

CAGE · BIRDS · AND · PETS.

PET MICE.

They Can Easily Be Taught to Do Many Tricks.

The fancy mouse is both elegant and graceful and fully repays any pains bestowed on it, as the smell is nearly if not entirely destroyed by keeping their cages properly clean. Mice are easily taught various tricks. They are gentle and somewhat timid, but with encouragement their timidity soon wears off, and they will then allow themselves to be handled. Unlike many domestic pets, they are easily kept, take up little room and do not require expensive food. The colors of fancy mice may be classed as self, or entire colored, and variegated or mixed colors.

The white mouse is perhaps the most common, and it is certainly a pretty animal when viewed without prejudice. As a rule the white mice have pink feet and eyes, and the ears at times appear pale pink through the light passing through them to a certain extent. Whether from a more delicate constitution and tractable disposition, or from some innate cause or inherent nature, they are the easiest of all fancy mice to tame and teach tricks. They also, as a rule, form the basis from which all the variegated forms are raised, and are consequently much in demand. Occasionally impure breeds or strains are raised, in which there are black ears, eyes and feet, and these look well as a change with the others, but it is needless to state that they should not be raised as a fixed variety, which they are not. For cross-breeding, too, they are not so good as the pure white on account of black being, as a rule, largely introduced into the young ones obtained.

After the white come the black, some of which are black, and others shade off to a sooty brown color. All dark mice are lighter underneath, and therefore the darker they are the more will this be observed. The best to be purchased for breeding purposes are the darkest, as it is a comparatively easy matter to reduce the color, but it is an infinitude of trouble to raise them up to full black. The blacks are not of so delicate constitution as the whites, and they are more wild and savage, and although they can easily be taught tricks, etc., they do not learn so readily as the fawn-colored ones or the white.

The fawn colored mouse is perhaps the most variable as regards color, which runs from reddish grey to bright golden fawn (not yellow). Some care has to be taken in the selection of the original stock, for although in the different crosses the various shades are useful, still it is far preferable to have the best colors to start with. The fawn mice are very much lighter underneath than on the back, are far larger than the white and black varieties, and have longer tails. These are as easy to keep as the white, and as easy to train, and, besides, they are very handsome in appearance—a point not to be despised. There is one kind of fawn mouse we have not mentioned, and that is bright fawn shading off to white, and white or grey shading off to fawn, i. e., the ground color of the coat is white, and the hairs are tipped with fawn or the coat is mixed. This variety looks very well, but it is difficult to breed. It is produced by crossing the two colors together, but not too often.

The various parti-colored or variegated mice are many, but we will only notice the chief, as other combinations may be obtained by judicious crossing on the part of the breeder, the same as with dogs or cats, as, to a great extent, like begets like. Black and white, fawn and white, plum and white, brown and white, tortoiseshell; plum, white and fawn; black, white and fawn; black and fawn, grey and fawn, silver grey, brown and white, and grey and white are some of the principal combinations which result, though some of these are only obtained with much trouble. Even then much depends on chances, many of the colors coming through reversion to previous crosses.—An Old Fancier.

The Belgian Canary.

The peculiarities of the Belgian canary are not presented to the eye until, in a state of nervous excitement, he braces himself together and shows what the little frame is capable of doing in the way of "position," much in the same way as the pouter among pigeons shows himself in his pride. On entering a room in which a number of Belgians may be caged singly or in numbers in flight-cages we are not at first struck with the peculiar merit of any one specimen. The very best of them, which when put in position may exhibit the most remarkable conformation, is seen hopping in a slovenly manner from one perch to another, or sitting apparently in meditation. His legs are certainly too long and set too far back. He cannot, when on the bottom of the cage, keep his tail off the ground, and when pecking at a grain of seed stiffens his legs into two splinters, straightens his tail into the same line with the body, like those artistic conceptions on children's toys, and looks eminently uncomfortable. And this is one of those most extraordinary Belgians of which one has heard so much? No wonder his beauties have no charm for the *profanum vulgus*, and well may it require an educated eye to discover them.

Wait awhile. He hops on a low perch, and from that to a higher, drops his tail, which was never intended to be dragged about on the ground, pulls himself together, stretches an inch or two, and is already not the swan out of water he was a moment ago. You pass him into an open show cage, and possibly one or two others hop in at the same time. But we must get them on even terms, for one is standing turned in an opposite direction to the rest. Don't hurry or frighten them in any way. Possibly they may look a little alarmed and not be very steady, or may even heave a little with the excitement, but a few minutes will set them to rights. Our well-bred Belgian is not a bird to be jostled about roughly; he is accustomed to polite society and is not unseemingly boisterous. Hang the cage a little higher, on that nail just above the level of the eye in the far corner of the room, where the attention of the birds will not be distracted by the bustle and twittering in the other cages. Don't lift the cage by the top, or the bird will perhaps cower and become more frightened at the novelty of the situation. Take it by the bottom and keep the hand out of sight. Surely these cannot be the same birds we saw in the flight? They are already standing in an erect attitude with their legs straightened, their wings tucked up closely, tails so nearly in the same line with the back that a plumb line would not show much deflection.—Canaries and Cage Birds.

Superstitions About Birds.

In France the handsome white owl, with its plumage, is accepted everywhere as a forerunner of death. As if that were not enough to draw upon it the animadversion of all, this bird is often accused of sacrilege, for in Providence and Languedoc it is charged with drinking the oil of the church lamps. In the south of Germany the crow bespeaks good luck, but in France anything but that if seen in the morning.

Among the negroes of the southern states the moaning dove moans to save a man's soul. To kill one of these doves is a sign of death, but more frequently the death of a child. A buzzard or a crow upon the housetop is believed by the same people to be an invariable sign of death or disaster; a visit at the door from a rooster, the approaching visit of a friend; the notes of the screeching owl, or "shivering owl, are a bad omen of many interpretations, while, if the common owl hoots on your right good luck will follow, but bad luck, should he take up his position on your left side and hoot therefrom. The reputation of all night birds, great or small, is no better; but southern imagination has discovered a remedy for all their spells. It consists of throwing a pinch of salt into the fire as soon as the sound is heard.

A TALKING RAVEN.

Dr. W. T. Greene in Poultry.

Most people remember the story of the Roman cobbler who trained one of these birds to flap its wings and repeat the words "Ave, Cæsar, Imperator!" (Hail, Cæsar, Emperor) when that victorious general was returning in triumph from one of his contests with his rival Pompey, and, struck with the novelty of the occurrence, the victor stopped the procession to buy the well-taught bird for a very large sum of money, but many probably have looked upon the narrative as fictitious, or at least exaggerated, but experience has taught me that it can well be true.

A friend of mine had possessed one of these birds for some time without, I believe, fully recognizing its merits, and, being for some reason desirous of parting with it, offered it to me. Never having owned a raven previously, I accepted the offer with thanks and went myself to fetch it home. Grip was quite tame and let himself be shut up in a box with a very moderate amount of resistance, but in the train he astonished our fellow passengers by a series of double knocks on the side of his prison. The people looked about, up and down, but never suspected the unexpected sound to proceed from the deal box I had placed above my head in the hat rack, but concluded at last that the noise was due to some person in the next compartment, and I of course kept my own counsel.

Well, when we reached home I opened the box in the wash house and Grip hopped out with a kind of frightened croak and flew on to the copper, which was cold, and there he sat looking sulky or perhaps astonished. I gave him a dead bird to eat, but he was not hungry or was too much upset to have any appetite, and after tossing it about in his bill a few times, let it fall to the ground and composed himself to sleep.

Next morning, however, there were only the feathers to be seen, the raven had plucked and eaten the dead bird. I gave him a breakfast of sop, of which he partook freely and when I opened the door he hopped out into the garden (one of his wings was clipped), and took up his quarters on a rockery under the shade of a small golden-leaved elder. It was my intention to let him have the run of the place, but as he began by plucking the elder bush to pieces, and cut or tore up every vestige of vegetation he could reach, I soon found that that would not do, and put my gentleman into an old summer-house, to which a moderate sized covered run was attached, and there he has remained ever since, rarely going into the run, and absolutely refusing to "step into the garden."

For some weeks after I got him, "Grip" made no sign, but sat very quietly in his summer-house, rarely giving utterance to his natural inharmonious croak; but one day I heard someone coughing badly either in my own or my neighbor's garden; it was really a shocking bad cough, and made me feel quite sorry for the sufferer. I looked about, but could not see anyone, and, calling a member of the family, we both looked and listened, and at last concluded that the lugubrious sounds must proceed from the raven, so we went down to see. Yes, there was master "Grip" sitting on his perch with outspread wings, tuning up the whites of his eyes, as if he were at the point of death, and coughing as if exhausted nature was about to give in! It was all imitation, however, for as soon as he saw us he ceased making the sepulchral sounds that had attracted my attention, spruced himself up, and exclaimed "Hullo!" in a particularly hearty manner, as much as to say, "What's the matter, good people? What on earth are you staring at?"

Then I remembered that some time previously my friend had suffered from a bad cold and his cough somewhat exaggerated) it was that the raven was imitating. "Hullo!" was the first articulate sound I heard the bird repeating, but he made rapid progress with his education, and very soon began to call the servants and the children by name. "Come along

Ann," or "Hurry up Joe," "What's the matter Charley?" and other phrases too numerous to mention. He also learned to imitate the hens. He quacked like a duck, and rendered the note of his neighbors, the jackdaws, to the life. The only thing that baffled him was the crow of Chanticleer, but he called "puss" as naturally as possible, barked like a dog, and even mocked the pigeons in the adjoining dovecot, though I must say in a slightly exaggerated key.

I have never heard a parrot speak more plainly, and when he coughs or laughs I am certain that no stranger would ever take the sounds to proceed from a bird, they are so remarkably life-like. He is easily satisfied, too, as regards feeding, but prefers his meat raw. I give him a good many dead birds, which he stands on and plucks daintily feather by feather before eating them, unless he happens to be hungry, in which case he merely pulls out the wing and tail quills and bolts the remainder, casting up afterwards the indigestible parts in the shape of pellets, after the fashion of other birds of prey.

Grip is very playful and is a great favorite with the boys. He runs about and dances with a piece of stick in his mouth and executes the most absurd gambols, walking along very gravely with his head on one side for a few steps and then giving a most comical sidelong hop. If he did not pluck his breast feathers he would be a gem, but he does, has done so long before I had him and I suppose will continue to do so to the end of the chapter, quite regardless of his personal appearance which this unfortunate habit considerably mars. Why does he do it? It is difficult to say. I thought he had given it up, for when he moulted some time ago his breast was quite clothed, and I was flattering myself that he had turned over a new leaf when lo and behold one morning I found every feather gone, plucked out and eaten no doubt, for I could not see one anywhere.

My friend thought perhaps that Grip was a lady and that the desire to nest had led to the self-mutilation, but I don't think so, though I must say that she or he is fond of picking up sticks and stones and laying them in a heap in different places, but as they are constantly removed from one corner to another, I fancy it is only done in play, and that like pet parrots and other birds, the feather plucking had its origin in sheer ennui. Whatever the cause, it is a pity, for it spoils the appearance of one of the cleverest birds I have ever come across. Every day almost we find the raven has picked up something fresh, and often for an hour at a time and while digesting a good meal he will go over his repertoire in the most amusing fashion.

I have heard that these birds will sometimes breed in confinement, and were I sure of Grip's sex I should get a companion, when the instinct of race preservation might lead to the abandonment of the bad habit of self mutilation, as I have known it to do in the case of a parrot I had some years ago.

Feeding Parrots.

Birds of all kinds in a state of confinement are more liable to disorders than those living in their natural state, owing to want of exercise and inability to procure for themselves those remedies infinite wisdom has provided for them, and which their natural instinct has taught them to seek and obtain. Many of these diseases may, however, be prevented by cleanliness and change of proper food, and a due regard to a warm temperature. A few peppers cut into pieces and given now and then, say about once a month, will act as a preventive against some internal diseases. Avoid, by all means, giving meat, flesh or bones, however clean and bare, to parrots. It is the cause generally of their imbibing a degree of irritability which prompts them to be continually pecking at their feathers and sometimes causes them to pick holes in their skin, so as to injure their appearance very materially. Rub the body with a little cooling lotion made of a little common salt in spring water, once a day for a few days and give it bread and milk paste for two or three days.

—A saturated solution of boracic acid is an excellent cure for swelled heads and eyes. Apply with a soft sponge.