

Preparing Birds for Exhibition: By G. Nicholson, U.K.

One of the fascinating aspects of budgerigar culture is exhibiting at Local and Open Shows. To be a successful exhibitor of budgerigars, it is necessary to know how to prepare and train them. They need to be spotlessly clean, perfectly steady and display themselves to their best possible advantage.

Condition is one of the most important items for a show bird. Many excellent exhibits have been put down just because they were out of condition. It is better to leave the bird at home or to send a substitute, if one is available. Budgerigars differ greatly from many other exhibition birds. The irregularity of their moult often upsets our well laid plans.

Fanciers have different "specialist" techniques for show preparation, but in principle they are basically the same.

Initially we select the birds, which in our opinion are worthy of being shown. To get the birds steady we cage them in 'stock' cages approximately three feet long (1 metre). Do not put cocks and hens together. Apart from fighting it quickly puts young birds out of condition when the sexes are mixed in this way. Six to eight birds to a cage is quite sufficient.

These cages should be kept spotlessly clean as Budgerigars have a habit, after being sprayed, and while preening themselves, to continually rub their heads against the wire fronts. If they are slightly dirty this dirt will soil their masks and heads, very quickly.

Time to Settle & Steady: Our selected show team should be transferred to stock cages approximately eight weeks prior to the first show. This will allow time for them to settle and steady. If we have the odd bird, which does not show to it's best advantage when placed in a show cage, intensive training must be given. Two to three times a week it must be left in a show cage for three to four hours at a time.

We now come to the matter of when to spray and when not to spray. Always spray early in the day, never at dusk. Birds must have at least four hours to dry out completely. If possible use an automatic spray of the type operated by air pressure. It is easier to handle and gives a fine, dense spray.

In my case, the birds are transferred to an old all-wire Canary hanging cage which I use specially for spraying. This gives the opportunity to spray the birds all round. If you spray the stock cages there are always birds which will not turn around to be sprayed on both sides. I usually put four birds in the spraying cage at once.

Approximately eight weeks prior to the show, I check the birds for any broken wing feathers. Tail feathers, which are broken or missing, are similarly checked. If new tail feathers are growing, all well and good, but sometimes the old tail feathers have broken off and only the short stumps can be felt. These must be removed so that the new tail feathers can grow. This takes about six to eight weeks, so make sure you remove them in good time. The same principle applies to any damaged wing feathers. At this time do not bother about the spots as it only takes three weeks for these to grow. Wait until nearer the show before trimming the mask. Trimming consists of removing the spots that are covering the four main throat spots. The spots under the cheek patches must not be removed.

Commence spraying four weeks prior to the date of the first show. In the first week, the birds are sprayed twice with hot water. The automatic spray is filled with hot water, but by the time the spray of water has reached the birds it will only be luke warm. Warm water penetrates the feathers and makes certain the birds are thoroughly soaked. Also if any of the birds have pen or quill feathers on the crown of the head, the warm water will help these to open.

Spray Twice Per Day: In the next two weeks the birds are sprayed twice each day with cold water. This has a stimulating effect, just like a cold shower toning up the human system.

The week before the show the birds are only sprayed lightly. Stop spraying two days before the show. This gives the birds ample time to recover the natural oil in the feathers. If you wish, you can add a bird shampoo to the spray water for the last spraying. This will give an extra sheen to the plumage.

Beginners have asked my advice regarding the pin feathers on the frontal crown of the birds head. They have managed to acquire a good show standard apart from one or two pins which spraying with warm water has not cleared. Take a pair of tweezers, the ones you have used to trim the mask, and gently squeeze them on the bottom of the quill feather and you will find that the quill, which is only a sheath protecting the feather, will slowly slide off.

If you wish to straighten a bent tail, fill a cup with very hot water into which you slowly dip the bird's tail. This will straighten out the main quills and also the smaller feathers.

Finally, make sure the show cage is perfectly clean. If the judge's first impression is that of a dirty battered cage, he will have difficulty to eradicate it from his mind.

Remember, your show cage is your shop window and nobody buys from a dirty shop. Besides, you do not want to ruin the work of the previous eight weeks, do you?