

Calling all stewards!

When I joined the budgerigar hobby as a Junior, I was fascinated by the experience of showing budgerigars. The early morning starts catching and caging the birds, travelling to the show hall, dropping off the birds and then heading off for the day eagerly waiting to return in the afternoon to see how I had done. This routine did not go unnoticed by someone who I now to consider one of my closest friends in the fancy and a man who became my first mentor in the hobby – Peter Corkhill.

Peter was the prominent and most successful exhibitor in my area when I started in Budgerigars and after I got to know him, he gave me a serious telling off for not staying at the show and helping out as a steward. Peter explained to me how much I was missing out on and what I could learn by staying on during the day. It is only now when I look back that I can appreciate how valuable this advice was!

There is any number of good reasons to be a steward at a show. Not only do you help out the club who are hosting the event and assist those old hands that have been left to do all the work year after year but you are also provided with the opportunity of learning so much about the hobby.

Peter Corkhill has now left the fancy but he was a master of show procedure, he knew where everything should be, what should be judged next and how an efficiently run show should work. I was fortunate to be taken under his wing and learn everything that he knew on this subject. If he hadn't taken the time to encourage me to take part as a steward and listen to his wise words, I am sure that I would never have had the opportunity to learn so much vital information.

It still shocks me that some fanciers do not know what a green or yellow dot award on a show cage means. I have also attended shows where even the appointed Show Manager has not known the correct order of judging the specials and some of the easiest tricks of saving time and eradicating wasted effort. For example, the easiest and most effective way of lining up the colour dot winners and moving on to the next award with minimal fuss. One trick Peter taught me was stacking either yellow or green dot winners in rows of hens and cocks separately after they had been judged in the colour line up but before they were judged for the major specials. This means that when a best young bird in show is a cock, rather than having a fifteen minute delay with stewards having to hold up cages to the light or trying to read cage labels to see if a bird is a hen or cock, they are all there ready lined up for stewards to place on the judges stand for consideration. Another example is with chief stewards learning the show classification so that they know the significance of odd and even cages numbers at a championship show so that they can place colour dots on cages without even looking to see if the bird is a cock or hen. The only way people will learn simple methods such as these is by participating in the full show day. If information about show procedure such as this is not passed on to newcomers, where will our next generation of show managers and chief stewards come from?

One of the most annoying occurrences for me as a breeder and exhibitor of budgerigars, which crops up at nearly every show I've ever attended is when someone comes in after judging has finished and sees a significantly better bird placed second in the class behind an inferior specimen in first position. Some people in this situation are quick to jump to the conclusion of a conspiracy or the inability of a judge to see properly! The reality in most cases is almost certainly that the better bird either would not sit on the perch when being judged or if it did sit on the perch, it sat like a sack of potatoes while the inferior bird sat up and blew it's head like a trumpet. If people took the trouble to help out during the day, they could see judges in action and learn to appreciate the many frustrations that they face.

Another good friend of mine, Dave Hislop is the well known show manager at the Budgerigar Society World Championship Show. He was also former show manager of the Great Nor Western Show in Blackpool (a show which is now sorely missed). From participating in premier events such as these and under the supervision of people like Dave, you learn to appreciate how much hard work and effort goes into shows. It is so easy for people to attend a show and be oblivious to the work that goes on in the background and the unsung heroes who work tirelessly often without as much as a rosette at the end of the occasion to reward their efforts. Whilst stewarding at the premier shows, people also have the opportunity to learn methods of show procedure and layout, which work at the highest level of competition and which can then be applied to their local show in order to improve efficiency and enhance the show experience for everyone.

The social aspect of stewarding is often overlooked. The afternoon of a show only provides a limited period of time for exhibitors and attendees to catch up with old friends and meet those who are new to the hobby. On the other hand, those who steward in the morning have time between fetching, carrying and filling in paperwork to discuss the birds at length and to share any problems, which they may be having with their birds. In the time that I have spent at shows as a steward, I have been lucky enough to meet some of the most colourful characters in the fancy. In my opinion, there is no better way of meeting fellow enthusiasts than by putting in a bit of hard graft at a show.

Participating as a steward is a huge part of doing what I consider to be a full apprenticeship in the hobby. I appreciate that some people have legitimate reasons for not stewarding and simply cannot spare the time or are unable to help out during the day of a show. However, for those who are able and choose not to, you really are missing out.