

Poultry Yard.

Poultry Notes—No. 10.

Rearing Ducks.

No farmer or fancier ought to be without a few ducks in his poultry yard; their appetite is such that almost any kind of food will supply them; they pick up the waste food left by other fowls, and grow fat upon it. In the barnyards, in gardens, and in pastures, they are alike useful and beneficial. In China, the raising of ducks by artificial hatching is carried on to a very great extent; establishments for such purposes are erected, and the business reduced to a regular system, giving employment to a large number of hands. In the garden or the vineyard young ducks are of great benefit as insect destroyers; it is truly wonderful with what diligence they dart after all kinds of bugs, thrips, flies and snails. As layers they are also very useful, laying a great many eggs, and as a table fowl, a young duck is hard to be surpassed.

Among poultry breeders there are three varieties of ducks, each of which stands high, although a number of other varieties are still bred and have their admirers as well as their good qualities to recommend them. The three best known varieties are the Aylesbury, which is a pure white; the Rouen, which in color resembles the wild Mallard, and indeed may be said to be his exact counterpart; and the Cayuga, which is a pure black, with occasional white feathers on the breast. The Aylesbury commences laying early in the season, earlier than the Rouens, but the Rouens (a French breed) are more precocious birds, arriving at maturity at the age of three months. The Rouen, too, is a harder duck than the Aylesbury, and would thrive where the Aylesbury would die, and is a good layer of green colored eggs. It is said that a cross between the Rouen and Aylesbury is much esteemed; but as we have never seen any, we cannot speak of our own knowledge. It does no doubt tend to make the Aylesbury harder, but does not increase their laying capabilities, although it may tend to make the flesh juicier. Three ducks are sufficient to one drake; and as soon as they have laid a setting of eggs, they should be placed under a hen and hatched. It is of great importance to have ducks early, which can only be procured in this way. Ducks seldom sit; but if they show signs of incubation, they ought to be allowed to persist in their desire. From twelve to fifteen eggs are not too many to let a duck have, and if possible persuade her to sit in a place of your own choosing—by the way, a very difficult thing to do; but in whatever place she persists in sitting, she ought not to be disturbed by any other fowls. She will very soon learn to leave her nest only when necessary; and to enable her to do so, the door of her house, if in a duck-house, should be left open for her return after her usual bath and food-taking, then closing it again to keep out the other fowls. When about to leave she will cover her eggs carefully, and never absent herself beyond the time necessary. The time of incubation is twenty-eight days, and during the hatching out of the ducklings she ought not to be disturbed, neither should she be shut up afterwards; for if deprived of liberty, she will most assuredly destroy the young ducklings. If hatched under a hen, of course the treatment will be but little different from that of chickens during the time of hatching; and it may be well to mention here that it is much better, if circumstances permit, to hatch several broods in the early part of the season, otherwise, if but few old ducks are kept, many young ones cannot be raised. The use of an egg tester in hatching duck eggs is very obvious; after a few days all the sterile eggs can be rejected, and by this means a great saving of hens' time made. After the ducklings are all hatched,

they ought not to be disturbed for twenty-four hours, after which they will be ready for food. A little hard boiled egg minced and mixed with oatmeal will be very suitable food. After a few days they may have oatmeal mixed with milk, rice boiled on milk and mixed with oatmeal, with wheat screenings or such other kind of grain most readily obtainable. Ducklings ought to be kept dry and not permitted to have access to water excepting to drink, as it will be fatal to them to get thoroughly wet. This may seem strange to a large number of persons, when they consider that water is their natural element; nevertheless, it is true that ducklings should never be allowed to swim in a pond or other place until they have put off their downy, and put on their natural feathering. It may be occasionally noticed, during a heavy shower of rain in warm weather, that all of a sudden young ducks stand still, get quite rigid and stiff, turn their beak upwards and tumble clean over, usually with a crook in their neck, and if not found at once and proper remedies applied, frequently never recover. A nearly similar catastrophe overtakes them if allowed into a large pan of drinking water, so frequently placed in their yard or pen by breeders, more especially if the water is cold. You leave them apparently all quite well and enjoying themselves in the highest degree, swimming about, and diving as none but ducks can do, and as nimble as bees; after a few minutes' absence you return to find one stretched here and another there, all apparently lifeless, and as previously described. This is cramp, occasioned by allowing them to have too free access to water before being duly feathered. The best remedy we know for this disease is to place the duckling in flannel near a stove, and give it ten drops of spirits—gin is said to be best—diluted with five drops of water; this must be repeated two or three times at intervals of half an hour, when in all probability a perfect cure will be effected. Prevention is, however, better than cure. The utmost extent of indulgence that should be allowed young ducks in water, beyond the quantity required for drinking, is occasionally on a warm day to allow them a shallow dish with a little tepid water to wash in. In case of wet or showery weather they should be securely shut into a dry shed or other similar place.

If ducks are kept in the same yard with fowls there is always difficulty in feeding each separately, a thing very much to be desired. Some time since there appeared in the *American Agriculturist* a simple but very ingenious contrivance for feeding ducks, and at the same time not allowing chickens to share their food. The food for the ducks is placed in a square dust-pan in which a few bricks are laid, filling the middle of the pan to prevent the food being shoved beyond their reach, then a box is turned over the pan and contents, and supported upon a brick under each corner. After a little experience the ducks learn to run their flexible necks under the box and fill themselves while the disconsolate hens can get nothing. Fed in this way ducks increase rapidly in weight. In turn the chickens have to be fed, and the plan adopted is equally ingenious as the other. On two barrels or wooden horses lay a board or two, and on this the food; the chickens fly up and take their meal, while the ducks stand looking on, unable to reach the much desired prize. Of the Rouen duck Mr. Hewitt writes: "I am confident that the Rouens are the most profitable of all the duck tribe; they are more lethargic, and consequently more speedily fattened than any others; they lay great numbers of large eggs of a blue green color, the shell being much thicker than in the eggs of the Aylesbury breed. The flesh is of the highest possible flavor, and in first-rate specimens is abundant in quality. I have frequently known young ducks, of only nine or ten weeks old, to weigh when killed twelve pounds the pair, and in some instances even more than this." When desirable to fatten young ducks for market, it is a good plan to shut them up in a small house, and feed on oats, bran or oatmeal placed in a shallow vessel of about one-half to two inches deep; with a little gravel mixed in the bottom they will lay on flesh very rapidly. But in a subsequent paper we will treat this subject more fully.

The Muscovy or Musk Duck.

The appellation of Musk or Muscovy is applied to this duck, because it is thought its plumage emits the odor of musk. It is a native of the warmer regions of South America, and is found in the numerous groups of islands which stud the Pacific Ocean; it is also found in Brazil, hence it is sometimes called the Brazilian Duck. They are of various colors, but commonly of black and white; they are also of clear white. The American standard of excellence does not recognise this breed, although mentioned by several of their poultry writers and bred by them. Bewent considers the black the handsomest variety, the most productive, and the one that yields the finest flavored flesh; the black are glossed with green on the back, and changeable as they are exposed to the sun. In the domestic state, says the same authority, it exhibits every variety of color like the common duck. At one time the male is white; in other instances, both male and female are of a lead color, yellowish, with more or less white. A crest, elevated or depressed at pleasure, rises from the back of the neck, and a scarlet fleshy space surrounds the eye, continued from scarlet caruncles at the base of the bill. The colors of the legs and feet vary with that of the plumage, being mottled in dull flesh color and black, according to the tints of the latter. The figure is of an extremely elongated character, and the shortness of their legs increase their stumpy appearance. It is not fond of water and will seldom go near a pond. The voice of the drake is very harsh and croaking, and the female is comparatively silent. As layers they are inferior to the Aylesbury or Rouen; the eggs are of a dull white, and small in proportion to the size of the bird. Some assert that they lay two or three times a year; the period of incubation is about five weeks. The male pairs readily with the domestic duck, and the produce is of large size, but the hybrid, it is said, is unprolific. The female will also pair with the common drake, and the hybrid thus produced has a deep green plumage, and is destitute of the red caruncled membrane on the cheeks, as well as the musky odor of the rump gland of the musk duck. The drake is very pugnacious, cross and quarrelsome with other poultry; he frequently attacks small children, manifests but little affection to his female partner, and none towards the offspring. Though a voracious feeder and a prolific breeder, it is easily fattened, but is not looked upon as a profitable bird for the poultry-yard. Mr. Wright makes the following remarks in his *Poultry Book* in reference to this breed:—

"THE MUSCOVY OR MUSK DUCK seems to be a comparatively distinct species, as the progeny of a cross between them and the more common kinds is found decidedly unfertile, at least when bred *inter se*, though we believe they have been bred with the parent strains. The distinct *habitat* of the wild species is also in favor of this view; for whilst the Mallard extends through the northern regions, including both America and Europe, and probably even Asia, the Musk Duck is found wild only in the warmer regions of South America. Its district ranges from Guiana to Paraguay, but it does not migrate, which is another strong argument in favor of its distinct origin. In Brazil it is extensively domesticated, and is indeed the duck of the country; and it is also domesticated throughout both England and great part of Europe, particularly in Germany. The name is derived from an odor of musk which pervades the skin, but which is not present in the flesh when cooked; and Muscovy is obviously only a corruption of this term. The Wild Musk Duck is stated by all travellers to be a very active bird, even flying to the trees when alarmed, and passing the night in the same situation, perching upon the branches, which again marks a very wide distinction between *Cairina Moscha* and *Anas Boschas*. The nest too is sometimes built in the branches, sometimes in a