

The Foundation of Conditioning Show Birds

By: Rip Stalvey

Whether it's a building structure or a football program I think we can all agree they won't last long without a strong, solid foundation. Have you ever given any thought to what the foundation of conditioning show birds might be? The best conditioning programs are built on a foundation of good husbandry practices and it makes all the difference in the world.

If you go to poultry shows you've probably seen exhibitors who regularly have well conditioned birds on champion row. You may have even wondered what's their secret. Well, it's really no secret but rather those exhibitors have learned that sound husbandry practices can give them a bit of an edge in the showroom. Long before the coop training, washing and primping begins, good exhibitors have been practicing good husbandry to get their birds in top shape for the showroom.

Conditioning begins before the chicks are even hatched. It begins with the breeders that produce the eggs. To hatch strong healthy chicks you have to have strong healthy breeders. This means healthy breeders that are free of internal and external parasites and are fed a well balanced diet. Breeders must have plenty of room and access to fresh water at all times.

Good incubation husbandry is important too. You can't produce strong chicks in a dirty incubator. Regular cleaning and sanitizing of your incubator helps get chicks off to a good start.

Brooding is another critical step to well conditioned show birds. Brooders must be kept clean at all times. The importance of feeding a well balanced, high quality feed and constant access to fresh water goes with saying. Overcrowded brooders never give good results so making sure the chicks have plenty of room is critical; it can also help prevent feather picking.

Rearing high quality young birds requires sound husbandry practices as well. Providing young birds with plenty of room to grow in quarters that are clean and dry is critical. Regular checks for parasites and diseases will give you strong vigorous birds. The removal of young birds that show disqualifications or serious flaws provides more room for the rest of the birds. As does ruthless culling of inferior birds that won't move a breeder's program forward.

Once birds have matured it's then time to select the very best for coop training and conditioning before the show season. Exhibitors that regularly win at shows know the importance of handling their birds so they become accustomed to the process. They also know it greatly ups their chances to teach their birds to pose in their cage so the bird shows well.

If you want to up your show wins, consider upping your husbandry practices. It will make a difference.

Authors Note:

Here are links to two videos on good husbandry practices that I highly recommend you watch. They were done by my friend Mike Omeg, a breeder of high quality New Hampshire large fowl. They are the best videos of their kind that I've seen. It will take a little over an hour to watch both of them but they will help you learn how to up your husbandry practices.

Incubation, Hatching and Brooding

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbLRMkhkRD0&t=403s>

Growing Out

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rft_xTQaBBw&t=2192s