

How to Get Your Bird Seen on the Show Bench (A Parody to Reality by Julie Mitchell©)

Determine an occasion to celebrate. It can be the bird's birthday, your birthday or even President's day. Get a good photograph of your bird taken or take it yourself. You want a very clear picture, so make sure it's a good one. Convince a good friend who could sell ice to Eskimos to help you get orders for Tee-Shirts. Send the picture and the order for the Tee-Shirts to a company that will produce the shirts and have them imprinted with the picture and the occasion.

The day before the show, have the shirts delivered because you want to make sure that everyone is able to show off their shirts at the same time. Have your good friend go around and deliver the shirts showing them off of how good they look.

On the day of the show, enter the same bird that has the picture shown on your "celebratory" Tee-Shirts in the show. Everyone that has bought one of the Tee-Shirts comes to the show wearing your bird's picture all over and the Judge sees nothing but that bird and can't get that bird out of his or her mind. Your bird places well! VIOLA! Mission Accomplished!

REALITY: Is this really how to get your bird seen on the show bench? **NO!** The below will give you information to use to get started in showing your bird.

Determine if you have a bird that fits the "standard" for the Society that the bird will be shown under. Each Society will have a panel of judges that have extensive past experience in both breeding and successfully exhibiting their own birds. Each Society has its own standards as to how to become a judge such as apprenticing under a "seasoned" veteran so many times, passing a written exam and having shown their own birds to a championship, or something similar.

The standards for SPBE, ALBS and NCS are at the end of this article and can be viewed there. All standards will speak to Conformation, Condition, Deportment and Color.

Conformation is how the bird is put together. Does the body flow, is the crest, body and tail proportionate to each other? What is the bird's overall shape? Does the head fit the body? Do the wing tips cross each other? Does the bird have a big eye? Does the bird have faults due to hereditary problems/issues such as balding (Lutinos/Fallows)? How big is the bird (not to be confused with how much does the bird weigh)? Special emphasis should be placed on body length. Does the bird have size and this is not to be confused with weight.

Condition (you will hear this word again), this is the condition that the bird is in. Does it have all of its feathers, i.e., central tail feathers, crest feathers, flights? Are the feathers tight? Do they have a gloss to them? Are they any signs of a molt?

Deposition is the way the bird sits on the perch. Does the bird slump on the perch? Is there a straight line from back of head to tip of tail? Is there a dropped tail?

Color/Markings are the deepness of the colors or the size of the cheek patch or the intensity. Birds should be marked symmetrically, meaning the left side should be marked similar to the right side.

Also, each Society has their own set of rules and regulations regarding showing birds for that Society. Most Societies have these posted on their web sites and if you don't have Internet access, they will be more than willing to mail you a copy. Most Societies will also have Beginner and Advanced-type Sections, some even have an Intermediate. It is important to know these rules before you begin showing. Also, they will define what you can use to show a bird (cage vs. show cage).

We could dwell all day on rules, but there's way too many out there for each society to discuss, again, check the individual societies' web pages for further explanation.

What do I do, to prepare?

If you decide that you have a bird that you'd like to show and you've checked into the requirements of that Society, what next? **Preparation and Condition.** These are two words that will never leave your vocabulary again, if you continue to show. Many times proper or improper Preparation and Conditioning may be the fine line difference of winning or losing. Remember, Condition was part of the Standard!

About 10 to 12 weeks prior to the show, pull any damaged tail feathers, ten to twelve weeks gives the bird ample time to grow in and restore the pulled feathers. Ideally, your bird will have recently gone through a molt so you will not have to pull old left over broken feathers. Also, make sure your bird is getting the absolute best diet possible.

About 6 weeks before the show, you will want to start spraying your bird once or twice a day with water. It is recommended that you use cold water so the bird will tighten up his feathers, which in turn will make them glossier. Once your bird gets used to this routine, you'll come to enjoy it as much as he does. This is also the time to start show cage training (preparation) your bird (if your society requires a show cage). You want the bird to sit quietly upright on the perch while it is lifted and carried around. As part of the cage training, put it in the car and drive it around so that the bird adjusts to the motion of the car while in his "cage". Another thing is to get up close to the cage and look into it at the bird. Also, take a dowel, slightly larger than a pencil in diameter and tap on the roof of the cage and stick the dowel in the cage to lift the bird's tail so that he will turn.

About one week before the show, you should clip your bird's nails, making sure that they aren't overgrown. Long toenails prevent the bird from perching properly. If your bird is housed with other birds, this is also a good time to isolate him from them into his own cage, so that you can keep him in "Condition" for the show. This is a good time to

pull the show cage out of the attic or the garage and go over it with a new coat of paint or a good thorough scrubbing, whatever it needs. It is very important to have a clean show cage the day of the show.

The day of the show – I always recommend to folks to try to attend another show before entering birds for the first time. It can be a little intimidating on the first go. You have to fill out paperwork, know your bird's band number, color, sex, age, and many other things (this is where knowledge of those rules helps). Once the paperwork is completed and you've attached your show tag to the cage, you put your bird up on the bench where a show steward will take control of your bird. At that point in time, you will not be able to get your bird until the show is over.

Next, you take a seat in the gallery and listen

What if I don't want to show?

You've already decided that showing is not your thing, for any number of reasons, you just don't want to exhibit a bird, but you are quite interested in learning (fill in the blank). (for the blank: learn to breed better birds, learn if you want a bird, learn more about the bird you have, etc.) Attend a show. Most judges are more than willing to answer questions from the gallery while judging. It is customary, that if the judge is actually in the process of judging birds, to wait until he/she has finished. Most judges will ask if anyone has any questions, so it shouldn't come as a surprise. The judge will especially entertain questions after placing the Top Ten Novice Bench, the Advanced Bench and the Best in Show Bench. Also, once the show is over, feel free to speak with the judge and the birds' owners. We love to talk about birds! Also, sometimes it's a good opportunity to see rare colors or breeds that you may not always have the opportunity to see.

In one of my earlier shows, someone came up to me and asked me what we fed our birds. I didn't really find the question odd because I just thought it might be related to the pellet vs. seed issue. I explained to her that show birds ate no differently than any other birds. She looked at me and said, "Well, you must be giving them something different from mine to make them that big, because my bird is ½ that size!" And off she went To this day, I'm still not sure she believed me.