

THE MANDARIN DUCK.

BY H. S. BABCOCK, PROVIDENCE, R.I.

THE Mandarin Duck, or as it is sometimes called, the Chinese Teal, is the most beautiful known variety of the duck family. It excels in the richness of its coloring even the exquisitely beautiful Carolina Duck. This species is Chinese and was brought to England in 1850. It is not really known when it was first brought into Europe. It is of comparative recent date in the United States, but I am not able to state what was the date of its earliest importation. Several years ago I saw some Mandarins at the New York show, and for several years a few breeders have regularly advertised young birds for sale; but the breed must be as yet quite rare in the United States.

In its wild state it is strictly monogamous, and so far as I have been able to learn, domestication has wrought no change in this characteristic. Birds once mated remain faithful to each other "till death doth them part," unless man breaks up, by a summary divorce proceeding, their union. It is not always easy to remate pairs thus separated.

Like the Carolina, the Mandarin is a very small duck, and in these purely ornamental breeds, I prefer the smaller specimens, other things being equal.

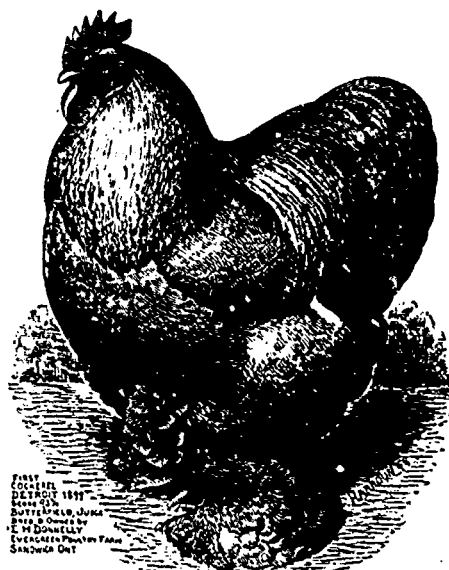
I shall not attempt to describe the color and markings of this breed; words are utterly inadequate to convey to the mind the richness and variety of the coloring. Green, purple, cream-color, brown, claret, white, black, yellow, gray, blue, all these colors are found on the drake, and arranged so as to produce the most happy

effect. The Mandarin is a crested breed and the crest can be erected or lowered at will. Two peculiarities must be noted; the neck is furnished with a collar or ruff, somewhat resembling hackles, and each wing is provided with a peculiar shield or fan standing nearly erect upon the shoulder of the bird. Like the Rouen, the Mandarin drake moults his fine feathers, assumes temporarily the more sober plumage of the female, and after this period of humiliation, again resumes his gorgeous robes of state.

It is said that the Mandarin, as well as the Carolina, tends to increase in size under domestication. This is not surprising, if it be a fact. In the wild state the supply of food is not always abundant, and the young probably often have to go on short commons; while under domestication the supply of food is constant and abundant. The wild bird having full liberty, keeps itself constantly exercised,

which is admirable for its health, but does not necessarily promote its growth. The domesticated bird takes less exercise, and the food goes rather towards growth than towards the caloric necessary to sustain almost constant movement. The more abundant and regular supply of food, coupled with less exercise, would, it seems to me, tend to increase the size of the bird in domestication.

But, big or little, the Mandarin's great beauty makes it worth while to secure its complete domestication. It is already more than half domesticated, and by breeding from the descendants of the tame birds, each year will tend to obscure the wild instincts and substitute those of the domesticated state.



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