

## Preparing Roller Canaries for Contests



This fact sheet gives guidance on preparing Roller Canaries for Contests.

The completion of the moult sees the start of perhaps the most interesting period in the Roller fanciers' year, when the young cocks start their intensive training in the song school.

Until the pin feathers start to appear on the young birds heads they should be left in the flight cages, where they will be practicing their song in a nice quiet way. Some of the more advanced ones will already have started to break their song and the beginnings of the adult tours will be heard among the baby warbling; but so long as they are keeping the attempts at song soft and quiet, they may be left in the flight and no damage will be done.

At the completion of the moult the young cocks should be caged off in training cages. Various patterns of cage are used for this purpose, some fanciers preferring a box type cage. Whatever type of cage is used some arrangement must be made to regulate the light available to the birds. Shading the whole training room is an option used by most fanciers; this is done by curtaining the windows. The usual arrangement is to have 3 or 4 shelves, bookcase fashion, each shelf holding about 4 cages. For the best results, a good adult bird should be placed in the middle to act as a schoolmaster; a training cassette or CD are also very useful tools in the training of young rollers.

The diet of the young cock birds at this time needs to be nourishing but not stimulating. Opinions vary, but a basic diet of Rubsen rape, supplemented by a small amount of canary seed each day and some mixed seed or egg food once or twice a week is a good base to work from; though this may be varied a little for individual birds according to their condition. Grit should be provided and also a little green-food from time to time.

The whole objective is to keep the birds reasonably active so that their combined burblings don't drown the voice of their tutor.

Young rollers will sing their inherited song even if they don't have the benefit of a schoolmaster, but it is an advantage if they have a good old bird to lead them, particularly if he is the father or is closely related to the pupils. It is better to have no tutor at all than a bad one and to be effective a tutor needs certain characteristics, but this does not mean that any faultless bird is a suitable schoolmaster. Even many prizewinning birds, although good contest birds and completely faultless on the score sheet are far from ideal for this important function.

If the tutor has in his song a tendency to repeat over and over the cheaper easy tours, even though he also sings some really good tours which have enabled him to score well in the contests, the young rollers are likely to copy the easy parts to the detriment of the deeper high scoring tours which are much more difficult to sing, even to the extent of taking them higher until they become

faulty.

The tutor should therefore be a bird which concentrates on the deeper, more valuable tours and hammers these into the young cocks time and time again. In choosing a tutor it pays not only to listen to what he sings well, which the young cocks may follow, but also to what is mediocre or bad song in his song, which the youngsters will certainly find easier to pick up.

At least twice each day the curtain should be opened. Some people feed and water their birds in the early morning and leave the curtain open for about  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour, which gives them time to preen their feathers and have a splash in the water pot; and then open them again in the evening for a similar period. Draw the separators out from between the cages, which stops them singing, and then replace them when they have had chance to feed; when they will usually start to sing straight away. So long as they sing quietly they are left open, but if they start to become excited and sing against each other the curtain should be closed. Each cage should have the birds ring number on it so that notes can be made each day plotting the progress of the development of the song.

The cages should be handled frequently to make the youngsters steady, and if 3 or 4 cages can be taken into a separate room for 10 minutes or so it is easier to assess the song and will also help train the young rollers to sing on demand.

The rate of development of the song varies from bird to bird. Some youngsters make very rapid progress and bring out some of the tours in an adult fashion at an early age, but these forward youngsters don't always make the best birds in the end, as there is a danger that the song may become racy and hard as they develop further.

The really good birds are often those whose song develops at a steady rate in a quiet fashion, with the adult tours gradually gaining in strength and duration and no flashy forceful passages standing out in the performance.

Any youngsters which develop faults in their song, particularly sharp flutes or high bells, should be taken out of the school so that the fault doesn't spread.

Two weeks or so before the first contest the most advanced birds, which are singing an adult song should be put into contest cages. The shutters should be gradually closed over a period of 2 or 3 days to give them time to become familiar with the cage. Once they are settled in, the cages should be handled frequently and opened for short periods as often as possible, in order to encourage the birds to sing freely.

When the shutters are opened, either in daylight or artificial light, the birds should be given about 10 minutes in which to strike up a song. If there has been no song within this time, the shutters should be closed again and the process repeated at the next convenient time, until the birds start to sing as soon as they

are opened up. This is an important part of the training, as free singing birds have an advantage in the contests.

If the contest cages can be put in the carrier and perhaps loaded in the boot of the car for short journeys, or even just carried, not too gently about the house, it will also be beneficial and will accustom the birds to the inevitable bit of jostling about they will get on their way to a contest.

Time spent training is time well spent. The best roller in the world is not going to win if it doesn't satisfy the first essential, which is to sing in front of the judge.

This fact sheet has been produced for:  
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