

## It's Show Time For Your Budgerigars

**Think your budgie is the best? Take it to the bird show and judging.**

*By Rebecca Sweat*

Budgerigars or budgies, America's favorite pet birds, are also some of the most popular on the show circuit.

If you're like most people new to bird shows, it's the competition that attracts you to that arena. "People like to see how good their ability is in raising nice show birds, and how they stand up against other exhibitors," said Don Langell, a member of the Massachusetts Budgerigar Society and one of the top exhibitors in the United States.

Bird shows also act as a market and meeting place where information and ideas are exchanged. "It's an opportunity for you to expose what you're doing in the hobby," Langell said. "For example, if you have parakeets of some rare variety that no one else has, bird shows allow you to go out and let other people know that such varieties exist."

The American Budgerigar Society (ABS) was established in 1941, and that year the society sponsored its first national budgie exhibition. In the years that followed, local budgie clubs affiliated with the ABS were formed in cities around the country, with each local group sponsoring its own shows.

Since the 1940s, budgie shows have grown steadily in popularity. Today, nearly 100 ABS-affiliated shows are held each year in the U.S. In addition, many other cage-bird clubs throughout the nation sponsor all-bird shows that have a separate division for budgerigars. Showing budgies also is very popular in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands.

The show season continues throughout the year, with the majority of shows staged from May through November. At any one show, several hundred, sometimes even thousands, of budgies are exhibited and judged.

The premier event on the U.S. show circuit each year is the ABS-sponsored All-American, where dedicated breeders gather from all around the U.S., Canada and even overseas. The location for this event rotates yearly; the 1999 All-American show is scheduled for September in Orlando, Florida.

Other important budgie shows in the U.S. include the Great Western show in Los Angeles; the Budgerigar Research Association show, also in Los Angeles; the DFW Exhibition Budgerigar Club show in Dallas-Fort Worth; the Blue Chip Exhibition Budgerigar Society show in Cincinnati; the Budgerigar Society of Missouri show in St. Louis; the Garden State Budgerigar Society show in South River, New Jersey; and the Massachusetts Budgerigar Society show in Bedford.

### Bird Show Procedure

You often don't need to be a member of a bird club to exhibit in their show, but you might need to fill out some paperwork and pay a fee. Exhibitors must also display their birds in a standard budgerigar show cage that conforms to the dimensions and appearances established by the ABS.

Birds at ABS-affiliated shows are entered in one of five divisions: the junior division, for young people up to age 17; the novice division, for adult beginners; the intermediate division; the champion division; and the rare varieties division. In the rare division, novice through champion compete together, but the junior rares show in the junior division so that birds owned by junior exhibitors all compete together.

"An exciting feature of exhibition for the novice is that you do not have to compete against the longtime breeders until you have gained experience and had some success on the show bench," said Bob Wilson of Cincinnati, Ohio, a judge with the Blue Chip Exhibition Budgerigar Society and one of the club's founding members.

The adult starting out will stay in the novice division until he or she has won three Best Novices with three different birds. "You then go into intermediate, and in intermediate you have to successfully compete with the champions on a regular basis," Wilson says. "There's a number of times, varying from club to club, that you have to place on the equivalent of the top bench at the show, and then you can move into champion."

Divisions are subdivided into classes. Each division has classes for different color varieties, such as green normals — where the light green and grey-green birds compete.

There are also separate classes for young budgies (that have been banded during the current year), old budgies, cocks and hens

The owners of winning show birds take home special plaques, rosettes and certificates. Langell explains that the winners are chosen by the following process: "In a specific class you might have 30 or 40 birds, and the judge will tend to go through those birds and narrow it down to the top 10, then the top three, and then, finally, he'll select the top bird in the class."

Once the judge determines the top birds for each class, these birds compete against other color varieties in their division and then a winning bird is chosen for each division. Finally, the judge compares the winners of all divisions to determine which bird gets the Best in Show award. In addition, special awards are usually given for the top three hens and the best young bird.

#### The Ideal Budgerigar

To eliminate problems over conflicting ideas about how a budgerigar should look, official standards are established to set the characteristics of the ideal exhibition bird, and entries are awarded or penalized points accordingly. Both the ABS and the UK Budgerigar Society (UKBS) have adopted the same basic standards.

Here are some of the most critical areas of the standards. The ideal length is 8 1/2 to 9 1/2 inches from crown of the head to the tip of the tail. [To get even more specific, the ideal bird should be 8 1/2 inches in the UK, 9 inches in the U.S. and 9 1/2 inches in Germany. — Editor] The head should be large, round, wide and symmetrical when viewed from any angle. The tail should be straight and tight, with two long tail feathers. The wavy markings on the cheek, head, back and wings should stand out clearly and match the description of the bird's particular color strain. The bird should be well-balanced and should sit alert and steady on the perch.

"If the bird doesn't behave well in the show cage, for example, it may get nervous and drop its wings or injure its tail, and it will get marked down for that," Langell says. Also, a bird will be marked down for such things as poor markings, broken feathers or having a less-than-ideal head size.

Apart from the competitive element and the thrill of success if your budgie is a top-notch bird, there's a real camaraderie between owners of show birds. Langell, who has been showing budgies since 1952, says one of the most enjoyable aspects of the hobby in all that time has been the friendships he's developed with other budgie enthusiasts.

"When I was first starting out, I was 'go, go, go' and very competitive, and winning was the important thing: I had to win, I had to move up," Langell says. "But once you've been successful, all of a sudden it's not quite as important to always win, and the camaraderie and friendships become the important factor."