

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN:

### WASHING PEKINS

The final preparation for a show begins about 3 days before the show. The birds feathers should be fully mature, that is they are past the pinfeather stage and fully open. An occasional pinfeather is acceptable but your rival maybe the fully feathered bird. But then this may only be a warm up for an important show later. Immature feathers can also be damaged and cause the bird pain and bleed during the washing and drying process. Birds that have live external parasites or unwell may and should be disqualified and evicted from the show because of the risk of contaminating other birds.



Three reasons why these 2 cockerels are unsuitable for washing or showing:

1. They are too young,
2. They are full of pin feathers noticeable on the far birds' shoulder and
3. The front bird has a communicable disease, which is a fowl pox scab on his face.

Washing a bird 2 or 3 days before a show gives it time to preen the feathers back into position and ensures they are perfectly dry. The washing process needs organization and plenty of uninterrupted time. It is best to start in the morning and have the job completed by the afternoon. The more birds one has to prepare the longer and the more complicated it gets ensuring birds don't get chilled and fights and accidents don't happen.



Before..... checking things out.



During.....sad and sorry.



After.... confident again.

*Stage 1:-* Preparation before washing is very important so that every thing is at hand , nothing is forgotten or one is wandering around looking for something. Plenty of old towels, at least 2 per bird. Shampoo, woolwash or some other soft soap that is a little diluted to make it spread better. Often the type of soap you use must be compatible with your water type (eg. Hardness and softness), what works well doesn't in another water type just over the hill from the last place. An old soft tooth brush or nail brush, toothpicks, fine sand paper, toenail clippers, scissors, cotton buds for cleaning around the face, a good quality hairdryer [as cheap ones are unreliable and burn out easily], a blow heater, lots of towels, a work bench about waist high [top of washing machine is good], diluted Ricketts blue for white birds, heaters and a combustion fire in the main house helps reduce humidity which can make a bird hot but slow to dry. A warm made up solution of lice dip made at no more than the required strength; a warm room/s free of drafts to wash and dry the birds; bathrooms and laundries are good places. Other methods or tools may suit an individual better; trial and error is a great teacher.



Make sure every thing is prepared before washing.



These are some ideas of what you will need for drying



Different bathrooms and laundries will need different methods and adaptations.

A sink, bath or bucket is the ideal receptacles for warm water. Always ensure the water is the right temperature before applying it or dipping the bird. This temperature should be no hotter than that in a human babies bath and not allowed so cool that the bird becomes chilled. The procedure should be as short as possible to prevent chilling and reduce stress. The bird should not be that dirty if prior preparation is careful, as many stains are impossible to remove. Some times some colours look yellowish when wet but disappear after the feathers are dry. Bleach and some other cleaners can cause feathers to yellow and strong cleaners can cause blistering or irritation of skin and the feathers loose their softness. Dry clean towels should be close at hand to quickly wrap the bird in and also to wipe ones own face

*Stage 2:* - The aim of washing a bird is to remove the natural oils from the feathers so that they fluff out as much as possible. Dust and stains are also removed giving the feather its maximum sheen. Most stains are on footings and around the vent. If the vent is soiled with faecal material it must be softened and removed before the main wash, do not cut it off as one will loose the shape of the bird and it would be regarded as tampering and may cause disqualification and definitely loose points. While resting the bird on a non-slip surface [eg old towel] scrub the footings with lots of soap and water, the action of the brush must go in the direction of the feather in all cases. Don't forget the toenails. The flight feathers of the wings may need the same treatment as the footing, especially in roosters where they are inclined to drag their feathers when they dance. Rinse off well before placing the bird in the clean bath water as if excessively stained, the dirty water will make the rest of the feathers of light coloured birds dirtier than when you started.



Areas like the vent and footings should be cleaned first as this prevents spreading dirt in lighter coloured birds.



Gently rub feathers to help remove dirt. Even black birds get dirty and washing improves the sheen.

On the first wash the bird will float and will be difficult to wet, wetting is easier with the diluted shampoo. Be sure to hold the bird firmly so that it does not panic and flap its wings. Once the bird is totally wet it usually ceases to struggle, watch out when they do struggle as injuries to the bird or its feathers can occur, some times a rooster will droop his head, just watch out it doesn't go under the water. Ensure all parts are wet as areas like under the wings and the breast can be missed. Avoid contact with its and your eyes and if some shampoo does enter eyes rinse out with plenty of cool water without drowning the bird, baby shampoo is often the best if worried about eyes. Rinse the bird and apply with full strength shampoo, the feathers should froth up on this second application. Do not bend feathers or force them into directions other than they were intended. Rinse the bird well as any soap left will prevent feather fluffing out to their maximum potential and causing skin irritation, running water is best but ensure the temperature is right and remains constant, to ensure this always have the water running over ones own exposed hand. It is not a good idea to use gloves because it will be too late to feel any temperature change by the time you feel it, if there is any.



The second soap up will bring up the bubbles. The first removes the natural oils produced by the birds.



Scrub the flight feathers in one direction away from the feathers.

After the final rinse is the time to dip the bird into the dilute, warm ricketts blue, for white birds only. Be careful you don't over do it otherwise it will have a blue tint and it is impossible to wash out. Do not apply to other coloured birds as it can ruin their sheen. This is also the time to dip the bird in the prepared solution of insecticide, do not rinse it out as it not only kills any lice the bird has but helps prevent picking up any other external parasites in the birds travels.



With practise it becomes easy to wash more than one bird.



Two birds can be a handful so I do not recommend shampooing more than that.

While inexperienced, only do one bird at a time. Once the bird is wrapped gently and firmly, but not tight as with all the weight of water breathing can be difficult in a towel, and put in a warm place then one can start the next. About 2 or 3 can be done like this, depending on how long you are taking. Never ever take your eyes off the bird you are washing and avoid distractions like the phone, cooking and young children. If one does have to leave the bird being washed ensure it is not in the water, cannot fall off the bench or get chilled, you may have to take the bird with you wrapped in a towel. The birds that are wrapped up will usually stay put.



Birds should be wrapped loosely in towels after washing; this helps soak up excess water. Also do this if you need to leave a bird you are washing.

*Stage 3:* - Drying a Pekin is the slowest process of all. The first towel will be quite sodden, open this out and use it for the bird to stand on. Any droppings should be covered or cleaned up to prevent soiling of feathers. The second towel is used to dry the feathers more by pressing it against the bird to soak up extra moisture. At this stage the feathers are stuck together and they won't begin to fluff out until they start to dry. One can feel disheartened, as this bedraggled lump of feathers looks a far cry from the trusting fluffy bird one is used too. Some colours look yellowish when they shouldn't, the colours look dull and the bird looks miserable. Be patient, gentle and don't rush.



This white cockerels feathers are starting to dry making it easier for blow drying.



Wet feathers need to be gently teased out to help the blow dryer work best.

Blow-drying starts slowly. Care must be taken not to burn the bird. This is easily done with the blow dryer or the heater. Birds will often not move from a heat source even when physical damage is occurring. Watch out for singed feathers from birds too close too or touching heaters. Ensure birds do not jump onto heaters. Start blow-drying without moving or parting the feathers. Always have your hand in front of the blast of hot air so that you are aware of the output of heat. The temperature setting must be warm so that the bird does not chill but this doesn't mean that the temperature will not burn. Adjust the distance of the dryer from the bird to adjust the temperature and constantly move the dryer so that it isn't directed at one spot. Once the feathers begin to dry they start to lift and then gently stoke or manipulate them to get more movement, the dryer they get the more they start to lift. Blow-drying is best done in the opposite direction to the feathers.



Blow the air in the opposite direction to the feathers and ensure the bird is not getting burnt.



It easy to work on birds when they are in a row like this.

Blow-drying cannot be hurried. One can move from bird to bird and back again but never leave the hot air blowing on the bird in close proximity and always check the heat or cold. It is no more difficult to wash 4 birds or one at this stage; in fact it is more interesting. During this time one can attend to manicuring beaks and toes and closer attention to face.

The toothpicks are handy for removing any dirt from toenails; this should have been softened from the bathing. If the birds start panting it means the humidity is high and the drying is not as efficient as it could be. Ventilation like a door ajar or the bathroom ventilator can be turned on and off but ensure the birds are not getting chilled by cold drafts. Treats can be offered like whole grain, small parrot mix, bread and cheese. Laying hens will be especially hungry. Once birds start to take an interest in their surrounding supervision should be increased, as hens will start fighting hens and roosters fighting roosters. Separating them to different parts of the room help and by placing a hen between each rooster. Water should also be offered and ensure it is not knocked over. A constant check for droppings helps as otherwise they can mess up footings and lower feathers if birds are walking through them. Don't forget your own needs and it is great if someone can supply sandwiches and drinks

Beaks and toenails may be given a light sanding to shape them. Toe nail clippers maybe needed to reduce excess length then finished with sand paper, ensuring they are not shortened too much – this may cause bleeding and in the case of the beak loss of aesthetics. A little sanding may help the upper and lower beak sit in place better. Spurs on roosters also need attention, do not do any major shortening at this stage but it is good to round them off and polish them up with the sandpaper. Wattles may look a little flakey and dull but these will be attended to on the morning of the show as it involves a light rubbing of oil and if done at this stage will get onto feathers reducing the fluffiness.



The scaliness on the comb can be removed by carefully softening the dead skin with soapy water or a skin moisturizer.



This cockerel is enjoying having his face cleaned with a cotton bud.

The scissors are to be used to trim the roosters' eyebrows. I am told that this enhances their facial features. Basically it is the only modification one can do to a bird. Trim the feathers above the eye and against the comb so it is just stubble. If you are unsure of what to do, don't do it until at the show and observe the other birds or don't do it at all. White and blue birds can have the occasional black feather pulled out however it cannot be done if it is a flight feather. Feet feathers will bleed. If a black has white in under feathers try to hide them by arranging the upper black feathers to cover them but this is best done when you are penning them on show day.



Take extreme care while trimming eyebrows.



The results are worth the effort.



Birds may not be totally dry until the next day, so it is important to dry them as much as possible before returning them to cages containing clean litter and fresh food and water. These cages may need to be covered with blankets to restrict drafts. If you are fortunate enough to have a sunny day the birds can be allowed to finish off in the sun. Shows can be in the winter and one can usually bet on washing day it will be cold and miserable. Spot cleaning maybe needed especially around the vent area and footings. To prevent moist droppings it is best to include plenty of grains in the diet and avoid high protein foods such as meat and lay mash and avoid fresh greens especially if they have not had them on a very regular basis prior to washing.

*Stage 4:-* show day is the culmination of all ones efforts. The box that you take your birds to the show in can be as simple as a cardboard box or a cat carry cage or an elaborate home made box. There should be plenty of shavings on the floor and it should be big enough to take one bird comfortably. Ensure that there are plenty of air holes and if it is not in the main car area with you, ensure that ventilation is good, it is secure in place, lids are closed properly and they are not exposed to inclement weather, fumes or heat. And the same care should be taken for the trip home, even if you didn't win. Unless you know your birds very well do not put more than one in a box as what comes out of it may not be the same as went in.



Wood shavings on the floor of the carry cage help keep droppings from messing up clean feathers.

It will be necessary to ask the steward which pen/s your birds will be in. Bring with you a little box with a little bottle of oil tightly shut, an old clean silk cloth, some bread and other food your birds are fond of, a little bit of sand paper, a wash cloth a little soap, cotton buds and if you have a hen that is

laying ensure some shell grit. I also like to bring a photocopy of my original entry. These things vary from individual to individual. Some things are for an emergency clean up but time for drying maybe limited so do your best to avoid such a situation. The tiniest little bit of oil, (take care, some oils burn, eg. Olive oil will cause skin to peel a few days after show – not good if other shows coming up) can be rubbed into the red area of the face and the beak to brighten them up, especially if the skin is a little dry. Wipe the bird with a silk cloth from head to tail as this helps give the feathers a glossy sheen and sets them in shape. Give the birds a treat but keep them expectant enough to show interest in the judge. Always provide water but ensure it is not spilt and wash the container first to ensure there are no unknowns residing in it. Wood shavings are usually supplied, if birds are not familiar with them they will either try eating them or be reluctant to enter the cage and be uneasy with them, so prior experience with them is important. Do not put any thing in the pen that may identify the bird as yours. Everything should be supplied except food ( this is supplied in shows that are more than one day). Ensure you record the number of your pen to prevent any confusion later. Leg bands are sometimes allowed.

This is an entry form used by a particular club to give back to the exhibitor with the pen numbers of each bird. These have been written on the far left hand side and vary from club to club.

Ensure you understand the system otherwise there will be problems with other exhibitors and more than one bird in a pen.

Watch others and ask for advice. For every exhibitor there is a different technique for their show preparation. Be prepared to modify and change your technique. Observe the prize getters and their owners carefully. Compare Pekin bantams to Pekin bantams and remember there are not only different requirements for different breeds but also in different colours. Don't accept anything said as gospel truth. Try new techniques with care and either on one bird or long before the show on a bird that is not a show hope, as mistakes are often difficult to undo. Some birds or lines show better at different ages and this also depends on colour as well as maturity. To quote W. F. Entwisle, page 38 in his classic book "Bantams", "Many splendid two-year-old birds were but narrow as cockerels, and short of cushion".

Birds become more used to showing the more they get but they do get tired and will not be at their best if shown too much. Good diets and adequate water are very important to maintain the vigour of the birds during the show season, even at the risk of the bird getting a little fat. Birds are old hands by the next years show season. One can help by not making the experience stressful. Always treat your birds with the same care and respect after the show as before it, there is no excuse not to. Never expect birds to get on together once they return from shows, especially roosters. Many an owner has dumped their birds back into the main flock and come back to find a bloody mess. Don't expect top fertility at first from birds returning from a busy show season. It is a good idea to quarantine birds for a week or two well away from your other birds, especially if they were at a show longer than a day. It is not uncommon for them to bring home some kind of flu being in contact with so many birds from so many different places. If this is a worry, don't show them or sell them at the show thus they don't come home, even if they win.



This bird is about to go through her final preparation the night before the show. She was washed 3 days before so that her feathers will be in place by show day. None of these processes should be rushed, as you need to be relaxed just as much as the bird and it will sense your confidence and patience.