

Impressions of a First Time Judge's Assistant

by Aline C. Keller
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Last show season was my first time assisting the judging of Type canaries.

It was a very enjoyable experience and one from which I learned a whole lot. These two particular shows did not present many birds, but a fairly good representation was available, therefore there was plenty of time to do the judging in a relaxed manner.

After the judging I heard a couple of comments to the effect that: "The bird chosen wasn't the best, another should have taken first place." — Maybe so but here comes my argument:

1) When a judge is invited to work in a show, we are submitting our birds to one judge's opinion. We assume that the judge has a definite idea of what the standard of a particular bird calls for and therefore qualifies to be a judge. However it still remains the factor that a winning bird with one judge will not necessarily win by another judge. One judge may be more captivated by one feature than another and vice-versa. But a bird with features closest to standard will generally win.

2) Here is my main reason for writing this article. Much of the blame for picking a winning bird showing lesser attributes over a better one, often lies with the exhibitor.

At these two particular shows I worked, there were several birds which very obviously had none or very little show cage training prior to the show.

By this I mean getting the bird accustomed to the show cage so that it feels comfortable and acquainted with it. That it knows where to find the water, but most important, feels secure with his cage and environment.

Some will say: "Oh, I don't have time to train them, I just put them in their cage the night before." Well maybe so, but don't expect the bird to perform to its best advantage. Here we have to think the way a bird thinks, and they have a very small brain.

There were several birds so frightened,



Photo by Tony Buccì

Yorkshire, one of the older classical types seen at bird shows.



Photo by Dan Martin

Varigated border

Varigated Norwich, one of the largest types of show canaries.



Photo by Tony Buccì



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it was pitiful. They would hug to the bottom of the cage, or would spread against the wire, totally terrified by an experience which was very foreign to them.

When they crouch at the bottom of the cage, how can the judge see if it even has legs. Don't laugh, I heard of a bird qualifying at one National which had only one wing!

We had a Border canary at this show I worked, which seemed to have many good qualities, maybe even better than the winner, but it would not come to the perches at the time it was brought to the judging table. When returned to the table with the other birds, it relaxed and showed even better form than the winner. However it was too late.

On the other hand, birds that fly against the wire, get their tails and wings so messed up with raggedy and broken feathers, forfeit their chances of qualifying.

Type canaries are birds of stance or posture and that's what they are called in most other countries. They are supposed to stand a certain way, and that's when they show their best qualities. If they don't show these attributes as well as proper conformation at the time of judging, they will not qualify.

If you'd like to show a bird and are not sure of what the attributes of a certain type should be, mention it to the officers of your club and they should be able to present a standard configuration of it, along with its characteristics and points listings to each part of the bird and the kind of show cage it requires. These show cages have to be ordered well ahead of time.

It would make a good lecture topic at a monthly meeting. Some breeders of this kind of canaries can bring them to the meeting, and qualities as well as faults can be discussed.

There are also several books around, with pictures of Type canaries and sometimes one of the standard. I say "sometimes," because most of the birds in the pictures display some faults too.

It is the exhibitor's task to provide the environment and training to present a bird well prepared for the show. If a bird is taken from an aviary and put into a smaller cage, it has to get used to not only the confinement, but also the wires, different colors around it and also very important, get used to the presence of people nearby. Showing a bird puts it through a great deal of stress which we have to try to minimize not only for the sake of its best winning chances but for later consequences. A bird which goes through too much stress may not

recover, and might never breed after that. Many breeders do not show their best birds for this reason.

Another point I'd like to draw your attention to, is: never allow a bird which is not supposed to get color food, to ingest some by mistake. This year there was one Border with pretty good qualities which showed several specks of orange color. This bird was disqualified. Borders are not supposed to be color fed.

Start to train your birds long ahead of time, in order to present a good showing and assure yourself and the bird of the very best chances. Getting them show cage trained from about the time of weaning would be the ideal way.

Hang a show cage on the cage where the birds are, so that they can go in and out of the show cage.

Different types of canaries need different kinds of training and for different periods of time. At the very least, start six weeks in advance of the show, and through the last two weeks, provide them with a situation in which they can be closer to people in order to get familiar with them while in their show cage.

Make sure their nails are properly clipped and filed a few weeks ahead of the show. They should be allowed to bathe frequently, so they can have many chances of preening themselves. Legs and I.D. bands should be free of caked dirt.

Some exhibitors will give their birds some liquor in their drinking water in order to relax them for the show. I don't know at what rate though. There is also a "nerve tonic" on the market that is quite effective, and should be used according to the label. However it should not be added to their water the day of judging since it will make it yellow and therefore a marked cage.

Another point worthy of attention is to show each Type canary in its proper cage with the appropriate drinker whenever possible. I've been guilty of this account myself, last year, through my own neglect and I accept all the blame. The birds which were supposed to be color fed were not, and their cages were outfitted with the wrong drinkers. This was a hard-learned lesson and yet much needed, since most judges here in the West have been lax on this subject.

This is only one phase of do's and don'ts in the preparation of birds for the show.

I hope this will be of some help, especially for novices. Give your birds a chance! It is frustrating to go through so much work and dedication, to see your birds disqualified. ●

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