

No Business Like Show Business

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Mention the words “bird show” and most aviculturists think of bird expos or marts where birds and related items are sold. However, these are fairly recent developments in the world of aviculture. For many years, indeed, centuries in some cases, birds have been exhibited for the purpose of improving them by selective breeding. While most breeders are simply happy to produce healthy offspring; people who show their birds want to produce the best possible bird of that species.

Showing birds also has other rewards such as introducing people to many species and color mutations of birds they have never seen before. Showing can also influence the type of birds owned by a breeder and most successful exhibitors specialize in a certain species or genus of birds so they can have the ultimate control of their breeding operation program.

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. Since then, I received quite an education – one that 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.

Exhibiting birds is not just for breeders but can be great fun for pet owners as well. There is no one so excited as a first time novice chewing their 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.

There are many bird shows nation wide sponsored by local bird clubs, including many in California. 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 hookbills. Then there is the granddaddy of all bird shows, the National Cage Bird Show which celebrated its 50th anniversary in Chicago November 1998. These shows are held in different locations throughout the country and are sponsored by a local bird club. The 2002 National will be held, for the first time, in Northern California and is hosted by the Santa Clara Valley Canary & Exotic Bird Club.

The best way to learn about bird shows and how to exhibit birds is to join the Society of Parrot Breeders and Exhibitors and the North American Parrot Society, Inc. Both NAPS and SPBE have 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 and NAPS. 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 cower on the floor or frantically climb on the bars but should 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 but 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 neither NAPS nor SPBE 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 debris. Seed should be changed after every show and always make sure the bird has fresh clean water.

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.

So, make plans to attend a bird show. Go with the intention of learning a thing or two and enjoy yourself. It's a wonderful experience and once you are hooked, — look out! ❖