

Some Avian Enthusiasts Begin Young

by Rena M. Rouse
Auburn, New York

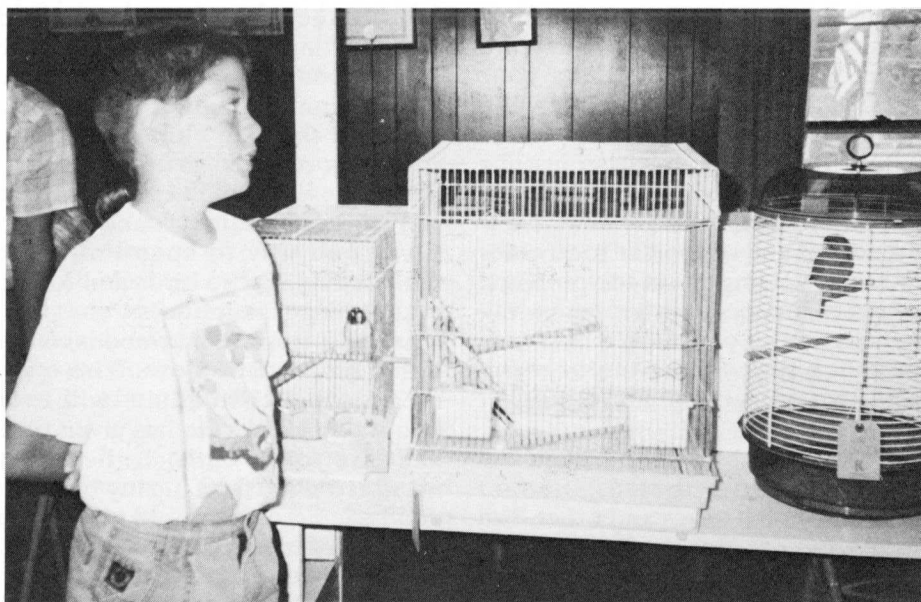
We adults often overlook the accomplishments made by children. On the other hand, we often try to recoup the memories of what it's like to be a child, to get excited in the simple pleasures of life. Perhaps that is why we raise and show our birds. Showing your best baby, bred and banded in your aviary can, indeed, be a very rewarding experience. We feel excitement for our accomplishments and want to show them off.

On September 21, 1991, the Finger Lakes Cage Bird Association held an all bird show at the American Legion in Waterloo, New York. Besides the usual divisions of finches and cockatiels, etc., there was a division for youths called Junior Competition. This was open for anyone aged 16 and under, the average age being about ten. These youngsters stood before the judge and the "audience" and talked about their birds.

The judge for the Junior Competition at that show was Dr. Val Clear, a renowned finch fancier and breeder. The children were asked questions like, "What does your bird like to eat?" and "How much time do you spend with your pet?" Most of the kids had notes which they read from. All in all, there was a lot of excitement and, at the time, the room was so quiet you could hear a pin drop.

There were no losers in this competition as all contestants went home with an award or certificate, and the feeling of pride in their accomplishments. This was their special moment. Congratulations went to Sarah Roche, Amy Wicks, Justin Coville and Stephanie McLeod.

All clubs hosting shows should consider adding a junior division and encourage parents to bring the child who helps with the chores, the one who takes an interest in the new baby that just hatched, the one who has to have a pet bird of his or her own. After all, they are our future avian breeders and exhibitors. ●



Junior competitor Justin Coville



Junior competitor Sarah Roche with show judge Val Clear

Keeping Junior Members Involved in Clubs and Shows

by Royce King
Rapid City, South Dakota

I have many happy memories when it comes to showing birds as a junior member of a bird club and many of these memories are due to the support of the adult members of the local club at the time.

I must have been about 13 years old when the first bird I had ever shown was an English Fantail pigeon and, as this was not a quality bird, it won no prizes. But it wasn't long before I was introduced further to the world of showing birds by the adult members of the local club. The memory of their attentiveness and interest to my best friend, my sister,

along with myself, and on occasion a few of our other friends, in helping us grow and learn more about birds is still with me today.

There are many things we can do to keep junior involvement and I will share with you some of those that the older members used twenty-plus years ago when I was a junior member.

First of all, they were nice people. Most bird people seem to be. But it was through their giving of time that I really grew and learned. I think most psychologists would agree that if we want to raise responsible and

caring children, those qualities must be modeled by the adults around them. Give junior members your time. Talk to them at meetings. We all like to be recognized, not just for things that we do, but also just for the fact that we are there. Let the junior members know that their attendance and support of local clubs and shows is important to you. Time seems to increasingly become a valued element of our hurried lives and, by giving time to the junior members, we are giving something of value.

If junior members live near you and have a problem with transportation to and from meetings and other bird events, offer to give them a ride. This is often greatly appreciated by the juniors and their parents.

Keep club membership and entrance fees for shows lower for junior members. This is usually a standard practice, but sometimes what we consider to be a few dollars may look like a lot for juniors. If their parents are not particularly supportive of their child's hobby and interest it may appear to be even more. Many families, both single and two parent, are financially strapped in these times. Low fees can help maintain junior involvement.

If you have extra cage materials and you have sworn never to build another cage as you already donate too much time to your bird interests (I think we have all done this at one time or another), allow juniors the first chance at receiving your materials. Schedule a demonstration of cage building at one of the club meetings or during the show especially meant for juniors.

Also at the meetings and shows, give juniors responsibility. They can feed and water birds, sweep up, and help with all-around appearance and

maintenance of the showroom and club meeting place. When they have done a good job, be sure to recognize that by complimenting them at the time and through club newsletters and show reports. As a junior member at shows, I didn't consider these activities a chore, but found them to be a good way to spend my time while enjoying the birds and fostering a feeling of helpfulness.

Award a trophy and ribbons to the best junior bird at shows. This often means more than adults will ever know to a child who has given time and love to his birds. To be recognized as a child for a quality bird that you have bred and raised is indeed a special experience and memory.

If there is a large junior membership in your club or strong junior participation in shows, there could be a "juniors only" show in conjunction with the adult bird show. This allows juniors to compete a little bit more on their own turf, eliminating the fact that they would be competing with veteran showmen and women, which to a child can be a little intimidating, to say the least.

The club I belonged to as a junior would sometimes hold a juniors only "pre-show" during one of the regularly scheduled meetings. Several of the adult members would jointly judge birds brought to this show by juniors, letting them know which were good and which were weak show candidates. This allowed juniors the option of entering only their best birds at the upcoming show, while at the same time learning standards and how to prepare birds for the show. The only awards given to the juniors at this time was the experience and knowledge of the adult members.

When selling birds to junior members, do so at a reduced price and

don't just sell them the birds that are your culls. How can a junior member become excited and involved if they never have a chance to win? Even coming in third or fourth is much better than always being 15th or 20th. Again, many juniors have little financial income; your support will be appreciated by them for years to come.

There is also the possibility of electing junior members to club offices or committee involvement regarding shows. Many junior members have much to offer in this area. Just because they may be younger than the rest of the group doesn't mean that they don't have some skills to utilize towards the benefit of all. Juniors often have more time to devote to this area than adults do and the involvement of those in their mid- to late teens can be especially helpful.

These are just a few ideas that come to mind regarding keeping juniors involved in birds. I'm sure that if your group got together and did some brainstorming you would accumulate many other good ideas. Perhaps that could be a club meeting in and of itself.

I have worked with children professionally for about 15 years and I still maintain that they are some of the best and most interesting people I know. By following just a few of the above ideas, we may be able to be some of the best and most interesting people that they know. I will never forget those men and women who helped me when I was just a "nestling" getting started in birds and I will be forever grateful to them.

It seems to me that many juniors leave birds upon reaching adulthood due to the demands of college, jobs, starting families and other various commitments and interests. However, after a few years' absence, I have known many of them to come back to the world of birds. It also seems to me that many of the people I know who are currently involved in the propagation of rare and endangered species started with birds of one kind or another as a child. Take a minute at the next meeting or show and notice the young people around you. It is entirely possible that when we are tending to the big aviary in the sky, that it is these young people, through our involvement with them now, who will then be, as we are today, the hands, mind, and heart of aviculture. ●

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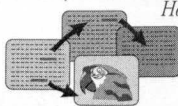
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