

► The Poultry Club of Great Britain has upgraded the show to regional status, which means some of the classes have become prestigious cup classes.

"I am very much looking forward to the show this year. As long as bird flu keeps away it should be good!" said John.

For the Wakeham family, breeding birds is a family affair. For the last six years Derek and Julie and their children Daniel, Andrew and Kelly have been competing in the show and have won many national prizes. At Sign of the Owl Birds, in Ivybridge, they keep rarer breeds of ducks, chickens, turkeys and geese, such as Sumatras and Orpingtons.

"We have won best in show with our Sumatras twice," said Andrew.

"The show is good exposure for us. We put the best birds up and if people are interested hopefully they will get involved and come along and have a look. It's addictive!

"More people should keep chickens. They are fascinating creatures. People think it's hard work but it's not too bad. Depending on the size of the bird, a three foot by three foot hutch will hold up to six as long as they can come out in the day and have room to run around in. The average back garden would be large enough. They adapt to their surroundings quickly.

"My favourite breed is the Orpington. They are massive with lots of feathers. They look big, but they are just soft, gentle giants. Come along and have a look!"

Pigs and sausage competition

Wander through the giant showground and you'll find pens of neatly groomed pigs waiting for their chance to shine in the ring. Twelve breeds will be on show in the Tesco pig ring including the endangered British Lop — a white pig with floppy ears — and many other British classics.

Chief pig steward Arthur Uglow is a practised hand at pig showing and judging and has developed an eye for spotting potential prize-winning animals.

"If they're going to be show pigs, they shine all through all their lives — I knew one breeder who swore he could see it from about three days old!" said Arthur.

Among the exhibitors this year is Ian Todd, of Smallcombe Farm, a small traditional rare breed and pedigree farm near Colyton. He is showing Berkshires and Middle Whites.

"Middle Whites are one of the rarest and most endangered breeds in the country," he



"The show is good exposure for us. We put the best birds up and if people are interested hopefully they will get involved and come along and have a look," says Andrew Wakeham, pictured with his father Derek, and brother, Daniel

said. "All of the traditional breeds are rare because they have been overtaken and made redundant by the commercial pigs. The traditional breeds are seen as old-fashioned, slower-growing and with smaller carcasses.

"We prepare the pig one week before the show and then on the day you give it its final wash and brush.

"The black pigs will be oiled to soften the skin and bring out the colour, while with white pigs we wash them and then brush them with a commercial sawdust as fine as talcum powder. It makes them brilliantly white.

"We always look forward to the Devon County Show. You never know what the competition will be like!"

Purely Pynes sausage-maker Deborah

Custance Baker will be exhibiting the best specimens from her herd of Large Blacks, but as head steward of the sausage competition, which is in its fifth year, she is also responsible for making sure the best quality bangers make it to the show.

"It is amazing how few children know where a sausage comes from and we hope the competition will catch people's attention," she said.

"The judges look at the raw sausage and make sure it is mixed properly with no air pockets. They note the shrinkage changes and then taste them. You want a sausage that cooks nicely, looks good and tastes good. Last year we had 50 entries so the poor judges were eating 50 sausages in one day! The judge this year will be butcher Dave Hoggett and a secret food celebrity.



Richard and Mary Yong's angora goats



"The whole idea is to make people aware that the majority of pigs at the county show are the traditional breed and if you don't eat them they will die out. There is a huge difference between a store-bought sausage and a naturally made local sausage."

Sheep

Competition is tough but friendly among the sheep exhibitors. With more than 30 breeds on display, the Tesco sheep rings provides wonderful insight into some of the varied breeds found on Westcountry farms.

Regional breeds include Greyface Dartmoor, Devon Closewool, Devon and Cornwall Longwool, Dorset Down, Dorset Horn and Poll Dorset, Exmoor Horn and White Face. Continental breeds like Rouge de l'Ouest, Blu du Maine and Berrichon du

Cher will also be on display, while British primitive and rare breeds will feature in their own classes.

For Graham Hill, of Ashtree Farm in Sidmouth, exhibiting sheep at the county show is a family affair. While Graham, who is chairman of the South West Texel Club, is showing six or seven of his prize pedigree Texels, both of his children, 10-year-old Annabel and Scott, 12, will be competing in the young handlers' class, and Annabel will also be riding in the horse section.

"It's about getting them out and competing for the experience," said Graham. "I've been a shepherd on the Clinton Estate here since 1984 and built the flock up. I've been showing for about 10 years. No clipping or grooming is allowed: it's all got to be au naturel! ►

"I very much enjoy the show. It's a great chance for everyone to catch up and share good points and bad points and discuss the lambing season. It's fantastic to see some superb flocks in all breeds of sheep. Shows are a fundamental part of our farming life — you have to have them."

For Graham and his fellow breeders, one of the highlights of the show is talking with children and letting them touch the animals.

"The breeders let them pick and prod the sheep and like to stop and chat with the kids," he said. "I am hoping the kids come to the show and that it keeps them in touch with real animals."

Goats

While dairy goats are kept for their milk, angora goats are famous for their soft fleeces. Richard and Mary Yong, of Yealmpton, breed angora goats for their white mohair, and have been doing so for 20 years. This year they will be competing in each of the five goat classes and six fleece classes. "Competition is very stiff in Devon because some of the best angora goat breeders are down here and we will also have contestants from all over the UK," said Mary.

The goats have to be cleaned and washed and their hooves need trimming, so preparation is hard work.

"You have to shampoo the hair very lightly and you don't comb or brush them like you do with sheep because it will spoil the mohair and make it fluffy, it's supposed to be in ringlets," explained Mary. "The last time you wash them you want to make sure it's a bright sunny day so the wind dries out the mohair. Then you keep them clean and bedded down in straw."

Horses and show jumping

The equestrian area encompasses a wide range of breeds and entertaining performances. This year, record numbers are expected to compete in the events, packed into four rings. In the show jumping section there will be an open show-jumping class for riders in BSJA Region J — a great opportunity for local riders to jump at county show level. The Renault Jump series, now in its second year, is returning, with league points allocated to the highest placed eight competitors at nine events staged in England, Scotland and Wales, culminating at the Royal Berkshire Show in September. ►