

So What's Up With Song Training?

By Darrell Horst

There are a lot of good articles in past newsletters about training your waterslagers. Why another training article? Well I am not going to attempt to write a detailed, in depth article. My purpose is to reach out to beginners and those of you that have thought about training your birds, but after reading an article have said "no way" or "this is too complex". In my opinion, the main reason for going through a training process is to bring out the full potential of the waterslager song. The prized "klok" note when sung slow and with a deep tone is one of the WOW moments of breeding this breed. Darkening helps the waterslager pay full attention to its song and practice the more difficult klok and bollende water notes.

So how can you do the training when you have a full time job, kids in sports, and no spare time? Here are some tips. Do your best to find a location in your house that can accommodate your males in single small cages. Show cages being the best option, but if you don't have any, use a small cage. You want the males to concentrate on their song, not fly or be distracted by other males. Last year, I took my wife's laundry supplies off their shelves and used that area. I removed some shelving and was able to stack three cages high by three cages wide in each section. After you've found a location, leave the room lighted for a few days so the birds can get used to their cages. Make sure the new area has slightly less light than they were before. Use timers if you are not home to turn lights on or off. Shut lights off at least a half hour before sundown so the birds can settle in without an abrupt black out. I use about 9 hours of light. Don't forget about multiple timers or night-lights to accomplish some of what you want. After about four days, I place a divider between the cages so the males cannot see each other. After another week, begin to decrease the light coming into their cages. Use your imagination on how to accomplish this. These next steps can be accomplished in many different ways. Use of timers, different wattage bulbs, cardboard, cardboard boxes, newspaper, cloth, etc. These items can be used to make the gradual decrease in light possible, even when the cages are in a fully lit room.

The idea is to slowly start to decrease the light so the male continues to sing, but starts to soften its song. If he stops singing, you may have decreased the light too quickly, just increase it again or move him to a lighter location. Remember not to decrease the hours of light, but the intensity. Hours of light should be 9 to 9.5. I accomplished decreased light by adding more layers of newspaper tacked to the front of the shelves. I place my males in show cabinets at some point where I can control the light more and begin to bring them out into full light for what is called staging. Staging is simply bringing them into a more lighted area where they can sing as a team. Cages are staged two high, two wide with a divider between them and a piece of wood or cardboard over the top two cages. Staging gets them used to handling and singing when brought out to a more lighted area. If possible, males should be staged in teams once or twice daily for 15 to 20 minutes. If are not home during the day, use times to turn the lights on for 20 minutes. So whether you have show cages and show cabinets, that is not the issue. You want to slowly keep decreasing the light so your birds will sing when just a sliver of light is available. If you are training to come to our show, then you may want to read more articles and especially our show procedures located on the WWC website. The show holding room is pitch black. If you are coming to the show, you must train to that level to get your males used to those conditions. They need to find food and water in total darkness. They only need this total darkness the last week before the show. They easily find food and water if the darkening is gradual.

When do you start this training process and how fast do I darken the cages? I would start no later than the end of November. Our judge Luc starts in mid October. So you can see, it varies. You want this darkening progress for about 6 - 8 weeks and the staging to overlap, but to begin in earnest about 6 weeks before the show. As you get more experience, your male's song will guide you. But that's a topic difficult to describe. The principle is that darkening the male develops the song. The dates above are a good guide.

So please give training a try this year. And as icing on the cake, come to the show.