

# NORTH OF ENGLAND RAT SOCIETY

Stewarding



2015

# Stewarding at NERS shows

Stewarding is an important part of the smooth running of the show. You also get to learn something new every time you do it, and you get to see the judge's thought process and be part of the exciting build up to the Best In Show.

## Setting up

The first step to being a good steward is preparation. Make sure you arrive in plenty of time before judging starts, including enough time to get your own rats sorted and benched first. You should aim to start setting up around 15 minutes before judging starts. Ask the show secretary for your stewarding sheet; this is a list of all the rats entered, sorted by class and then tank number, and you will need this throughout the day. There may sometimes be last minute changes (late entries and withdrawals) so you should check with the show sec if you find any inaccuracies or if you are missing a tank number on the bench that is listed on your sheet. Spend a few minutes familiarising yourself with the sheet and get an idea of the largest classes and sections, if there are lots of kittens, etc.

Use your stewarding sheet to start putting the tanks in number order, working from the left hand side of the judge.

- Tanks should not be stacked or carried more than 2 high.
- Make sure that all tanks have the label side facing towards the judge's table.
- Lids should be the right way around - they should open from the side with the tank label.
- Stack the first rat in the class on top of the next, in order to minimise the need to shuffle tanks during judging (so 6601 goes on top of 6602, 6603 on top of 6604, etc).
- Where space allows, try to start a new stack for every new class. This can be difficult if there are several classes with only one rat, in which case just make sure that the first rat you need is on top.
- As you go along and sort the tanks into order, make a tick against the line on your stewarding sheet so you know it has been accounted for.

- Where there are two rats sharing a tank (kittens only), the tank should be slotted into the order according to the lowest of the two numbers. Ensure you tick off both numbers on your sheet, and note down the each kitten's tank number by the other's number – this will help you later on and prevent you from “losing” a tank.
- If a tank isn't on the bench despite being listed on your sheet when judging is about to begin, ask the show secretary to check if the rat has been withdrawn or if the owner is late. Cross out any withdrawals on your sheet.

At this point, once all rats are accounted for in one way or another, you can let the judge know that everything is ready for judging to start. This includes letting the judge know if rats are unaccounted for or withdrawn and what classes they were in, if applicable. Most judges will choose to judge the rats in the order of the classes but on some occasions a judge may choose to work in a different order.

## Good to know

You are the link between the judge and the show sec - do your best to please both! This will include keeping the show sec furnished with challenge results as and when they get completed, and your judge topped up with brews! (Judges get free refreshments from the kitchen and as steward you are entitled to two hot drinks during the day.) You will likely also have to ferry messages and questions between them. The show secretary has a large amount of paperwork to complete and will very much appreciate a continuous drip feed of results rather than a big pile of paperwork arriving all at once at the end of the show.

Sometimes a judge may lose track of the time; if there are lots of entries and you notice that they are moving through the schedule very slowly, please gently remind them of the time. It is not fair to the rats if the judge ends up having to rush the challenges.

The judge may disqualify a rat with a health issue or one that bites them, or they may wish to remove the rat from the bench for any other reason. It is your job to take the tank to the show secretary and inform them of the reason. Even if you know the rat, or the rat is yours, you still need to take it to the show secretary for registration in order to preserve the anonymity of the rat and ensure the necessary paperwork is completed.

Whilst disqualifications are entirely the judge's responsibility, it can

sometimes be useful to have a second observer. Occasionally the judge may ask their steward to double check a health condition they have identified, for example whether you can see lice, hear respiratory noise, etc. You should only agree to this if you feel confident about it; if you are unsure about doing this, the judge will appreciate your honesty and ask someone else.

Your stewarding sheet will tell you which entries are adults and kittens. Most shows also have different coloured tank labels for adults and kittens, which makes life easier for you as a steward. Another method is to look at the first 2 digits of the tank number – even for kittens, odd for adults (e.g if the number starts with 10 it should be read as ten, 21 is twentyone, etc).

During challenges it can be worth keeping an eye out for the judge accidentally placing a rat higher than one it has previously beaten; whilst judges are well aware that they can't do this, it can be easy to lose track when focusing on similarly good rats. Although the show secretary should also be checking that this doesn't happen, it's useful to be able to help.

## Things to avoid

- Never identify a rat to the judge, whether or not it is yours or someone you know, until judging is finished (including completion of the star sheet and special awards, etc.).
- Don't judge the rat for the judge or try to influence the judging process - don't point out faults etc if unasked for, whether or not you know the rat in question. If you are on the training scheme, the judge may well ask your opinion but this is a very different thing. The only exception is if you notice a potential health issue that could impact the rat or the other rats in the show (such as lice, a noticeable limp, bleeding wound, etc) in which case you should bring it to the judge's attention.

## Things you might want to ask the judge

- If you are interested in learning about varieties judging you can ask the judge if they mind you asking some questions during the process. Most are fine with this, but please try to be reasonably selective with your questions and if time is tight you must not distract the judge.

- If they will be judging in standard class order or some other order
- Which order they want the tanks on the table (most judges would want the first one in the class in front of them, with subsequent numbers either to their right or left)
- If you can ask some questions during the judging
- If you can get them a brew!

## The judging process

When the judge is ready to start, confirm what their first class is (e.g. black adult, bucks under 6 months, etc) and how many rats are in the class. If there are more than 4 rats in the class, ask the judge how many they want on the table. Bring the tanks to the table, and make sure that all tank lids open the right way so that the judge has easy access to the rats.

Once a class is judged, make sure the scribe (or judge) has had time to write down the placings on the paperwork before you remove the rats. The judge will put stickers on the tanks for the class placings, or may ask you to do it: **red** for first place, **blue** for second, **yellow** for third and **green** for fourth.

1 – Red  
2 – Blue  
3 – Yellow  
4 – Green

Take the rats back to the bench. At this point you will need to separate the top 4 placings and stack them in order (1<sup>st</sup> on top of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> on top of 4<sup>th</sup>) so you are able to easily locate them for the challenges. A good way of doing this is by moving them forward and pushing the tanks of the unplaced rats in the class to the back of the table, to easily see which tanks you will need again.

When the judge has placed all the variety classes in a section, they will judge the section challenge next. This is where the process splits for varieties and pets.

## The varieties challenges

Each variety class (black adult, hooded kitten, AOV dumbo adult, etc.) sits within a section (Self, Marked, Dumbo, Guide Standard, etc).

Once all the classes in a section have been judged, the judge needs to do the adult and kitten challenges for that section. Ask the judge which one they would like to do first, letting them know if there are more adults or kittens in each section challenge (judges will often start with the smallest). If this is the kittens, you then need to bring back to the table all the kittens with a red or blue sticker who came first or second in their variety class. The judge will tell you if they also want to see a third or fourth placed rat from a class, so it is important that you know where your tanks are. For the section the judge will then select their top 4 kittens, and then move onto placing their 4 top adults using the same method. These tanks will need a second sticker on their labels, so each rat placing in the adult or kitten section challenges will have 2 stickers. Once this is completed, return the unplaced rats to the back of the table.

When doing the all ages (AA) section challenge, it is useful to stack the two first placed rats (labels with 2 red stickers), then stack the 2 second placed rats and so on, in front of the judge. Keep either all the adults or all the kittens at the bottom as this helps the judge. At this point the judge will choose to dismiss a rat or two; take these away and return them to the bench as they are unlikely to be needed again.

Once the judge has decided on the best of the two first placed rats, that's the section winner (e.g. best self) and the rat will be given a third red sticker. The judge then needs compare the 2<sup>nd</sup> placed rat in that age group with the 1<sup>st</sup> placed of the other age group, in order to pick the overall second place, and so on.

You now have the top four rats that have placed in the first section. Move all the other rats in that section to the back of the table, and place the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> placed at the front of the table (with the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> behind or next to them in case you do need to pull them later on). The order of the unplaced tanks doesn't matter, except if you have two kittens from different sections sharing a tank, in which case it is worth moving them into the later section.

Then it's onto the next variety class in the next section, until you are finally at the supreme challenge, which is done slightly differently to the section challenges. Instead of placing the age groups first and then the AA challenge, you go straight to the supreme (all ages) challenge.

First, bring all the section winners to the table (these are tanks with 3 red stickers on their labels). Make sure you have a winner for each of the 8 sections; Self, Marked, Shaded, Russian, AOV, Rex, Dumbo and

Guide Standard, unless there were no entries in a section (or not up to standard). Please note that the New Varieties section winner is not eligible for the supreme challenge.

Next, the judge will dismiss one or more rats, who should be removed from the table back to the bench. The judge will then select their Best In Show, at which point you should ask the judge if they want the second placed rat from the same section as the BIS; this is because the second placed rat in that section could be better than all the other section winners. The judging will then continue to place the Reserve Best In Show (again you need to offer the next placed rat in that section) until all 4 in the supreme challenge have been placed. In most cases these rats will get a fourth sticker on their label. If only one age group has placed in the supreme challenge, the judge will need to pick the best opposite age (e.g. a kitten if the supreme challenge is all adults and vice versa).

Once the supreme challenge is placed, the judge will place 1-4 in the adult and kitten challenges respectively. Those rats that have already placed in the supreme challenge will naturally form the top of the relevant age challenge. The judge will then want to see the other high placing rats of the respective age groups until each age challenge is fully placed.

Finally – you're on to the stud buck challenge. For this you need to bring the adult bucks up, particularly those who are macho looking. Put them on the judge's table and they will let you know who to leave on the table and who to return. The judge will then place the top 4 stud bucks, which will be recorded on the paperwork but not stickered.

## The pet challenges

The main difference to remember with the pet challenges is that they are placed to 6, not 4 like the variety challenges.

The first pet challenge is usually the buck challenge. This sets the top 6 of each age class against each other to find the best pet buck. Start by bringing to the table the top 2 or 3 from each age class, placing the first placed rat from each class next to each other, or stacked for comparison. The judge may dismiss some rats which should then be returned to the bench and will not be needed again. If the judge's top two or three rats are from the same class, they may ask for the rats that placed 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> in that age class, so do make sure you know where the tanks are.

When the judge has placed the buck challenge, each of the top 4 receive a second sticker on their label. There are no labels for 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place but make sure you place the top 6 rats at the front of the bench, stacked in order, as you will need them later for the supreme challenge.

Once the buck challenge is complete, the judge will move on to the doe classes (unless they started with the does). When all the does have been judged by class, the doe challenge takes place in the same way as the buck challenge. You are then on to the pet supreme challenge.

On the judge's table, stack the top 4 does onto the top 4 bucks. Make sure the tanks are in order so the judge can easily compare the best buck with the best doe. As in the previous challenges, if the first four are all does or bucks, you will need to bring the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> placed rats onto the table too. When the judge has placed their top 6 for the supreme challenge, each rat who places 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> should get a third sticker on their tank. This means the Best Pet will have 3 red stickers – one for their age class, one for the buck or doe challenge, and one for the supreme challenge.

The judge will then move on to awarding the special awards. Some judges will make notes during the judging process and will be able to award the specials based on their notes. They may also ask you to bring a few tank numbers to the table for a second glance. When the specials have been awarded your job is done – or well, it is time to offer the show secretary help writing the prize cards and rosettes!