

CAGE AND SHOW TRAINING

The first truth you must accept to become a successful showman is the fact that youngsters must be conditioned to a human touch and to the various distractions encountered at a show. Old birds never handled as youngsters are doomed, regardless of their attributes. Judges who cannot handle a bird due to its struggle to free itself, or who cannot see its station due to its crouching position, are forced to pass over the specimen.

Scientists tell us that pregnant animals are capable of passing on fright to their unborn young, and that upsetting experiences are to be avoided for the mom to be. I doubt that birds are capable of leaving their eggs with lasting impressions, but it is probably prudent to avoid annoying your breeders whenever possible. Once the eggs hatch, each youngster needs to be handled daily, even if for only moments. Make sure you take the baby completely from the nest and place it in your palm. Gently stroke it as you talk or whistle to it. In time, you will have your youngsters feeding from your hand. This early training will set the groundwork for the shows to follow.

Even before the brood has been weaned, begin placing them in cages similar to the ones they'll be in at shows. Start handling the wings, vent, head, and tail of each bird. Make the examinations short at first, taking care never to accidentally harm the young bird. Move the bird around the cage with a dowel or judging stick. Place others in the cage with it. Try having a friend go over the birds as well. Gradually increase the time the birds spend in your hands, and the time spent in the cage. Provide water and feed only after they are done for the day; this serves as a reward for them and they will look forward to these sessions. A secondary advantage of this is that they will learn to eat even when away from home and in strange surroundings. Next try leaving the youngsters overnight in your transporting carrier. After this, they are ready for their first show.

Your first couple of shows will no doubt be fun or lawn shows, where young birds are judged rather informally. Don't expect to win at your first show unless your charges have gained the valuable exposure beforehand. Remember, the demeanor, stance, movement, and confidence, are being sought after in addition to structural soundness. Judges, being the greedy lot that they are, want to see it all in the winning bird. While perfection is never reached, it is always sought.

Things to remember are: keep mature hens and cocks separate not only when being transported, but during the entire show season, and also remember that young birds may be damaged for the whole season, if placed for any length of time with older birds. Hopefully by the time you start showing, your birds will have already gotten used to having their

beaks and nails filed. A show is no time to acquaint your pigeons with a new twist in their routine. Whenever shows permit, bring your birds to and from the judging ring yourself, as others are usually less careful in handling than the owner is, and a lost flight feather can cost you a win. Plan your show calendar keeping in mind that shows produce stress and damage to feathers, and that your hopefuls are best managed by limiting them to a few, more important shows rather than ruining them early in the season by over showing. If your show team is large enough, divide it, allocating one youngster from each pair on each team, one team basically reserved for the later shows once they have been conditioned as indicated earlier.

Once the show season is over, a difficult but necessary job awaits you. Culling your team by as much as 80% is made easier, if you have periodically culled members during the season. As faults become visible, or when it appears that you have extra specimens of the same sex and color, you should take that opportunity to thin out the herd. To embark on next year's breeding season as you ideally should, means to keep only the best of this years stock. So as the English say, " Good Show !"

By Harold C. Jones