

## Show Preparation by Barrie Shutt – S3872

Show preparation begins in the nest box; my chicks are handled every day from the age of two (2) weeks.

One of the most important assets of a show budgerigar is steadiness when on the show bench.

When the first batch of chicks is weaned they are then transferred into the nursery cages and given the company of an older steady cock bird.

These nursery cages are just above my daily work station and they soon steady down and spend time watching me doing my budgie chores.

These cages are always spotless as my concern about disease and the chicks building up immunity against them is always paramount in my mind.

I leave these youngsters for three months in the nursery cage and then transfer them to the flight to build up some muscle, during these important three (3) months we all get to know and respect each other and we form an important bond that will remain with us forever.

During the next few weeks' birds are caught up at random and spend short periods of time in show cages, they are introduced to the judging stick and get accustomed to the constantly moving show cage.

All budgerigar exhibitors should be aware of the criteria needed by the bird to win an award and remember that any bird out of condition will be penalised. Condition is essential and is the most important items for a show bird, the bird must be complete in feather and showing the bloom of good health and preparation.

Where applicable the bird should have six (6) throat spots the outer two partially hidden by the cheek patches.

Once the birds are reaching maturity they along with the adults that will be considered for the show bench are caged up with the sexes separated, clean cages are essential and mine are two metres long.

Preparation is the final act in putting your bird in front of the judge. It is most important to give a good bird a chance, so it is up to you to present it in top condition and help it in its final presentation. A bird that has not had early growing care will never have the conformation which a potential winner must have. The feather needs feeding with the proper proteins, plus fats in moderation. These proteins - given sparingly as a 'treat' - will help give a good wealth and condition of feather.

A minimum of ten (10) weeks before the first show all the show team are checked for broken feathers, flights and tails are the most important ones. Be aware that if they are broken and removed with one gentle pull they should fully regrow, this is not always the case though but a chance we take.

Removing any feathers broken or split at this time should have our birds in full feather at show time. Over the next few weeks keep a check on any new feathers that should be growing. Four (4) weeks before the show we must get our birds into show condition and this means water, clean and warm.

I use all wire breeding cages and these are ideal for spraying my birds in, several are placed in a single cage taken into the garden and given a good soaking, I then transfer the cage into a warm greenhouse where they can dry off without the fear of catching a chill. Always spray early in the day, your birds need four (4) hours to dry out completely before roosting for the night.

Now the all-important preening begins and the birds will be seen transferring oil from the oil gland at the base of the tail and preening their feathers with it.

Every two (2) days I continue spraying but the sprays are getting lighter as the feathers tighten.

Two (2) weeks before the show a few surplus secondary spots are removed from each bird, only a few at a time.

Ten (10) days before the show a decision is made as to which birds will be entered at the show; these will be the full spotted conditioned birds.

My work station will have a toothbrush, baby shampoo, salt, tweezers and a junior hacksaw blade laid out ready for use.

After removing a few spots each day just gently stroke any pin feathers with the hacksaw blade, this will open them up but do not touch any pin feathers with blood in them or your day will be ruined. Gently squeeze at the bottom any last minute pin feathers with a pair of tweezers and the quill which is only a sheath will slide off.

Four (4) days before a show I stop spraying and let the natural bloom appear on the bird's feathers, today I also remove all the surplus spots with the exception of one (1) secondary spot under each of the four (4) main spots, these secondary spots are not removed until one (1) day before the show, these are better than nothing if one of the main spots drops out.

We are almost done now.

Are your show cages clean and ready for the big event? I hope so as these are your show window.

The day before the show dip each bird's tail in boiling water this will straighten it out.

And time now for one last check of every bird, can you see any pin feathers or secondary spots that need removing, now is the last chance to do it.

I always put one label at a time on my cages and then put the correct bird in before moving on to the next.

Good luck at your show.