



Preparing Your Bird for the Show



The Art of Cage Training

I thought I would touch on this subject a bit as I have been asked by several folks as to how we actually work with the birds when cage training.

#1— Acquire a cage similar to the ones that the bird will be shown in at the shows. You can purchase show cages from several poultry supply places. You will need to set your cage in a location that is at waist level or higher as that is how the cages will be set up at the shows. You also need to select an area that will receive high traffic from your family or friends that you can convince to come and visit your birds. It is important to get the birds comfortable with strangers walking past their cage and talking. It would be good to have some younger children walk past the cages and chatter as kids do. You will also need to set up a radio by the cage, preferable tuned to a station that has talking and not so much music. The goal here is to replicate the showroom as much as possible.

#2—Cage training isn't an overnight thing, it takes time. When we work with the birds, they may only spend an hour a day in the cage at first, gradually working up to where they are comfortable in the cage setting for a full day. When I start a new bird on the show schedule, I only take them to one day shows at first-, two day shows can be a long time for a new bird. The idea is to make the bird as comfortable and relaxed in the cage as they can be. A relaxed bird will show better than a spastic one.

3— Now that the bird is comfortable in the cage, you can start to train him. I take the bird out of the cage, head first of course, and examine him like a judge would, and then put him back head first. I do this several times each day so that he is used to being caught and looked over. The bird will realize that he is not going to get hurt and will learn to just stand there to be caught. Judges appreciate a bird that is easily caught verses one that they have to struggle to catch. If it comes down to a tie between two birds, that judge will select the cage trained bird over the wild one. Then I introduce other people into the catch and handle routine. The bird needs to be comfortable with others handling them too.

#4— Impress the judge. After the bird is comfortable with this routine, you add the final touch on- the pose. Take the bird out of the cage, do your examination of the bird and then stand the bird on the palm of your hand in front of the open cage- he should hop in. As soon as he hops in- toss in a treat, he will turn to get the treat. The goal is to get him to hop in and immediately turn to the door, puff up, and pose for his treat. Now it is very important to use a treat with a crinkly wrapper as you will be able to get him alert and to pose just from the sound of the treat wrapper. I use Old Roy soft dog food treats. They come in little individual packets with a nice crinkly wrapper. Tender Vittles would work if they are wrapped in plastic and not a paper type wrapper. Just shop around, you will find a suitable wrapped treat. It is wise to work on the return to cage and pose when the bird is hungry as then it will mean more. When you are on the show floor, have the wrapper of the treat in your pocket. As the judge walks by your pens, you can crunch your wrapper around in your pocket, that bird will turn and pose for the judge.

#5— Practice, keep it fun for the bird and he will work for you. In poultry shows, sometimes it is just the little things that make the difference in the judge's mind. Your goal in cage training is to make that judge take a second look at your bird. If you can get a second look, then you have a shot at taking that class. The birds that are just sitting or wild, aren't showing at their best. If you can get yours to pose and show for the judge, he will be impressed with you and your bird.

#6—To learn more, watch other breeders at the shows and see how well trained their birds are. Ask them if they would show you how they train their birds. But remember, if the bird doesn't meet the APA or ABA Standards then it doesn't matter how well trained your bird is. It's not going to "hit that big Best of Breed, Class Champion or Champion Row".