

Teaching Show Cage Training at the AFA Convention

By Linda S. Rubin

Brilliant colors caught the eye of spectators once again, as AFA provided the backdrop for another SPBE affiliated LoryLeague Hookbill Show held during the San Antonio convention. The show - co-sponsored by the Triangle Bird Club and Feathering Crest Aviary - provided the opportunity for convention attendees to take part in a concurrent educational event, while returning live birds and a fabulous festivity of feathers back to the AFA convention. I had the honor of being asked back to judge the show a second time, this year presiding during the afternoon show.

A Chance to Train

Because entries were lighter than last year, I had more time to spend on educating the gallery, which I was asked to do. Usually, there is little opportunity to instruct or inform the audience, but this show provided an occasion to delve into examples of training birds for show. The demonstrations of cage training added a teaching element to the event, to an extent usually found in monthly club presentations.

Overall conditioning techniques and effective show cage training are the two components that are directly under the exhibitor's control that lead to success when exhibiting parrots. Training birds for show starts weeks, sometimes months in advance, and advice on routine bathing and maintenance spraying were discussed in detail. Tips on finding common conditioning flaws, from pin feathers—to difficult flight and tail feathers—to selecting a last minute entry, were discussed with advice on how to condition parrots to be at their peak for exhibition.

A number of entries new to show cages and the show experience were offered the opportunity to calm down and present themselves in a more opportunistic pose. The type of show cage training we

demonstrated here was modeled for exhibitors to use at home. Both exhibitors and the gallery watching were appreciative of this impromptu addition to helping their birds, and it did turn some of the entries into stars! In fact, a number of entries that were trained on the spot, could probably do well now at larger shows, with continued show cage training.

This show was truly unique because it allowed the judge - along with the assistance of the show committee - to demonstrate some traditional show cage training techniques. Thanks to Show Secretary and SPBE Director Janet Brubaker, and Back Steward and SPBE Panel Judge Julia Howard, the three of us formed a team to help even reluctant entries to bench. And bench they did!

Once perched, I was able to further comment on individual species brought to the bench and explain their species-specific exhibition habits and strengths, while also suggesting options to improve their chances in future shows.

As a judge, I always emphasize making the cage training process a positive experience for the bird by using positive reinforcement techniques during show training. I added tips on how to entice even stubborn parrots to calmly perch, and discussed methods of training young birds to comfortably cage train before completely fledging the nest.

Preparing to Show

Earlier during the convention week, I presented on two topics, one of which was titled, "The Art and Changing Trends of Exhibiting Parrots in the USA." During the presentation I discussed the science of exhibition by examining show standards that influence the genetics and future of livestock and their genotypes. Practical information was presented on the art of show cage training, conditioning parrots, how to prepare for show, and what it takes to make a champion or grand-champion exhibit. The program helped prepare

exhibitors by going over classifications, show mechanics, the judging process, filling out entry forms and cage tags, in order to make exhibiting easier to understand. The talk served to reinforce the show experience, plus I was able to share some of this information again during the LoryLeague show.

SPBE Show Standard for Exhibited Parrots

Understanding the show standard is paramount to realizing success as an exhibitor. The SPBE Standard for Exhibited Parrots describes five categories that include conformation (40%), condition (30%), deportment (15%), color (10%) and presentation (5%). Although each of these categories is assigned a weighted percentage, the birds are actually judged by a one-to-one direct comparison method. Therefore, rather than assigning actual points, the weighted categories instead serve as a guide. By SPBE rules, rarity is never an issue in judging, which allows the best parrot in the competition to emerge over all.

As required by SPBE shows, the birds are entered in show classifications that are divided into the major geographical regions with subdivisions in the South Pacific, Afro-Asian, and New World distributions, with two additional subdivisions for Open Entries and Novice. Open entries may include birds that are unbanded, or that wear an open (split) leg band. Novice exhibitors may show birds with clipped wings however, these entries are marginally penalized. Without all flight feathers in evidence, it is challenging for a judge to accurately evaluate the back-line, proportions, length and substance when judging the conformation of a bird.

Judges are often asked, "How do you decide between totally different species, with birds representing all colors and sizes?" The actual answer is akin to judging "apples" against "oranges." In the end,

while considering the SPBE Standard, a judge must ask himself, "Is this the best bird I've seen of this species that is in front of me, compared to the best bird I've seen of that species?"

The answers are usually quite clear. As in most shows, a few of the birds might have placed differently given additional mistings of warm water to tighten feather condition, or extra show cage training to become more at ease and confident on the perch, which can help any bird improve for the next show. As SPBE judges, we try to encourage the strong points in birds and place comments on the show cage tags to help exhibitors chances in the next show.

Misting with warm water to tighten feather condition, or additional show cage training to become more comfortable - exemplifying confidence and fearlessness on the perch—can help any bird improve for the next show. Not all birds will necessarily show well during their moment in front of the judge, which is one of the main



GENNY HEPTIG/ Fifth Best in Show Quaker Parakeet (left) and Sixth Best in Show Lutino Peachface Lovebird.

reasons why a bird may not advance at a bird show. Judges are seeking a well-formed, finely conditioned parrot that sits

up high on the perch as if to boast, "Look at me!" It is not merely the stance, but an elegance, poise, and style - with flair - that

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GINNY HEPTIG / **Seventh Best in Show and Second Place Junior Exhibitor Deane Cheney with SPBE Panel Judge Linda S. Rubin.**



Second Best in Show and Best Bred and Banded Bird in Show by an AFA Exhibitor, Scott Stringer, with Rubin.

grabs the judge's attention while the bird stands erect, claiming with a fearless air of confidence, "You many now admire ME!"

The Top Bench

My pick for Best in Show was a magnificent Umbrella Cockatoo with superb conformation that was in perfect condition. Once I got this cockatoo up on the perch and as he acclimated to it, he stood up—steady and fearless—and showed confidently as if he had been attending shows all his life, which made it commanding in its presentation on the bench. This impressive Umbrella also won Best Novice, having won the Novice sub-division earlier, and once perched, maintained his regal stance throughout the show.

Second Best in Show went to an impressive Abyssinian Lovebird with wonderful conformation and very good head qualities—including noteworthy skull width—that was in lovely condition. This male Abyssinian was steadfast, showing little fear while presenting, though slightly relaxed on the perch, yet was a close challenge to the top position. The Abyssinian also won "Best Bred and Banded by an AFA Exhibitor," in the afternoon show.

Third Best in Show, and Best Lory, went to a very striking Iris Lorikeet with marvelous substance and proportions. This nicely conditioned Iris was in good feather and sat steadily, often showing a superb backline.

With more show training to heighten its confidence and presentation, it would no doubt bench well in future exhibitions.

Fourth Best in Show was another enchanting Umbrella Cockatoo with good conformation but a few minor conditioning problems that would have otherwise given the first place umbrella, a run for its money, with a little more cage training. This talented umbrella was voted the Lory League Award for "Audience Favorite," for its fondness for performing numerous summersaults and other tricks. A little more spraying to enhance its condition would help this wonderful cockatoo climb even higher up the bench in the future.

First through Fourth Best in Show were all so impressive that any one of them could change position in future shows with perhaps a little more cage training and spraying.

Fifth Best in Show was a fabulous Quaker (Monk) Parakeet with wonderful size that appeared to have very good conformation. Unfortunately its deportment at the time masked its backline and a continual ruffling of feathers affected its condition during this show, which held it back. However, no doubt that this quality Quaker would continue to climb up the ranks with more spraying to tighten the feathers and cage training to encourage it to sit up to show off its wonderful lines.

Sixth Best in Show went to a wonderful Lutino mutation Peachface Lovebird, in

splendid color, which also won Best Junior Exhibit in the show. This Peachface had excellent size and shape, and was in very good condition, demonstrating that it was very well cared for. A box show cage would have allowed a better all around view than the pet cage it was in, presenting the bird in a more advantageous manner. The color was deep and consistent and overall, it perched quite steadily, making it an excellent Junior entry.

Seventh Best in Show was a very lovely Blue mutation Pacific Parrotlet that showed well through most the show and was in good color. Just a little more spraying to bring out its full condition, and more time in the show cage to make it more comfortable, would help this Parrotlet move up further in future shows.

Eighth Best in Show went to a stately and nicely feathered Red-rumped Parakeet with very good size. Just a little more show cage training to help it gain the confidence to sit up erectly, would no doubt enable this entry to show off its full backline to demonstrate all its qualities.

Ninth Best in Show was a wonderful Green Cheeked Conure who was in good condition overall, but has some missing flight feathers. No doubt, time to re-grow these feathers, along with further cage training to enhance its posture and deportment, would help to show off its lines at future shows.

Tenth Best in Show was a splendid Canary-wing Parakeet with good proportions, just a little down in condition, and its deportment, but undoubtedly will do well in future shows with more spraying and feeling at ease in the show cage.

Placing on the Bench

As I always explain to the gallery, bird shows are merely a snapshot in time, and those Polaroids can change for moment to moment. In truth, bird shows are actually beauty contests at a given "moment in time." This is because birds can change from show to show, from week to week, and even moment to moment.

Overall quality as judged by genetic conformation—and superb condition and deportment as reflected by the exhibitor's work invested in show cage training, frequent bathing and top nutritional programs throughout the year—usually provide a bird with a high chance of scoring a win at shows. However, conformation is heavily considered as reflected in the show standard, and judges keep the genetic traits of birds in mind because the winners will often be bred and pass desirable traits onto their offspring.

It is not uncommon for birds to become tired and fatigued during a long show day, which can prevent an entry from appearing at its very best. We often see such problems as feathers being inadvertently dropped, ruined, or messed at the last minute that will affect both condition and conformation. Birds can refuse to perch, climb all over the cage, or simply not feel like "showing," when perched in front of the judge, which prevents a bird from revealing its true size, proportions and shape that the judge needs to see at that "moment in time" on the bench. Conditioning problems from pin feathers, to missing feathers, to smearing droppings on feathers, or even birds bathing in the water cup—all occur.

These factors must be considered when you take your bird to a show to be judged. No one bird wins every show, and not every bird will place at a show, but it doesn't mean you don't have a quality bird. A lot



LINDA S. RUBIN / **The Best in Show winner, an Umbrella cockatoo**

does depend on conformation and genetics, however proper conditioning and show cage training goes a long way. Spray and condition your parrot well in advance of a show. Show cage train your parrot so that it is comfortable in its show cage. And, listen for tips from the judge to improve your bird's chances for the next show; you may be surprised at how well you'll do.

Many thanks go to AFA Northwestern Regional Director Julie Corwin, for inviting me to judge another SPBE affiliated LoryLeague Show at AFA, arranging the wonderful awards, and making it all happen. My extra special thanks to Show Secretary and SPBE Director Janet Brubaker, for her continuing expertise in setting up the show books, organizing, checking and recording the entries, and making it possible for me to do my job, for a second year!

And my gratitude to Julia Howard, our newest SPBE Panel Judge, whose expertise in back-bench stewarding, organizing and bringing up the correct birds throughout the show made my job a lot easier. My personal thanks to all who pitched in, in many ways, to help the success and smooth running of the show. I could not have done my job without this excellent, hard-working show team.

It was a fun week of events, wrapping up with the show on Saturday and a tour of Sea World on Sunday, before heading home the next day. I enjoyed judging the SPBE affiliated Lory League Hookbill Show during the convention again this year, and it felt like it prolonged my birthday celebration all week. I mean, I get the best seat in the house—people bring the birds close up for me to see under bright lights—and I get to tell everyone my opinion. What could be better?

To see additional show photos, visit my Blog titled, "Teaching Show Cage Training at the Lory League Hookbill Show During the AFA Convention!" at <http://cockatielsplusparrots.blogspot.com>.

Linda S. Rubin is an SPBE Panel Judge and qualified as a certified panel judge for cockatiels and parrots, judging shows since 1984 throughout the U.S., Puerto Rico and Canada. She has 35 years experience as an avian educator, speaker and author of several books on her website, www.cockatielsplusparrots.com. She serves as director of AFA Specialty Organizations, and founding president of the Cockatiel Foundation; and writes as a columnist and bird breeder expert for BowTie's Animal Network at birdchannel.com.

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SPOTLIGHT ON AVICULTURE

RICK JORDAN

This edition of the *Watchbird* features a spotlight on professional aviculturist and world-renowned authority on parrots, Rick Jordan. He is the author of the online courses, AFA's Fundamentals of Aviculture; *A Guide to Macaws as Pet and Aviary Birds*; *Parrot Incubation Procedures*; *African Parrots* (with Jean Pattison); and *Parrots: Hand-feeding and Nursery Management* (with Howard Voren). He appears in Expert Companion Bird Care Series II, created by avian veterinarians Scott Echols and Brian Speer. He has written more than 150 articles that have been published nationally and internationally. Jordan is a much sought-after speaker and lecturer. He has bred more than 100 species of birds. Since establishing Hill Country Aviaries in 1996, he has banded more than 10,000 parrot chicks. He is a tireless advocate for avicultural education.

By Concetta Ferragamo

Dedication to Aviculture as an Industry

In addition to being the contracted AFA Business Office manager, Rick Jordan volunteers as the AFA CITES Committee chairman, Conservation and Research Committee chairman and sits on the AFA Membership Committee. His devotion to aviculture seems tireless and he often volunteers to assist in the preparation of AFA handouts or legislative matters and bylaw changes.

Jordan wrote the majority of the FOA courses, which were made possible by a grant from Pet Care Trust and the Schubot Exotic Bird Health Center, College of Veterinary Medicine at Texas A&M University. Other authors and contributors of the FOA courses include Barbara Heidenreich, Robin Shewokis, Jason Crean, Dr. Donald Brightsmith, Juan Cornejo, Jeannie Meisle, Lyrae Perry, Matt Schmit, Linda Seger, and more. The Fundamentals of Aviculture (FOA) are online courses that are offered exclusively through AFA and provide veterinarians and vet techs with Continuing Educational Units (CEU's). These educational courses are a great resource and highly recommended for anyone interested in birds, from the novice to the professional. Jordan and team are currently in the planning stages of FOA III which is expected to be released in 2014.

Childhood Memories Ignite Avian Interest

Jordan's curiosity about avian breeding biology started in his youth. He reminisced about incubating eggs from doves, robins, pigeons and other species that he studied as a youngster. Through constant study of wild birds Jordan was able to witness developmental stages of the embryos—wild birds often discard undesirable eggs from their nesting sites.

Jordan said, "I studied and learned about eggs, birds, incubation, and biology. I used to watch with fascination the barn



swallows in my grandfather's barn as they built their nests of manure, mud and sometimes the string used to bind the hay bales together."

As with most aviculturists, Jordan's parrot passion began with an American Budgie. Jordan said, "I always loved my grandmother's parakeet. At about age 10, my uncle bought me a parakeet and cage set-up and my interest in caged birds probably blossomed from that little 'keet.'"

As Jordan grew up, so did his interest in avian biology. In 1978 Jordan joined the Air force. He secured a bank loan and bought a wild-caught Blue and Gold Macaw (Carlos) as a pet. "My macaw arrived from the jungles with cut wings, a short tail and a ferocious attitude. I was petrified of that bird," he said.

He decided to get creative and built a giant jungle gym in the only spare bedroom of the apartment that he rented. At the time Jordan, was living off-base in Biloxi, Miss. His neighbors used to see him in uniform in the mornings as he headed off to work. They often inquired, "Do you have a pet duck or something. We hear a lot of honking going on from your apartment," Jordan said.

Working His Way Up

In 1984, Jordan was discharged from the Air Force and