

POULTRY NOTES

(By MR. G. H. AMBLER, Christchurch.)

SELECTION AND MATING.

As most poultrykeepers will be busily engaged selecting and mating up their breeding stock for the coming season, a short article on this subject will not be out of place, as, unless birds are carefully selected and mated, the poultrykeeper, to use a horsey phrase, will be "off his horse." It is now quite generally conceded that one's success in incubating, brooding, and growing stock depends very largely upon the vitality of the breeders, especially if disease does not enter in as an important factor. This being the case, constitutional vigor should be the basis for selecting and mating our breeding stock. But how is constitutional vigor to be measured? is the vital question. To my mind there is only one absolute method, and that is to test our stock during the pullet and cockerel year; then the second year we would be breeding from tested specimens. What we term a tested hen is one that has been either trap-nested or single-pen tested to determine the number of eggs laid, her eggs tested for fertility and hatchability, and her chicks tested for liveliness, rapid and continuous growth. By a tested male I mean one which has been tested for the same points as the hen, except egg-production, and in addition to these points the performance of his daughters, which is the supreme test for the male. Of course, we want to apply this test to the hen also, but if she is a good layer herself we naturally expect her daughters to be good layers, if the sire is of the right composition. To test a flock in this way, I realise, is beyond the ordinary poultrykeeper, and as a rule belongs only to experimental station work. But poultrymen who trap-nest or single-pen their birds can easily test each hen for fertility and hatchability, but to keep a record of the liveliness and growth of the chicks would necessitate keeping a record of each individual chick from the time it was hatched, to maturity, which would be out of the question. Inasmuch as the average poultryman cannot resort to such scientific methods, there are other ways by which he can determine fairly accurately the vitality and worth of his breeders, and one of the most important of these is general appearance and vitality. By shape I do not mean those characteristics that separate our birds into breeds and varieties. Select breeders that conform as closely as possible to the following description, and as a rule they will be strong vigorous specimens. This description applies to both male and female:—

The Kind to Select.

Size—Those nearest standard weight should be selected for breeders, as there are many reasons why those that are either oversized or undersized should not be chosen. The former are more or less inclined to be inactive and also clumsy. This applies both to male and female, and may become a much more serious objection in the male than the female, as he may not be able to perform his duties as a breeder. Undersized birds should also be rejected, as the tendency in most of the breeds and varieties is downward rather than upward as far as size is concerned. Poor breeding and rearing have no doubt something to do with this, but it is not often that we raise a flock of large birds from small parents. If one has a male that is undersized, but exceptionally good in other respects, he should be mated to large females, but better results follow when both male and female are more uniform in size. **Head**—From many points of view the head of a specimen is not considered very important, but from other viewpoints it is extremely so. The head is not only a fine index to the general health of the specimen, but shows his alertness, vigor and snap. If the head is too small and refined, it indicates lack of vitality. The best specimens should have a medium-sized head, with short, stubby beak (which denotes strength) fairly well curved, a short face, or short from the eye to the end of the

beak, broad between the eyes with comb set well upon the head and fairly thick, especially at the base, and standing up well. The eye should be bold, of good size, bright, clear, and snappy. The face should have a good healthy color. **Neck**—This portion of the bird should not be too long, but fairly short, as such a neck indicates strength. **Back**—The back should be broad and straight, not only broad across the shoulders just back of the neck, but the breadth should be carried back to the tail. One of the great weaknesses of birds is the narrowing of the back from neck to tail. Avoid the double pitch-roof type of back. This section is an extremely important part of the specimen, as it forms the framework of the body. Again, the reproductive organs lie just below the back, and we want these organs to have plenty of room. This portion of the specimen should be long as well as broad, but we do not want the length to be out of proportion to the breadth and give it a narrow appearance. **Breast**—From a utility point of view, the breast is a most important part of the specimen, as it contains more meat proportionally than any other part. It should be deep, round, full, and broad. Avoid those birds that have narrow, sharp, or flat breasts, that are cut up too much just in front of the legs. A specimen having a full crop must not be mistaken for one with a full breast. We naturally think that a fowl with a good strong breast has a great deal of vitality. **Body**—Body, used in this sense, includes those portions of the real body of the specimen exclusive of the back and breast; in other words, the sides, underline, and the back part below the tail, or what is termed the fluff. In the body, then, we must look for depth and length, as the back governs the breadth or thickness. To measure the depth, place the end of the thumb on the middle of the back just back of and underneath the wing, and allow the fingers to pass down the side to the keel. We should look for great depth at this point. A side view of the bird should show the body extending well back of a vertical line passing through the knee joint. This gives us a large frame upon which to put meat. The underline should be fairly straight, and specimens whose abdomen sags or appears baggy should be avoided, as this shows a tendency to break down.

The Kind to Reject.

No one should select for a breeder a specimen that has the following characteristics:—Long, slim back, crow or snake head, sleepy eyes, long neck, narrow chest, wedge-shaped back, pinched tail, long legs and toes, extremely shallow abdomen, or a bird which is deformed in any way. Specimens of this description either have hereditary taint or have grown under conditions that are far from ideal, or it may be they are overloaded with disease germs or worms. Those which have had any serious sickness should also be rejected. A great many people claim their hens are better breeders than pullets. One reason for this is because the hens during their pullet year have been culled and culled. Those that were weak were eliminated, and we therefore have less sickness during the second year among our flock than during the first year, but it is on account of the weaker ones having been weeded out. **Note**—Select your breeders and place them in a pen by themselves a month or six weeks before you wish to use the eggs. In this way they can be kept under close observation, and actually studied.

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