

# “The Thrill of Victory...”

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Showing a bird is a wonderful extension of just owning a bird. Showing your cockatiel(s) is the best way to judge, through comparison with other birds, just what you have achieved with your own. You can read every book and magazine, but you will never know where you stand until you see other birds . . . the best.

So you never attended a bird show? At least go to one! Okay, don't take a bird if you feel too new to the situation. (And I will bet you go home wishing you had shown your bird. You saw lots of birds you could have beaten! The very worst that can happen is that you lose to the tune of \$1.00 entry fee per bird.) Regardless, you will meet some wonderful people, and will learn a lot!

Years ago, cockatiels were grouped with lovebirds, parrots, conures, Australian parakeets, etc. into one overall hookbill division at shows (comparing apples with oranges). In 1978, the National Cage Bird Show (NCBS) recognized the growing interest in cockatiels and gave the species its own division and prestigious Kellogg trophy. Entries have grown from 30 or 40 cockatiels to 100 or 200 at the NCBS.

Each year, the National Cage Bird Show is held in a different area of the United States (1991 in Dearborn, Michigan, Nov. 14 - 16). There are many local and regional shows held by the American Cockatiel Society or the National Cockatiel Society that rival such NCBS entries. My point is that showing cockatiels has become “big time” in recent years.

Bird shows are not like dog or horse shows where an experienced handler has an advantage over the novice, as he can cleverly hide faults or highlight good qualities in front of the judge. In bird shows, the birds *alone* are on display, and the judge has little idea which bird may belong to whom.

Someone who has only one pet cockatiel need not feel he has no

chance against a breeder who can pick and choose his best from many. Your tame cockatiel might automatically sit up there fearlessly on the perch where it can be seen. A breeder can take a “wild” bird from his stock and, lacking a lot of work, the cockatiel may huddle in a corner of the cage and panic with the judge's every movement. A bird could be the “Secretariat” of aviculture, but unless he struts his stuff, how will the judge ever know? A breeder must all but finger-tame his birds if they are to exhibit the goals he has reached through his breeding.

In other words, one's success in breeding does not necessarily mean success in showing. It takes a lot of work to consistently show successfully.

ACS and NCS encourage novice exhibitors to show. Each cockatiel division is now subdivided into novice and advanced exhibitors (newcomers need not feel intimidated by initially competing with the “pros”). The best novice birds are eventually put against the advanced winners. But read my lips. It is not uncommon for novice exhibitors to beat the pants off the “pros”!

The novice and advanced cockatiel division is each divided into sections: Normals (greys), Pies, Lutinos, Pearls, Cinnamons, and rare varieties (Whitefaces, Albinos, Silvers, Fallows). Included in these sections are separate classes for splits and cross-mutations. (“Splits” in show classifications refer to birds that harbor the gene for Pied and manifest it by a patch of yellow or white feathers usually on the nape of the neck. “Cross-mutations” are birds that visually show two or more mutational colors/markings, for instance: Lutino-pearl, Cinnamon-pied, Whiteface-pied-pearl, etc.)

Each class is subdivided into cocks and hens, young and old (four subclasses). Young cocks and hens must

be banded (proof of age). Birds not hatched in the present year or without bands are entered in the “old” cocks and hens classes.

Judging begins at the class level with ribbons for first, second, third, and sometimes fourth places. The resulting placements in each class are then regrouped before the judge to be awarded first, second, third, and fourth best in section. Eventually, section winners are again placed on the show bench for the best in cockatiel division judging. Depending on the number of entries, winners can place from first through tenth “Best in Show.”

Realize that a judge can decide that a bird that placed second or third in one class (or section) is better than a first-placed bird of another class (or section). A given class or section may be very strong in *quality*. It is not uncommon that a bird that won in its section does not even place on the “top ten” division bench due to superior competition from other sections.

I hope I have not totally confused you! Judging procedures *are* complex if you don't know the system. You will enjoy a show much more if you know what is going on, and can follow the routine. Don't be afraid to ask questions at a show. Bird people love to help fledglings!

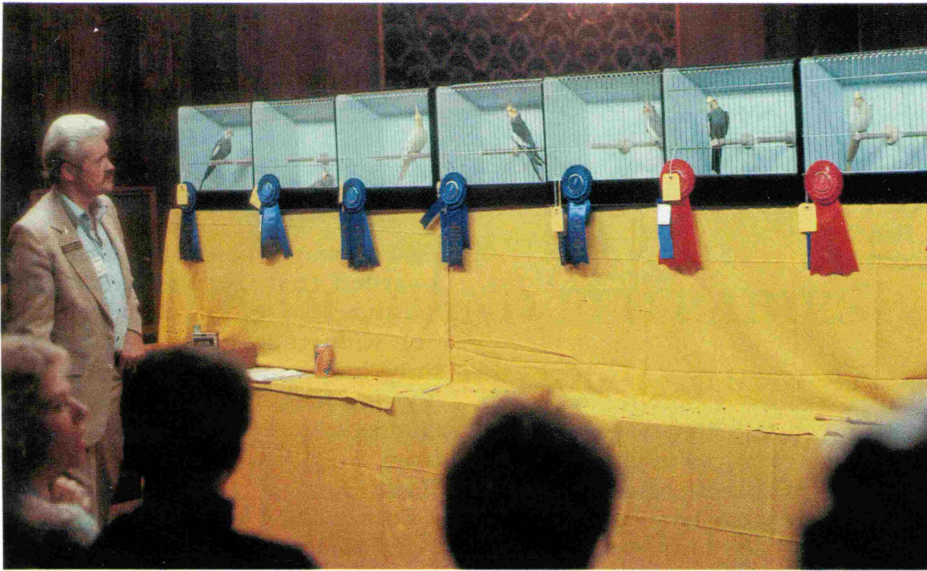
Bird magazines carry announcements of the upcoming shows. Send for a show catalog from the show or club secretary. Attending shows, talking to exhibitors, and visiting (or corresponding) with breeders will develop your eye for quality. The more birds you see, the better you can judge your own.

Shows run anywhere from one day's duration to three or four days, as with the National Cage Bird Show and the Kaytee Great American Bird Show. If there is a lengthy trip involved, it may be best to arrive the day before, as judging usually starts early in the morning.

## Early Preparation for Showing

About two months before show time, you must finally decide which birds are best and will be ready in time. Disqualify birds that have not at least started to molt; chances are by show time they will either sport half-grown flight feathers or may be missing them completely.

The following is a timetable for feather growth: three to four weeks for body feathers; four to five weeks for tail and wing flights and crest;



Harold Bowles (left) is standing in front of the cockatiel winners for which he judged at the Kansas City Bird Show (NCBS).

seven to eight weeks for the two long, central tail flights. Therefore, eight weeks before the show, scrutinize the bird's longest flight feathers. Differentiate between broken or cracked shafts, and merely bent or fretted feathers. The latter can be rectified by washing; the former must be pulled and allowed the necessary time to grow.

#### Show Training

Training a bird to a show cage is, in reality, teaching a cockatiel the art of being inactive. Your goal is a bird that sits calmly on its perch and will not panic when either the cage itself is moved or the judge scrutinizes or manipulates the bird with a stick.

The show cage is minimal in size, so there is no room for adequate exercise. This is strictly a temporary situation that the bird must not be left in for too long a period of time, as it may become too inactive, which would be detrimental to the bird's health and definitely to future breeding success. Chances are, if the bird is good enough to show, you will obviously be thinking of using him or her

for breeding. The bird must be given exercise periodically and allowed to catch up on its feeding if it has been picky in the show cage.

#### Feeding

Watch for seed husks in the show cage. If a bird refuses to eat for too long a time, put him back in familiar territory. Do not let him get completely run down! A strong, healthy bird (your probable choice for showing anyway) can go a good 24 hours without eating with no harm done. Its exercise has been drastically limited, so its food intake can be minimal. Conversely, a bird that adjusts easily to the situation and eats like a vulture should have food rationed to the extent that it will not become too fat. In this case, too much sunflower, oat groats, hemp, or other fattening foods must be curtailed. Don't feed any food that may stain the feathers — no strawberries, etc.

#### Cleanliness

I have yet to see a top winner in a shoddy cage or box! I have seen many potentially good birds lose only because of their caging. If you have a Rembrandt, don't show it in a plywood frame! I cannot emphasize this enough! Why spend a lot of time and money raising superior birds, only to wreck their chances at the shows by exhibiting them in dirty and chipped cages? Immaculate cages and good training can be as important as the perfection of the breeding and condition of the bird. If two birds are of equal quality and steadiness, the judge may have no recourse but to consider the cleanliness of the cages as the determining factor.

#### Bathing

It is not usually necessary to bathe a cockatiel. However, for show purposes, the long tail or wing feathers sometimes must be washed, especially on those birds that have white or yellow flights (Lutinos, heavy Pies, female and young Pearls, and Albinos). These may have become noticeably dingy from newsprint or other floor coverings. Birds kept in smaller cages are more often in need of a bath than birds in flights, as the former spend more time in contact with the floor. Rarely does the whole bird need to be washed. Bathe the tail, or whatever, at least a week before the show, so that the natural oils on the feathers have time to be replaced.

Cockatiels are not very keen or proficient at bathing themselves in a dish of water. Frequent spraying or misting of your birds with water will keep the feathers in top condition — tight and smooth and glossy. (Don't spray their seed!) Short of a good diet to grow good feathers, there is nothing more important that you can do for your birds cosmetically — and the birds learn to love it!

#### Good Sportsmanship

If you have taken care of all the details to give each bird its fair chance to show its full potential, then you can honestly say on show day, "I have done my best!" Hopefully, thanks to your best efforts, the bird you have chosen does reward you. If so, congratulations! Accept success with pride but, more importantly, with humility. In another show, another bird may have you eating your hat. If defeated, accept defeat tactfully — no sour grapes! After the show, yes, the winner is hailed, and a graceful loser is respected, but a sore loser is so labeled.

The American Cockatiel Society and the National Cockatiel Society have show standards detailing specific ideals for each mutation: a point standard (how many points are allotted in judging for conformation, condition, steadiness, etc.); rules as to caging; showing in novice or advanced, and much more. There are only minor variations between the two clubs' standards. And *anyone* is eligible to show in either an ACS or NCS show.

Perhaps I have made the fun of showing sound too complex. Wrong! Talk is cheap. Few exhibitors are as thorough as I have suggested. Showing is a sport — join the game! ●

#### Warning to Bird Club Editors

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The HAGEN AVICULTURAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE (HARI) located in Rigaud, Québec was established in 1985 to study the captive breeding and maintenance of companion birds. At present, the breeding colony houses 150 pairs of 40 various parrot species.

The birds are housed in separate, double door rooms incorporating the latest techniques in environmental control.

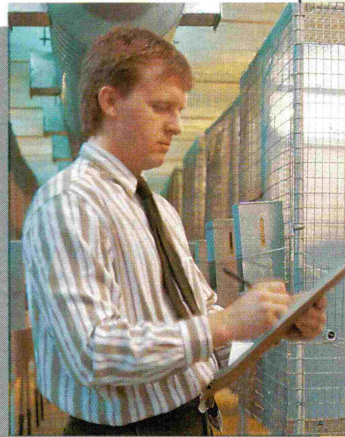
- Insulated walls and ceilings are totally waterproofed with PVC plastic sheeting.
- Sloped poly-urethane concrete floors are drained to an environmentally secure in-house septic system.
- Down draft ventilation is connected to a high tech air-to-air heat exchanger and multiple fan system which provides fresh warm air.
- 400 watt sodium and fluorescent lights with timers provide photoperiodic manipulation.
- Green House misting system provides continuous humidity control and a rain-like effect which the birds love.
- Large eight and ten foot suspended flights and gravity feeders provide privacy and minimal human disturbance.

Research fields include disease control, pair bonding, nutrition and the influence of temperature, humidity and light cycles on breeding. Progress has been rapid in the area of feeding research at HARI.

Hagen's new VME seed line (Vitamin and Mineral Enriched) incorporates the most effective supplementation for smaller bird species. HARI research determined that vitamin and mineral enrichment of dehulled seed kernels was more effective than other industry methods, such as coloring the outside hull or simply mixing seeds with poultry type pellets, which are often rejected by the birds.

PRIME, a unique vitamin/mineral and limiting amino acid supplement which includes beneficial bacteria and digestive enzymes, was also developed by HARI. The formula is designed for birds on a soft food or seed diet, ensuring that all essential nutrients are made available in the diet.

The TROPICAN line of formulated, fruit flavored extruded foods for parrots is the direct result of intensive nutrition research at HARI. The TROPICAN line includes both a High Performance formula for breeding birds, moulting or periods of stress and the Life-Time formula for normal maintenance conditions. Both PRIME and TROPICAN have been fed to HARI's own colony of birds since 1985 with excellent results. Hari has raised many of the larger parrots and is presently supplying pet stores with tame babies.



Mark Hagen is Research Director at HARI. He has a Master of Agriculture from the University of Guelph and specializes in Psittacine Aviculture. His continued Research includes Nutrition, Incubation and other Psittacine Aviculture research projects.



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