may not be as well colored in total as his drab mate.

### Presentation

Worth only 5%, this can make a difference in a case where certain long tailed birds drag their tail in the cage; the cage is not of sufficient size for this type of bird. Occasionally a judge will notice a cage that is filthy, perhaps not having been cleaned between shows. In Cockatiels, most show cages are so uniform that there is little to check for presentation.

### How Judges are Selected

It is difficult to become a judge in this era, however, the Specialty Clubs have prepared a plan whereby the current judging panels are uniform in procedure as well as outcome. It is not uncommon for two different judges to select the same six or seven birds in the top ten in concurrent shows of one hundred or more.

Most Specialty Clubs are quite uniform in the procedure of selecting judges. Firstly, a potential judge must have been breeding the type of bird he or she wishes to judge for at least five years. The potential judge must have exhibited for a minimum of three years and in some cases finished one or more Champion birds in that field.

Next, a potential judge must apply to the Panel Judge Chairman to take a written test. When given, the test must be passed with a 90 per cent grade. If not passed, the person is asked to study for another year before trying again. When passed, however, the apprentice judge must apprentice with three different judges at three different shows before being ready to judge on his own.

Each Specialty society publishes a listing of those judges that may judge at any affiliated or unaffiliated show when asked by the show-giving organization. There are ethical rules our judges must abide by, therefore maintaining the highest moral issues of judging birds.

### Attend a Show

It is most exciting to attend your first show; if possible, attend with someone who has exhibited. Ask many questions because as the judge and his stewards and secretaries work, it is easy to get confused. You may see one bird return several times to the bench of judging.

Purchase a show catalog and follow it very closely. Notice that once the judge begins, he marks the tags on all entries. His first set of entries will be a class; he will compare the first two birds on the extreme left. The best of the two will either remain on the extreme left or be moved there. He then compares the birds currently in second and third position; if the third bird moves up, then it is compared to the bird in first position. If there were eight birds in a class, there is that possibility that the eighth bird could move all the way to number one. When the judge is satisfied they are all in place, he then marks the placements on the tag.

The judge may perform this same procedure in several classes until the entire section of classes has been completed; he will then bring back all the top three birds in each class in order of wins to select the top three in the section. If indeed a first class bird was the only entry in a class, it might not be as good as a bird that placed second or third in another class. It is not unusual to see a second place class bird placing second or third in a section. He just cannot defeat the bird that already defeated him.

In time, the section birds will be brought back for the Division judging where the judge selects the top ten birds of the show. These are the birds (if banded) that can earn show points towards a championship status.

It is truly amazing how some outstanding birds will repeat their wins under different judges at different shows throughout the year. People that show their birds must selectively breed, otherwise they will not win at the shows.

Try to attend a show in your area; there is a show somewhere in almost every state of the union. ➔

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