

Showing Birds



This fact sheet gives guidance on showing your birds.

GENERAL

If you are interested in birds, other than as a pet, a bird show is the place to go. Some shows are advertised in local newspapers, but to find out what clubs and shows are in your area you should buy the *Cage & Aviary Birds* magazine. This is a weekly newspaper which deals with all aspects of bird keeping and carries news of club meetings and shows.

Once you have located your local club or society you may choose to join. By comparing your birds with other members' you will get some idea whether your birds are the type which can win prizes. The larger the show you go to, the wider the varieties and species of birds you will see. You will notice that the birds are in good feather condition. Breeders go to a lot of trouble to make sure that their birds are in perfect feather for a show. No judge will give a prize to a bird whose feathers are dirty and uneven.

Exhibiting birds is a great social occasion and gives many hours of pleasure and competitive excitement. Good Luck!

BUDGERIGARS

The Budgerigar Society lays down the show rules and sets a standard for what the 'ideal budgerigar' should look like. It is with this standard in mind that budgerigars are judged. By joining The Budgerigar Society, or one of its ten Area Societies, you will be able to buy aluminium rings which are stamped with your own membership number, the year and different number for each bird. The colour of these rings is changed each year, so you can tell at a glance the age of a close-ringed budgerigar. Large shows are divided into Sections: Champion, Intermediate, Novice, Beginner and Junior. The Junior section is for young people (aged 8-16). If you are over 16 years of age you will start by showing your birds in the Beginner Section. There are rules which decide when you must move up to Novice, but, generally, a successful Beginner will move to Novice after three years, to Intermediate after another three years and to Champion after another four years.

After ten years, if you are a Champion, you can apply to The Budgerigar Society to be put on the list of Open Show Judges. Within each Section there are classes for each variety and colour of budgerigar. These are split into two groups: Any Age and Young Bird. To be shown in the Young Bird classes a budgerigar must be entered by the person who bred it and be wearing that person's official closed ring. All other budgerigars, wearing a ring or not, bred by any breeder, no matter how old, can be shown in Any Age classes. By winning certain prizes at top level shows, a bird can become a Champion budgerigar. The budgerigar show season runs from July to November. If you

decide to enter a show, you must obtain a standard show cage. All of the cages at a show are the same so that no budgerigar gains an advantage. Club shows, staged just for club members, are usually easy going affairs, where you can turn up with your birds on the day to enter them. The Show Secretary will help you to enter them into the correct classes. Open Shows are more formal and your birds need to be entered in advance. When you find a show you would like to show at, send for a schedule. Ask an experienced breeder for help on which classes your birds should be entered in. Otherwise you may arrive at the show, after judging, to see "W/C" written on your cage. This means "wrong class" and that the bird has not been judged. A few days before the show your cage labels will arrive through the post. Make sure that you stick the correct label to the correct cage before taking your budgerigars to the show hall. The schedule will show what time your birds need to be delivered for judging. It will also show what time the show opens to the public, so that you can return to see if your birds have won.

Better still, ask if you can help at the show, when you send in your entry form. If you do, you must be prepared for hard work, but the whole day will be spent with, and talking about, budgerigars. What better way is there to spend a day ?

ZEBRA FINCHES

The keeping and breeding of Zebra Finches is in itself an enjoyable hobby but many fanciers find added interest and pleasure in going on to exhibit them at the many cage bird shows in Britain. There is at least one show within reach of most fanciers and they vary from a local show, which has classes for all species of birds to 'specialist shows' which cater solely for Zebra Finches.

The first thing you will need to obtain is a show schedule, which you can obtain by writing to the Show Secretary. His/her address can be found either in the show advertisements in 'Cage & Aviary Birds' or from your Society Year Book. It is sufficient to write to the Show Secretary on a sheet of note paper with your name and address, stating "schedule please" and always enclosing a stamped addressed envelope. If you are having difficulty in locating a suitable show, the secretary of the Zebra Finch Society may be able to assist. When your schedule arrives, study it and decide which are the appropriate classes for the birds you want to exhibit. Remember Zebra Finches are shown only in matched pairs (a cock and hen of the same colour mutation). Fill in your entry form giving the numbers of the classes for your birds. As a novice you will put your birds in the classes for fanciers like yourself who are fairly new to exhibiting. After the class numbers state the colour of your birds, as this will enable the Show Secretary to check you have selected the correct classes, although in the event of error the onus is on you. The column on the form marked "For Secretary's Use" is left blank. If you have bred any of the pairs you are exhibiting and have

close rung them with your own current year Z.F.S. rings you can nominate them as a 'breeder' entry. To do this put a "B" or "B.B.E." in the nomination column for each breeder pair entered. This means the birds are bred by you and become eligible to win any awards given for 'current year owner bred birds'. It is important to note that both the birds in a single pair must be current year bred and wearing your current year ZFS rings, otherwise the pair can only be entered in the "Adult" classes. You should also nominate in the nominations column of the entry form any specialist societies of which you are a member, and who are offering their special awards at the show. If successful, your birds may win one of the attractive rosettes or trophies offered by specialist societies and clubs which grant their patronage. Should you want to sell your birds you could state the selling price in the column of the entry form marked 'sale price'. If you do not wish to sell your birds simply leave this column blank or mark it N.F.S. If the club does sell any birds which you have marked for sale, they will usually deduct 10% commission for this service. The price does not include the cage.

Post your entry form with the appropriate money to cover your entry fees and a stamped addressed envelope. The latest date for accepting entries will be stated in the show schedule. Within a few days, you will receive from the Show Secretary, your cage labels and a lifting card (some societies do not use lifting cards, so don't worry if you don't receive one).

Prepare your show cages for the show making sure they are clean and a credit to you. Remember too that your Zebra Finches can only be exhibited in the approved standard show cage. These can either be purchased ready made from trade suppliers (many of whom advertise their products in "Cage and Aviary Birds" journal), or you can make them yourself to the specification approved by The Zebra Finch Society, in which event great care must be taken to comply with that specification. Your cage label should be stuck on the middle of the bottom front rail and ample seed should be scattered in the bottom of the cage. Nothing else should be placed on the bottom of the cage. Use a seed mixture of the type your birds eat regularly, and remember before leaving for the show to place an empty drinker pot in the correct position inside the cage. Run your birds into the correct show cages. If you have to catch them by hand, do so for the minimum handling period necessary and with the minimum of excitement and try to avoid damaging any feathers.

Now it only remains to take your birds to the show. Use a carrying case or strong cardboard box to convey your exhibits into the show hall. At the show your birds will be checked in by an official of the show, and the water pot will be filled with sufficient water to allow the birds a drink.

During the morning whilst judging of the exhibits is taking place, the show will

not be open to the public or to anyone other than the show officials and stewards. At patronage shows all Zebra Finch exhibits are judged by a Panel Judge of The Zebra Finch Society to the show and colour standards which are set out in The Zebra Finch Society's Year Book and to which you should refer when assessing your own stock. For the future as you progress, you may be able to offer your services as a show steward, so that you can assist the judge and see at first hand the assessment of the exhibits by him/her.

Later in the day you can attend the show and you will be able to see if your birds have won any awards. You can also discuss with fellow fanciers and the Judge, the merits of the various exhibits, from which you will be able to gain experience of the show and colour standards, how your own stock compares and how it can be, and/or needs to be, improved. When the show closes you can collect your birds and they will be checked out by a show steward.

Exhibition Preparation

Zebra Finches are often described as ideal birds for the beginner and this can often mislead fanciers into believing that they are easy to prepare for the show bench. While it may not be too difficult to bench pairs of Zebra Finches in reasonable condition, the task of exhibiting birds in perfect show condition is much harder to achieve.

Unlike most other type standard exhibition birds, Zebra Finches are exhibited in true pairs of the same colour; this greatly increases the problems faced by anyone hoping to exhibit their birds. Even those fanciers who possess an outstanding exhibition pair consisting of a well matched cock and hen of the same colour, may have difficulty in getting both birds into condition at the same time. This is because Zebras can moult at anytime of year and often seem to choose the most inconvenient time to do so. Some individual birds will moult after each show they attend, but others will seem to retain their condition indefinitely. Although this can be a major problem for specific exhibitors it does create a situation where the 'honours' may be shared out more equally. While your birds can have been well beaten this week, the birds in front of them may be moulting within a fortnight. Good condition is vitally important to achieve any degree of success on the show bench as it enhances the apparent type and size of the birds being exhibited.

Exhibitors should always attempt to bring out the best possible condition in their birds. Ideally potential show birds should be housed in individual cages, when Zebras are kept more than one to a cage it is likely that feather plucking will result. As potential show birds are being caught up they should be inspected for damaged or broken feathers and feet defects. Any damaged or broken feathers should be carefully removed and these will take about six

weeks to fully re-grow. Birds with missing toe nails or claws will rarely be successful on the show bench, although they could win a class if they were vastly superior to other exhibits entered against them.

Birds should always be given a well balanced diet and this is essential if they are going to attain full exhibition condition. The most important factors in the diet are of course a good quality seed mixture and an ample supply of mineralised grit, but birds may also appreciate a little rearing food once or twice a week, greenfood such as cabbage, brussel sprout or dandelion, and also wild seeds such as ratstail plantains, meadow sweet etc. Frequent bathing will help birds to acquire their best feather condition possible. Spraying the birds with warm water will also enhance their final appearance. Birds can be sprayed with boiled water, which has then been allowed to cool, two or three times a week prior to the show season. Quite heavy spraying can be beneficial up until about ten days before the first outing on the show bench, provided this does not make cages excessively damp. Where possible it is advisable to use a separate cage solely for the purpose of spraying birds. Various additives such as bay rum, glycerine or "plume spray" are often added to the water before birds are sprayed and these may help to give an extra sheen to the plumage of the birds. The dilution for bay rum is normally one teaspoonful to a pint of water, and for glycerine usually one drop to a pint of water.

Show training will help birds to perform to their full potential on the show bench. This simply involves allowing pairs to experience the confines of a show cage for up to an hour (a legal imposition) in any 24 hour period. By running pairs together it may be seen that certain birds perform better when exhibited with specific partners and a note should be made of any show pairs which are particularly compatible. Birds which indulge in feather plucking when put in pairs are particularly annoying to the exhibitor and can rarely be exhibited successfully.

In addition to preparing birds properly for the show bench, show cages must also be turned out in good order. Having made the effort to get the most out of your birds, it is foolish to neglect the show cage in which they are to be benched. The show cage forms part of the exhibit and can be penalised if badly turned out. Judges tend to be particularly unimpressed by dirty cages, or those which have been repainted within the past twelve hours.

Having decided to exhibit, prepared your birds properly, and made the necessary entries, one should not forget that the whole exercise, win or lose is supposed to be enjoyed. Established exhibitors tend to bench their birds as much for the prospect of meeting and talking to fellow fanciers, as they do to win prizes. We all enjoy winning but that is not the prime reason for countless

early morning starts and the hundreds of miles traveled through fog, rain, ice and snow. Bird shows are social events and it is only possible to reap the full rewards of exhibiting by being sociable.

Type

In birdkeeping circles the term 'type' is commonly used to refer to the shape of birds. Some birds are long and thin, others are short and round, and there are many variations between these extremes. Where a large number of birds are being bred by fanciers it is usually necessary to determine which type or shape is to be preferred, so that judges can decide which are the best exhibits at shows. In the Canary Fancy there has been sufficient interest to establish various different type preferences and this has resulted in several different fancies developing from just one species. The main variation between each breed of canary is the shape, although in some cases overall size must also be taken into consideration. Perhaps when the Zebra Finch Fancy is as old as the Canary Fancy, there will be several different breeds of Zebra Finch which vary from each other by their shape. However at the present time there is just one type standard for Zebra Finches, which all competitive exhibitors must strive to achieve.

The type standard laid down by the Z.F.S. is as follows:-

TYPE: Bold throughout and of "Cobby" type giving the birds a look of substance; wings evenly carried to root of tail.

Although very brief, this type standard has successfully conveyed to exhibitors over the years that the ideal Zebra Finch must be a round bird, with clean lines, showing no angularity. If a type standard drawing had been adopted then this would have been altered several times as the type of exhibition Zebra Finches improved over the years. The Budgie and Border Canary Fancies have both experienced the turmoil that can be caused when type standard drawings are altered. In the case of the Border Canary this was largely responsible for the 'birth' of the Fife Fancy Canary, which is much more similar to the original Border Canary, than present day exhibition Borders.

When assessing type it is usual to start by looking at the bird's head, and more specifically the eyes of the bird. Human beings communicate initially by making eye contact and therefore it is simply human nature to look at the eyes first. The eyes of Zebra Finches should be round, bright and as large as possible without appearing 'deformed'. The head should show roundness when viewed from the side, and good width when viewed from the front or back. The beak of the bird can have quite an affect on the apparent head shape. In Zebra Finches it is usual to look for birds with neat, short, conical beaks, as this tends to emphasize the shape and size of the head. A large beak will tend to make the head appear smaller and therefore detract from the type of the bird. Ideally

there should be no sharpness under the beak; the neck and throat should be full, showing width and depth, so that the head blends neatly into the body. The head should be in proportion with the body, appearing neither too large nor too small.

The body of the bird should be full and round. When viewed in profile, the line from the base of the beak to the vent should be a smooth curve, showing as much depth as possible, without any sign of being square chested. The line from the back of the head to the base of the tail should be nearly straight and at an angle of 45 degrees to the vertical. Ideally this contour should be slightly convex to add extra substance to the body, and if this is the case it will also tend to improve wing and tail carriage. Birds which have a concave or hollow backed outline often have poor wing carriage and appear to droop their tails. The wings should be carried neatly and evenly so that their tips meet at the base of the tail. Dropped wings and crossed wings spoil the overall impression of roundness which is essential in a good exhibition Zebra Finch. The tail should be neat and relatively short, compared to most other types of exhibition birds. It must show no sign of drooping and therefore be carried at least at the same angle as the back outline, and ideally at a slightly more horizontal angle than 45 degrees.

When a Zebra Finch is viewed from above or below, the outline of the body should be nicely rounded, being elliptical in shape, rather than tubular. The head, body and tail should blend together neatly giving the appearance of being one complete unit, rather than three separate components. The overall impression should be one of roundness throughout, from the tip of the beak to the end of the tail.

The type standard does not mention size, type is merely concerned with shape and overall size is secondary to shape. Given that two birds have identical merits with regard to type (condition, colour and markings also being on a par) then they can only be separated by their size. In order to be consistent from one event to another it is essential that preference is given to either the smallest or the largest, opting for intermediate size is sure course for disaster. Whether or not pairs are determined to be of intermediate size depends on the size of the other exhibits placed beside them. Good exhibition pairs must be determined as being good in their own right, rather than depending on other exhibits in the class to make them good. As the type standard asks for birds to appear bold and have substance, it is accepted practice in the Zebra Finch Fancy to opt for the larger birds. But size should only be rewarded on when it is accompanied by good type.

The ability to differentiate between good type, average type and poor type is

essential if one hopes to establish a good strain of exhibition Zebra Finches. This ability can usually only be obtained by looking carefully at lots of different Zebra Finches and learning to recognise all the different type faults. The best way to do this is to visit shows where there is a good selection of Zebra Finches on view. The judge will have already given his or her decision, you have to try and understand why the birds are placed in this order. Usually there will be experienced Zebra fanciers on hand who are only too pleased to help you recognise the finer points of Exhibition Zebra Finches.

Show Standards

Condition to be essential. Birds should not receive any award unless they are in show condition. Missing, ragged or soiled feathers, and missing claws or toes constitute show faults.

Type: Bold throughout and of "Cobby" type, giving the birds a look of substance; wings evenly carried to root of tail.

Markings (Where applicable) **COCKS**: Breast bar distinct and clear cut, not less than 1/8in (3mm) and of even depth throughout. Throat evenly striped. Side flankings should be prominent extending from the wing butts to the end of the rump and decorated with round clearly defined spots. Cheek patches and tear marks to be clear and distinct. Beak bright red with feet and legs deep pink. **HENS**: As for Cocks, less breast bar, throat markings, side flankings and cheek patches. Beak a paler shade of red. Cock markings on hens are definite show faults.

The birds as a pair should have a balanced appearance.

CANARIES

All canary groups have a novice and champion section for exhibitors, although an intermediate section is being discussed by one canary group. Young birds are shown in an "unflighted" section, and over year birds should be shown in a "flighted" section. Some classes are mixed, and exhibitors should note that the schedule will normally ask for the exhibitor to nominate whether or not the exhibit is flighted or unflighted.

It is not essential for canaries to be rung, but it is an obvious way of tracking the pedigree of a bird. Aluminium or plastic rings can be used in most varieties of canary, although it should be noted that certain breeds have rules with regards to ringing. They also have rules for the standard of the variety to be exhibited, and normally points are allocated by the judges to establish the winner of each competitive class. Before entering shows, it is essential that the exhibitor refers to the governing body of their section to ensure that they fully

understand the rules of the variety. Cage labels have a definite insertion point on each show cage, and this is covered also within the rules of the breed.

Exhibitors cannot wash birds every week before showing, but the top exhibitors go to more trouble before exhibitions such as the National Exhibition of Cage and Aviary Birds or the major show of their own variety. Before washing canaries for showing, be sure that an experienced exhibitor has demonstrated how it is done. It has in the past been common for birds to die whilst in shock during washing.

Every show will have show rules and it is always worthwhile checking that these rules have been observed. After showing it is sensible to make mental notes with regards to the standard of judging and the organisation of a show to dictate whether or not you would like to repeat the experience.

BENGALESE

<u>Show Standards</u>	Points
<i>Condition and feather quality</i>	20
<i>Head and Body</i> —Nicely rounded, neck thick, head round from tip of beak to nape of neck. Beak in proportion to size of head. Eyes well back from base of beak. Back slightly rounded. No undue fatness.	20
<i>Wings</i> —Compact set close to body, tips meeting at base of tail.	15
<i>Tail</i> —Straight, clean, no loose feathers.	10
<i>Position</i> —About 45 degrees.	15
<i>Matching</i> —Pairs to be well matched with preference to birds with similar markings, additional marks for evenly marked birds. Both birds to be of same size & colour.	<u>20</u>
	100

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