



No Business Like Show Business

By Sandee L. Molenda, C.A.S.

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Why Show Birds?

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 birds 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.

Going to bird shows has taught me more about parrots in general and specifically what constitutes an ideal specimen. 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 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.

Exhibiting birds is not just for breeders but can be great fun for pet owners as well. There is none 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.

Where Do I Find a Bird Show?

There are many bird shows sponsored by local bird clubs all around the US and Canada. One can go to web-sites published by the various exhibition organizations or look in the back of Bird Talk magazine to find the dates and locations of various bird shows. There are also two national shows in the U.S. The Great American Cage Bird Show or GABS, is the only national show that gives cash awards to the winners. The oldest national show is the National Cage Bird Show.. The National is considered the “Westminster” of bird shows and hundreds of exhibitors bring thousands of birds to compete for the coveted, Scannell Award for the Best Bird in Show. These shows are held in different locations throughout the country and are sponsored by a local bird club. The 2005 Great American will be held in Punta Gorda, Florida October 8-9, 2005. The National will be held November 18-19, 2005 in Dallas, Texas.

What Is A Bird Judged Upon?

To put it simply, bird shows are beauty contests. It is strictly judged on how the birds look. All birds are judged on Standards, which are specific sets of guidelines that are used by the judge to pick the best bird. Although there

are more than 350 species of parrots alone, these Standards are focused on the most important aspects for each species regardless if it is a Senegal or a Princess of Wales parakeet. It is also important to remember that the birds are not only being judged against the birds present at the show, but also on the judge's impression of that particular bird against all the others of that species that judge has placed before. In other words, they not only compete against one another but against every other bird of that type seen by that judge. Very high standards indeed, but when you are talking about future generations of the highest quality birds, high Standards are a necessity.

SPBE STANDARD FOR EXHIBITED PARROTS POINTS AWARDS:

Conformation	40 points
Condition	30 points
Department	15 points
Color	10 points
Presentation	5 points
Total Points	100 points

Conformation (40 Points): Conformation is the single most important consideration in judging parrots since it involves hereditary characteristics, which might -at least in theory -be perpetuated in captive breeding programs. Conformation includes size, proportion and substance.

Some exhibitors are under the misapprehension that bigger is always better. The bird should, instead, be the right size for its species or subspecies. Thus, a Double Yellow-headed Amazon of the subspecies 'magna' should not automatically receive more points than the smaller subspecies 'oratrix'. Some birds should have a tendency towards the diminutive and an oversized bird is no more desirable than an undersized one.

The head should be bold and broad, and the eyes must be bright and clear.

The eyes must also be the appropriate size and shape and have the proper relationship to the overall shape of the head. The beak should be in proper proportion to the head and without deformity, imperfection or

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misshapeness. The cere must not show crustiness or scaling.

The back should be full and smooth and should lead in a straight line or curve down to the rump and tail. In some birds, e.g. Amazons, the wings will be held close to the body and lay flat along the back, forming part of the line from the back of the head to the tip of the tail. In other birds, e.g. some of the larger Cockatoos, the wings are held near to but not against, the body, thus the wings will ride slightly above the line of the back, rump, and tail.

The wings in repose will not normally cross at the tips, although some birds will carry the wings in a crossed position while climbing or engaged in other activity. It is desirable for the wings to fit neatly together, without drooping or being held unnaturally away from the body. Conures, Macaws and birds of the Ring-necked group (*Psittacula*) often cross their wings and should not be penalized as heavily as other birds for this fault. The tail should be held at the correct angle and its line will usually continue the line of the back and rump.



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Feet and legs should be strong and clean, without growth, abnormalities or excessive scaling. All toes and toenails should be present. The toes should point in the right direction - two forward and two back - and the nails should be of proper length and shape. Judges are not to penalize too much for a missing toe or toenail.

Condition (30 Points): Condition refers to the overall health, appearance and grooming of the bird and is of paramount importance in judging parrots. Of particular importance is the appearance of the plumage. Feathers should be complete. Clipped wings will be penalized, as will any sign that tail feathers or the tip of the flight feathers have been trimmed to create an appearance of evenness. All wing and tail feathers must be present and no feathers should be obviously missing from the head or body. Visible pinfeathers are also undesirable. The feathers of the body and head should lie smoothly along the body. Plumage should be clean and free of any

foreign matter or deformity, with no frayed or rough-edged feathers. Feather texture appropriate to the species and excellence of feather condition will be weighed heavily.

Some birds, such as Amazons, hawk-headed, Pionus, Caiques, and Cockatoos, will partially erect or ruffle their feathers while displaying, especially the feathers of the head, neck, and upper chest. This should not be mistaken for poor feather condition.

Some birds, such as Eclectus, have oddly textured feathers and this must not be construed to be a defect.

Some birds, notably Lories, Ringnecks and Hanging Parrots, will normally take very good care of their plumage and these types must be examined very critically during judging. Other birds, like Galahs and Pionus, are seldom seen in perfect feather and will be particularly impressive if they appear in excellent condition on the show bench.

Eyes should be clear, bright and free of any discharge or abnormality. The beak should be clean and free of excess scaling or incrustation. The beak of the parrot normally grows in a 'layered' pattern. Attempts to erase these layers by polishing and buffing are needless and should not be undertaken since this layering is typical growth and is not a fault. Feet and legs should be neat and clean. Both nails and beak should be of the proper length and shape and trimmed if necessary.

The general appearance of the bird should be one of radiant good health and conscientious care.

Department (15 Points): Department refers to the bird's demeanor and behavior while being judged. A trained bird stands at the proper angle, firmly grips the perch, does not hunch over, and holds its head and tail at the appropriate angles. The stance is erect and confident.

The bird behavior in the show cage should be normal. An Amazon should behave like an Amazon, etc. The bird should perch with alert confidence and not hang from the cage wires and "to hide". The bird should display itself to advantage, with an air of confidence, alertness and behavior normal to its type.

Good deportment cannot be overestimated since it allows the bird to show off its conformation, condition and color. These qualities can be obscured by poor deportment resulting from insufficient show training.

Color (10 Points): Color expectations for each species and subspecies or mutation will differ, but as a rule, a judge should look for depth and uniformity of color. The color should seem to radiate from within whether it is bright and metallic, or a soft pastel. Depth and evenness are still major considerations with those birds that show color suffusion or a blending of one color into another.

In Pied mutations, a pleasing degree of color contrast is desirable, with the pied markings in an attractive proportion, which may have light or dark factors; no preference is given to one factor over another. Rather, the color that is actually present must be rated.

Presentation (5 Points): Presentation refers to the show cage. While SPBE does not require that a specific show cage be used at this time, the cage should encourage and allow the bird to display itself well. It

must admit enough light to permit close observation of the bird and its construction should permit the judge to view the bird from above as well as from the side and front.

Perches should be of appropriate thickness for the bird feet and they should be firmly fastened. A single perch, or one main perch and another supplementary perch near a seed cup, is desirable. If more than one perch is used, placement should permit easy movement from one to the other.

The cage must be large enough to permit some natural movement, but small enough to provide a sense of security for the bird. Its size and construction should allow the judge to focus attention on the bird, without distraction.

Ornamental cages, swings, toys and distinguishing marks are not permitted. Cages with a flattop are preferred.

The cage floor should be covered with plain white or brown paper, ground corn cog litter or the appropriate seed.

How Do I Prepare My Birds To Show?

Conditioning show birds usually starts weeks in advance of the show. Of course, feeding a healthy, nutritious diet is the best and easiest way to get a bird into condition. Feeding the diet appropriate for the species that is rich in high quality foods and nutrients will give a bird energy, make its feathers shine and improve the rich luster of the bird's natural colors. Remember, no amount of grooming will make up for a bird that is not receiving a good diet.

Good grooming not only consists of nails and beaks of appropriate lengths but the quality and condition of the feathers. Diet is the best way to improve feather quality but it is often necessary to spray the bird with water regularly. Some exhibitors believe in spraying the birds with all kinds of homemade concoctions but nothing is better, or safer, than plain, old-fashioned water. Water hydrates the skin and feathers and encourages preening and preening is what brings feathers in perfect condition.

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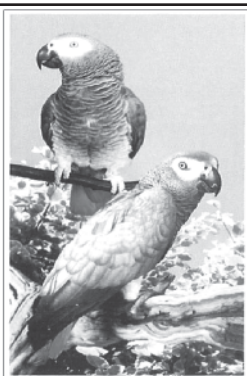
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grain of the feather. Using the hooked side of Velcro™ rubbed in a circle can also help remove pin feathers, which seem to pop up overnight on show birds. Many a bird has lost the top spot to a pesky pin feather so be sure and look at your bird under bright light and make sure no pin feathers are visible.

It is not necessary to buff bird's nails or beaks or place any 'unnatural' substance on the bird to hide flaking beaks or legs. Judges are well trained to know what is a natural occurrence on a bird - such as the natural flaking of beaks – and the application of unnatural artificial substances such as shoe polish or other compounds to hide these natural imperfections. Many judges will disqualify a bird that has been 'enhanced' in this manner.

Only birds shown in the Novice Division may have clipped wings otherwise it is considered a fault. The reason for this is that a bird with clipped wings will sit differently and may even

be able to hide flaws if its wings are clipped. However, since many Novice exhibitors show their pet birds, Novice birds are allowed to have clipped wings.

Training a bird to sit in a show cage or box is also very important. While most judges avoiding touching a bird while it is being judged, many do use props to work with the bird in order to get it to turn or back on a perch. However, it is the exhibitor's responsibility to train the bird to sit in the show cage and show itself off while it is being judged. The bird should be placed in the

cage several weeks before the show for longer and longer periods of time. The bird should sit on the perch without jumping off when someone is looking intensely at it. The bird should also turn itself so that all sides can be judged. This can be accomplished by gently touching the underside of the bird's tail with a stick or dowel. Praise the bird when



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it turns and continue to do this until the bird learns to turn when the stick is placed in the cage.

How Do I Show My Birds?

Once you have decided to show your bird and have both groomed it and trained it, find a show that you would like to attend. Plan to arrive several hours prior to the show in order to prepare your bird and complete the paperwork.

If the show is out of town, you may need to stay over night. Most clubs have contracted with a local hotel that allows the birds and will give a discount to exhibitors. Check with the club. Also, find out exactly where and when the show

begins, what time the birds must be checked in ("benched") and be sure and get written directions so you do not get lost.

You should bring the following minimal items when you go to a show: pens, paper, spray bottle filled with water, extra food and water cups/bottles, extra food, water, old toothbrush (for grooming bird) and a blood coagulant such as Quik Stop™. While show cages are not required to show parrots, if you are serious about showing, you should invest in a good quality show cage. There are cages made for every size bird and most are made from either wood or plastic. Be sure and get a cage that is large enough for the parrot to stand completely erect without stooping or tail touching the floor. Long tailed birds should have a single perch while short tailed birds should have two. Always clean the cage before placing the parrot in it and provide clean food and water.

Some clubs will provide the paperwork the night before the show and if this is possible, be sure and take advantage of this convenience. It is much easier to fill out tags and entry forms prior to the hustle and bustle, which always happens, on the morning of the show.

When you get to the show hall, find the registration table and obtain: an entry form, cage tag(s) (one is needed for each bird being shown) and show catalog. Most clubs charge \$1 or \$2 per bird to enter them in the show. Some clubs also have an awards banquet

or raffle. These things help pay for the show and exhibitors should purchase the tickets as well as attending the banquet in the spirit of camaraderie and support. Besides, most banquets are a great place to network with other bird owners and breeders and are often a lot of fun.

Once you get your catalog, you can complete the entry form and cage tag(s). Be sure and place your name and address, the type of bird(s) and band numbers on both the entry form and cage tag. The entry form will also require the number of birds you are entering. Look in the catalog to find out what Division you will be entering your bird. If you are showing Parrots, you will be under "Hookbills". You then need to decide which Sub-Division to show. If you are showing birds for the first time, you are a "Novice Sub-Division 5" exhibitor. "Novice" means just what it says, you are a beginning exhibitor and showing in the Novice Sub-Division is designed to teach you what is necessary to successfully show your bird. Many judges take more time with Novice birds just to help these exhibitors better understand how to show their birds and many will overlook mistakes that would not be tolerated by more advanced exhibitors. Under SPBE rules, an exhibitor may show as a Novice under the following conditions:

1. A Novice Exhibitor is one who has never placed on the Top Bench at an SPBE Show.
2. An Exhibitor may place three (3) times in the Top Bench before advancing to the Open or Captive Bred Sub-Divisions.
3. Birds that are purchased having already



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earned Championship points with another exhibitor are not eligible for entry in the Novice Sub-Division.

4. The Novice Sub-Division may include birds with clipped wings, but such birds will be penalized when they are competing against the other four (4) Sub-Divisions.

5. No Exhibitor can show in Novice and another Sub- Division in the same Show

Once an exhibitor has placed their bird more than three times in the Top Bench, under SPBE rules, they may either show under the "Captive-Bred Sub-Divisions" or the "Open Sub-Division" "Captive-Bred" is for birds that were domestically bred and have a closed leg band and are as follows "South Pacific Closed Banded – Sub-Division 1", "Afro-Asian Parrots Sub-Division 2" and "New World Closed Banded – Sub-Division 3". The "Open - Sub-Division 4" are for all birds regardless if they are banded or not.

Once you have decided which Sub-Division, you need to mark the Sub-Division number on your show tag in the appropriate spot. On the entry form, you will need to mark the cage tag number as well as the Sub-Division number. If you are showing Novice, that would be Sub-Division 5, Open is Sub-Division 4, etc. Also, if

you are showing Novice, you need to place an "N" on your cage tag.

Under the Sub-Division, is the "Section". "Section" is usually based upon the genus of the bird such as "Parrotlets" or "African Grey Parrots" or a similar group of parrots such as "Grass Parakeets" etc. The Section number should be placed on the show cage tag and entry form.

Under each Section, is the "Class". "Class" is for the individual species and/or mutation of the bird. For example, American Budgies have one class and English budgies have another. The same is true with Blue and Gold and Scarlet macaws – two different Classes. The Class number should be placed on the cage tag and entry form.

The cage tag should be affixed to the lower left corner of the cage. The cage should be checked for water (bottom right side of the cage) and food (on the floor). Close the cage tag or ask the steward (the person bringing the birds to the back for judging) to staple it for you. Tear off the bottom page of the entry form and give the top sheets to the secretary. Then get a cup of coffee, sit back and wait for the judging.

As the judge is judging, it is not appropriate to ask questions. Many judges will take a moment after placement to comment on the strengths and weaknesses of the various birds and why they were placed as they were. If the judge indicates, this may be the appropriate time to ask questions or better yet, wait until the show is over. However; it is not permitted to disclose to a judge that a bird belongs to an exhibitor. NEVER let a judge know which bird is yours as it is grounds for disqualification and expulsion. In the event a steward needs to consult an owner, the judge will leave the judging area until the situation is resolved out of sight of the judge.

Judging Procedure.

The judge never enters the Exhibition Area until asked to enter by the Show Manager. If a steward needs to ask the judge to look at a bird to determine whether it is misclassified, or if an exhibitor is not sure how to classify a bird, the steward must bring the bird to the judge for examination outside the Exhibition Hall. There must be NO Indication as to who


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owns the bird. Judges are encouraged to share their knowledge of parrots with the gallery and most do.

Before the judging, the judge will often check the birds with the secretary and stewards. This is called a 'walk through'. This overview will give the judge an insight into what will be coming to the bench and the opportunity to be sure that entries have not been misclassified. Then, the judging is started. The stewards bring the first Class of parrots to the bench.

At this time the judge often marks, initials, punches or stamps each tag. This assures the exhibitor that that particular bird was judged. While completing this procedure, the judge has an excellent opportunity to check each bird for obvious faults - missing toenails, feathers, etc.

Entries are to be judged on a one to one basis, by comparison. The best birds will end up to the left side of the bench. Birds of lesser quality will end up on the right.

The bird that is farthest to the left is compared with the bird next to it. The second bird is moved to the left if it is better. The bird that is in Third Place is compared with the Second Place bird. This procedure continues down the line until the entire Class has been judged.

The judge then announces the placements for the secretary to record. Usually, three birds are ranked in each Class. The decisions are then announced to the gallery. After this, the judge may not change their decision.

The judging procedure continues throughout all classes in the Section. To judge the Section, the stewards to bring all First Place Class birds back to the bench in the order in which they were judged. To prevent confusion, the birds that were First in Class are placed and then the Second Place birds if possible. The Third Place bird follows if desired. During the judging of the classes, a judge may have noted a particularly strong class, Blue-Front Amazons, for an example. The judge may wish to see the Second or even Third Place birds in that Class again. Because of the strength in that Class, the Second or Third Place Blue- Front Amazon may be better than the First Place Yellow Front Amazon. Comparisons are made until the top birds in

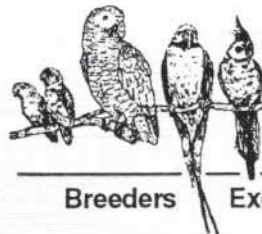
the Section are selected. REMEMBER, a bird can never be placed higher than a bird that has defeated it. The top three of four birds are usually ranked for Section.

This same procedure is followed in judging the Sub-Division and Division. All birds which were Best, and perhaps Second and Third Best, in Section will be compared. The top four or five birds can be ranked for a Sub-Division. When a Sub-Division is being judged, it is not uncommon to have a bird that has placed Second Best in one Section defeat a bird that placed Best in another Section. Rarity is not considered when judging.

For Best in Division judging, the top birds from Sub- Division One (1) through Five (5), are brought up, followed by the Second Best in each Sub-Division. Sometimes Third or even lower placed birds may be brought up if the judge feels they merit placement. The Top Ten birds will earn points from one to ten, depending on the number of Division entries, and will receive any awards the Sponsoring Club gives as well as any SPBE awards given.

What About "Points"?

Both birds and exhibitors accrue points in order to be recognized for various achievement awards. In SPBE, parrots accrue a number of points and, together with other criteria, can become Champion, Grand Champion and Hall of Fame birds. Exhibitors can earn various awards such as Champion Exhibitor, Exhibitor of Excellence and Supreme Exhibitor, which give both prestige and pride for hard work and a job well-done.



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In Conclusion.

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.

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!

For More Information:

Society of Parrot Breeders & Exhibitors
Great American Bird Show
PO Box 546
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www.spbe.org
www.greatamericanbirdshow.org

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