

# the Rewards of Exhibiting Birds

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**D**o you believe in love at first sight? I did not until I went to the Capitol City Bird Society's annual show in the fall of 1985. There, I met the love of my life and it changed my life forever. Did I meet the man of my dreams? No, not unless you count a small green and blue bundle of feathers as a man. But, it was at that show that I saw parrotlets for the first time. I did not know what they were but they were cute as heck and I knew I had to have one.

That is just one of the many wonderful things about showing birds. You can see more different kinds of birds at shows than any other place in the world except, possibly, the rain forest. Different species, sub-species, even banded by an AFA member. I had the honor and privilege of winning it both at GABS and the National in 1997.

The best way to learn about bird shows and how to exhibit birds is to join the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors. SPBE has worked long and hard to establish standards for the judging of hookbills. Lovebirds, English Budgies, and Cockatiels are usually judged under their own Societies' standards but may also be shown under SPBE's. These standards are scored on a point system based upon conformation, condition, deportment, color, and presentation.

Since the primary purpose of showing is to produce the highest quality breeders, conformation is the most important factor and accounts for 40% of the point total. Conformation is based on the length, weight, size and proportion of the bird.

Condition is the next important factor and is 30% of the total points. Unlike conformation, the exhibitor actually has some control over the condition of the bird. It must be well-fed and kept in a clean, appropriately-sized cage. All feathers should be intact and well-groomed with no pin feathers and should be held tight

against the body.

Deportment is 15% of the point total and refers to the bird's behavior in the

show cage. A bird exhibiting proper deportment sits up tall on the perch and shows itself off. It should not be



"Morgan" a Brown-headed Parrot owned by Katy Secor was the 1997 and 1998 Kellogg winner at the National Cage Bird Show.



Molenda's Blue-winged Parrotlet "Toby" took third place in San Diego in 1997.

Photos courtesy of the author



cowered on the floor or frantically climbing on the bars but stand erect and secure. Color is 10% of the point total and refers to the depth, uniformity and clarity of color not rarity. Many people are surprised to see a normal green Pacific Parrotlet place higher on the show bench than a rare and beautiful mutation. If that mutation does not have better conformation or condition, it should not beat the green bird just because it is rare. If that were the case, no one but very rich collectors could show birds.

Finally, presentation is 5% but should not be overlooked. Although SPBE does not have cage standards, anyone who plans on showing birds should invest in some good quality show cages. Be sure and keep them and the perches clean and free from new mutations are abundant at bird shows. Shows are held all over this country and, the rest of the world, throughout the year. Never in my life did I know there were so many different kinds of Australian grass parakeets – absolutely exquisite birds. It's the same with conures and lovebirds. I never realized how many different colors were available or that there were even different species of lovebirds.

For so many years I was just happy that my birds bred and produced babies. It never occurred to me to breed for specific physical traits or to develop the bird itself. My main motivation was to produce healthy, strong parrotlets for pet homes and other breeders (my rarer species are involved in breeding cooperatives but that is another story).

After a decade of learning about diseases, nutrition, housing, pest control, neonate care and even tax liabilities, I recently returned to my roots and began showing my parrotlets. Showing has allowed me to take my desire for strong, healthy birds to new heights.

There are many bird shows nationwide sponsored by local bird clubs. There are also two national/international shows in the U.S. The Great American Cage Bird Show or GABS, is a show that was primarily designed to show hook bills. It also has the distinction of offering cash prizes for the first three Best in Show winners with



*Left to right: Katy Secor and Sandee Molenda at the 1997 National Cage Bird Show. Secor took first place and Molenda won the AFA award for Best Bird Bred & Banded by an AFA member.*

\$1,000 being the grand prize. Jewelry is given as well. Then there is the granddaddy of all bird shows, the National Cage Bird Show which celebrated its 50th anniversary in Chicago November 1997. These shows are held in different locations throughout the country and are sponsored by local bird clubs. This year, GABS will be held in San Juan, Puerto Rico and the National will be held in Buffalo, New York. Next year, the National will be in Puerto Rico.

Did you know that AFA sponsors an award at both the National and GABS? The American Federation of Aviculture Award is given to the Best Bird in Show Bred and Banded by an AFA Member. This beautiful trophy is given to the best bird in show, not just the best parrot, that was bred and debred. Seed should be changed after every show and always make sure the bird has fresh clean water.

Going to bird shows has taught me more about parrots in general and specifically what constitutes an ideal specimen of a parrotlet. When I decided to attend my first show, it was mainly to have fun with my friends and get an "appraisal" of the quality of my breeding stock. Once I won my first ribbon, I was hooked. Since then, I received quite an education. One that continues to evolve and is constantly being improved. Today, when I hold back breeding stock, I look for great bone structure first, tightness of feathers second, and strong, bright color along with a calm disposition. This way, I

have gorgeous show birds *and* sweet gentle pets. It's the best of both worlds.

Speaking of pets, showing birds is not just for breeders but can be great fun for pet owners. There is none so excited as a first time novice chewing her nails off while little Kiwi is being judged. Watching a beloved pet do well on the show bench is like watching your child's piano recital or school play. The best birds also enjoy it very much and will strut and turn to show off their best side.

As you work your way along the show circuit, you will make more contacts and learn even more from old timers willing to pass on knowledge.

Once you start placing on the top bench, you will start to be recognized by people you have never met and who want to buy your birds. People want to buy the best birds possible and if you are winning on the show bench, you have proved you have wonderful birds. You may also open markets you never thought possible. For example, now that color mutation Pacific Parrotlets are available, I am finding more business from Cockatiel, Budgie, and lovebird breeders because they like to work with color. And these people have been teaching me more than I ever thought I would know about genetics.

So, the next time you hear about a bird show in your area, make a point to attend. Go with the intention of learning a thing or two and enjoy yourself. It's a wonderful experience and you too may find true love. 