

Time for some training

PART ONE

TOM O'REGAN gets down to the serious business of show-training his Irish fancy canaries, beginning with acclimatisation

CANARIES

I've often been asked when and how do I train my canaries for the show cage and how do I prepare them for shows. Preparation for showing canaries should start as soon as the chicks leave the nest.

The reason for this is that the hen will be ready to go down again and will use her chicks as nest material, plucking their feathers, especially the tail and flight feathers. Give the hen plenty of nest material to avoid this.

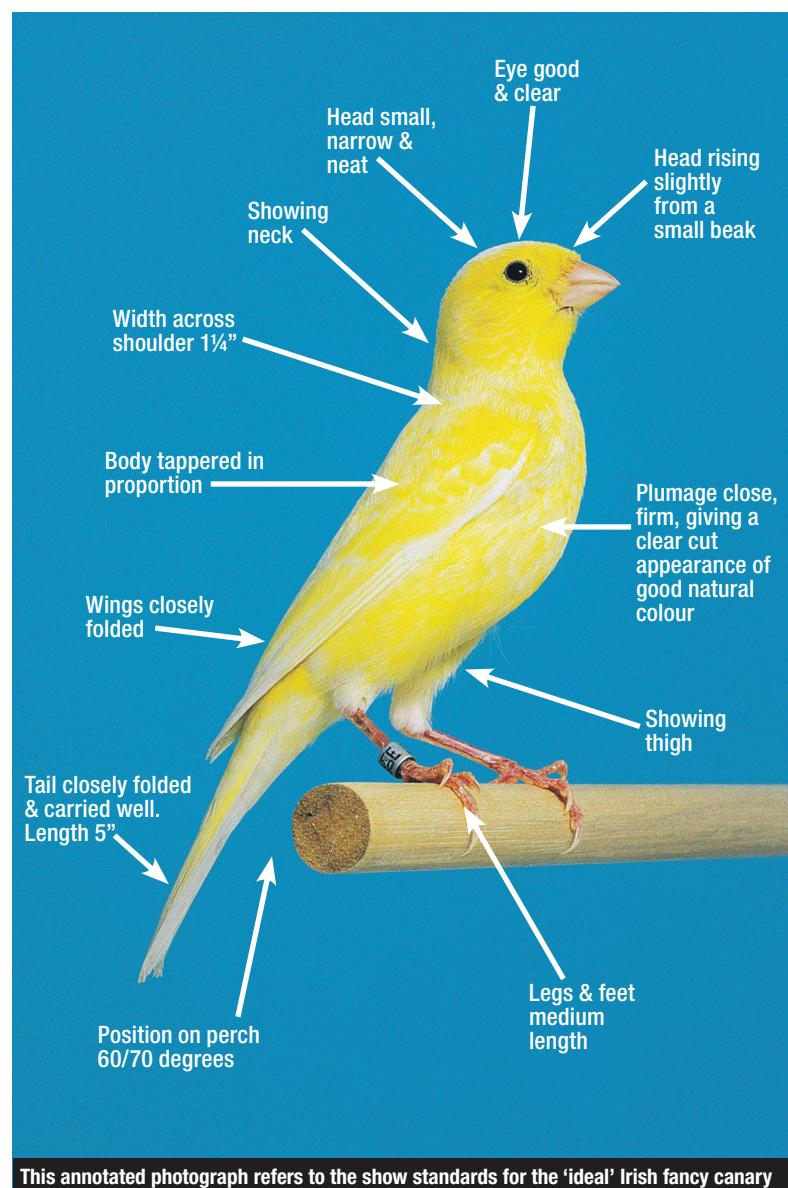
Once chicks are weaned and separated from their parents, I check their ring numbers. The rings are normally dirty and need to be cleaned, so I tend to clean the claws at the same time. Be careful not to remove any toenails as they are still very delicate. Soften any dirt before removal as birds with missing toenails cannot be shown.

On separation from their parents, I put eight birds to a run of four cages and give them eggfood twice daily. As soon as young birds are settled in their cages, I place a show cage and a wire cage on the front of one cage, and put sawdust

on the show-cage floor. The wire cage is placed there so that birds can get used to them in time for being sprayed. When I put them into their individual cages, I spray them on Saturday and Sunday as some birds won't go near a bath.

I put pieces of broccoli into the show cage to entice young birds in. Eventually one will go in for it and the others will follow. Once I know they are confident going into the show cage, I put a show-cage drinker, filled with conditioning seed, on to the cage to get them used to the drinker. I also give the birds a daily bath at this stage. There is no need to start putting birds into show cages as there will be plenty of time to train them before show season; you don't want your birds too steady on the show bench where they won't work the perches while been judged.

My birds are kept like this until the end of August when the birds are almost moulted out. At this point, all young birds are put into individual cages and assessed. Any young birds that are not up to standard are set aside. All young birds will have a show cage attached to their individual cages for 12 hours a day.



This annotated photograph refers to the show standards for the 'ideal' Irish fancy canary



K. McCallam judging Irish fancy. 'You need to train your birds how to sit on the perches in show cages without being too flighty OR too steady,' says Tom

During this time, I add water to the drinker and put a small piece of broccoli in it to entice the bird to use the drinker. The broccoli sinks when the bird tries to reach it and the bird will feel the water. I fill drinkers only halfway so as to deter young birds from bathing in them. If birds get a full drinker on initial training, they will bathe themselves and will continue to do so no matter how much water is put in the drinker in future. Just enough water for the bird to reach is plenty, as there is nothing worse than seeing water from the bird on a show cage label while being judged.

This process lasts for two weeks, after which, birds are put into show cages with a training stick. Any bird that refuses to go into a show cage with a training stick is put into a wire cage with a training stick. The bird is then transferred into a show cage, which is moved gently so as not to startle it.

Try not to handle your birds on their first movement to your training bench. They will get used to the stick and in time will jump into their show cage as soon as the stick is put near them. At this stage, half an hour on your training bench is sufficient.

Do the same for a few days with all your young birds. The more confident they are in the show cage, the longer you can leave them in there. While they are in their show cage, put your hand in front of the cage to get your birds to work the perches. Some birds will flutter about at first but, given time, they will get used to you putting your hand up to them in the cage.

Once you feel your birds are steady enough, treat them as if they are at a show. Walk them from one end of the shed to the other in their show cages, getting them used to movement for a show hall. Place them on your training

bench and move your cages along the bench by lifting and sliding them and changing their positions, thus getting birds used to the movements a judge might make.

Should you intend to show flighted birds, it would do no harm to give them a run or two in their show cages. After

returning birds from the show cage to their cage, keep a look out for any bird that goes straight to the drinker for water. These birds will need more training with the broccoli in

the drinker. You could also ask a family member to give your birds water or ask them to move your birds to your training bench. This will help your birds become accustomed to stewards handling them, as you might not be able to check your birds in yourself at every show.

Tom O'Regan has bred and exhibited Irish fancy canaries for the past 22 years.

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Mini water-cannon

SOME birds may be harder to train and will take more time to settle in the show cage. Just be patient with them and eventually they will come good for you. You will always get awkward ones that will insist on hanging off the cage wire. Or jump from one perch to the wire front and back to the other perch, meaning they cannot be judged.

My solution is to put the offenders into separate show cages early in the morning, wait until they jump on to the wire and then give them a good jet-spray of cold water. Leave them to dry and return them to their cages, then do the same the next day. By day three this problem should be resolved, as they won't want a third day of a cold spray.

Part 2 will appear in the September 19 issue, where Tom O'Regan will discuss show schedules and the importance of pre-show prep for his Irish fancy canaries



Tom O'Regan has been a panel judge for the past 14 years. He is pictured here with Enda Maloney (left) and Paul Brogan (right) having judged at the Irish Fancy Club of Ulster