

Story of an Irish Fancy Canary Breeder. . . . FEATURE As printed in the Cage & Aviary UK

ON WITH THE SHOW

John Dowling is well known on the Irish show circuit. TOM O'REGAN visited his bird room recently to find out how he prepares his Irish Fancy Canaries for the show season.

JOHN DOWLING is chairman of the Irish Fancy Canary Society Club, Irish Fancy Canary Society (Cork Branch) and The Cork Show Bird Society. He is also a panel judge and has judged at all shows throughout the country as well as judging the Irish fancy section twice at the National Exhibition in England. Not long ago, John moved his house and had to build a new bird room. When I visited him recently to find out how he trains his young birds for shows, I could see what a lot of thought he had put into it. It measures 9mx2.4m (30ft x 8ft) and has been built using marine ply covered with PVC tongue and groove. At the entrance to the bird room there is a utility room, containing a sink with hot and cold water and a fridge to keep the greens for the birds fresh.

Multiple cages

The bird room itself contains 115 cages; the cage fronts are plastic and the perches are plastic. By removing dividers from cages, a run of 15 can be created and used for young birds after they have been weaned. There are two large windows to the front of the bird room that supply plenty of natural light. John built the bird room by himself and, as he is an electrician, he was able to organize his lighting to suit himself and his birds.

John begins his show training as soon as the birds are weaned'

As soon as young birds are separated from their parents, John takes each group of siblings and puts it into a single cage. He feeds the young on soaked seed, egg food, lettuce and broccoli. Once he is sure the young birds can feed themselves and are sturdy enough, he transfers them from single cages to stock cages where they have a run of 15 cages.

The covering for the cage floors at this stage is small woodchip, which is excellent for soaking up droppings and does not have to be changed as often as sawdust. Under the woodchip John has newspaper. He finds that the newspaper has reduced feather plucking during the molt, because the young birds are kept otherwise engaged shredding the paper.

John begins his show training as soon as the birds are weaned. The first thing he does is to attach a wire cage to the door of each stock cage. John makes the wire cages himself from Twilweld wire. They are left in position until the birds are used to going in and out of them and are then ready for the next stage in the training process. This is generally when birds are 90 percent through the molt. The birds are transferred to show cages using the wire cages and, once the birds are steady enough in show cages, John assesses them, making sure the feather quality is good, the birds are of the right length, the wing carriage is perfect, the tail is properly formed, and birds are standing in the right position. Birds that are of show standard are then caged singly.

When John is training bird, he leaves them in show cages for an hour at a time, which, he says, is sufficient for the training process. He has no problem training birds to drink water in show cages because he uses show cage drinkers on his stock cages. During training, he treats his birds as if they were at a show by putting drinkers on the cages and adding water

while the birds are in the cages, just as an inexperienced steward might do. Getting them accustomed to the kind of thing that might happen to them at a show helps his birds when they are brought to the real thing. After this he places his birds in position on a bench, and puts them through the rigors of judging. By doing this he can be confident that they will be familiar with show proceedings and are less likely to be shocked or display signs of nervousness.

Shampoo and set

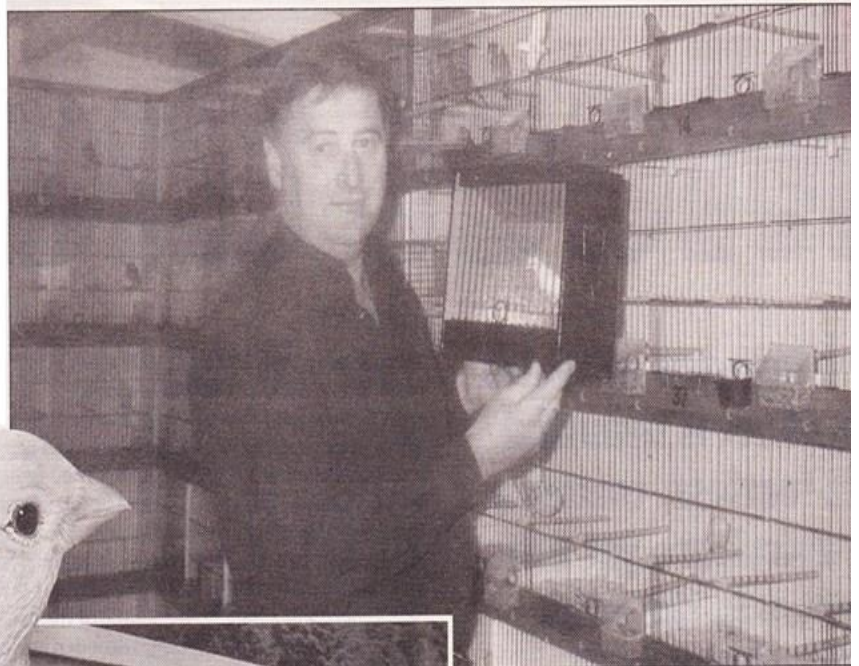
Birds in John's stock cages are given baths every day. Birds caged singly are sprayed with Johnson's baby shampoo, which penetrates and enhances the birds' feathers. These birds are sprayed while in their wire cages. It soon becomes quite clear that a huge amount of work goes into preparing birds for the show bench. John prepares his birds for a show from the Saturday before. The stock cages in which the birds are housed are cleaned on the Saturday and Wednesday prior to the show, and birds are given their last spray before a show on the Wednesday to allow oils back into their feathers and to ensure they look their best on the day.

John cleans the show cages and puts in two round egg drawers of seed so that the birds have plenty to eat, especially if it's a two-day show. He then attaches the cage labels before putting the birds into their show cages early in the evening. This is not a job that John likes to rush because it is so easy to put exhibits into the wrong cage. The birds are given plenty of time in the show cages before they are boxed, and before closing the box John makes sure his drinkers are clean and in place. There are always substitute birds on standby in case a bird is dirty or has dropped a feather.

John visits as many shows as possible and believes the show bench is the best place to assess your birds and see for yourself why birds got the placing's that they did. When the show is over and John returns home, he leaves the birds in their show-cage box with the lid slightly open until Monday morning so that he doesn't disturb the other birds in the bird room. Then he returns them to the bird room and gives them a light spray, fresh seed and water and some greens. He cleans the show cages almost immediately in preparation for the next week's show.

Family help

JOHN says all this could not be done without the help of his wife, Vera. Vera and their son, Mark, give the birds a midday feed during the breeding season. They also look after the birds when John is away on judging engagements. Since starting with the Irish Fancy canary almost 20 years ago there have been a lot of changes in the breed. Size has been reduced and feather quality is up. Also, the number of people keeping Irish fancies has trebled since then, such is their popularity. Open shows are attracting up to 350 exhibits and the society show benched over 700 birds at last year's show in Arklow. At this stage of the show season his training has paid off. He has won awards at all shows.



Above: John attending to his birds. Left: Outside view of John's new birdroom. Far left: Clear Irish fancy cock that did well at a National Exhibition.

Show schedule

WHEN the show schedule arrives, it is important to study the classes for your section very carefully. Mark off the classes of birds that will be exhibited at that show. Make sure you differentiate between flighted and unflighted birds and do not class birds wrongly. A list of entries is recorded along with ring numbers for future reference. Entries must be sent off to the show secretary as soon as possible.

Cork Show Bird Society 2003

Class	No.	Ring No.	Description	Placing	Award
321	2	1234	Clear or ticked yellow cock		
323	6	1256	Clear or ticked buff cock		