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MY POULTRY DAY BY DAY

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This was written at the turn of the 20th century, it contains a wealth of poultry keeping information. Most of it still very relevant today and gives us an insight into the work of the poultry keeper.

January

January is one of the coldest months of the year, and one must see that the fowls are all comfortably housed and in good condition.

Pullets will be mostly laying by this time and backward ones can be brought on by a special diet of green bone fresh from the butcher's. The older hens ought also to be well forward, and breeding-pens should be mated at once with second or third year birds.

In the early days five hens to one cockerel should not be exceeded, especially as eggs are expensive at this period, and one wants every one of them fertilised. The male bird should be introduced to the pen about three weeks before the eggs are required for incubating, and it is well to feed him heavily for a week or two before mating up. A male bird should never be allowed to run loose with pullets.

All birds not absolutely needed for egg-production or breeding should be culled out and sold. Be sure that the house be as warm as possible and free from draughts. Feed plenty of good, wholesome food. If you feed dry mash, let the hopper be open all day, and feed not less than two

ounces of sound grain per bird per day. If wet mash is fed, let the birds eat as much as they can pick up in, say, half an hour, but afterwards clear away anything remaining until the next meal.

Vary the grain food by giving wheat, oats and barley or kibbled maize alternately. Get your incubators ready and give them a trial run to see they are in working order. If there are any frost-bitten combs apply a little camphorated oil gently rubbed in. Be sure that you do not get your hatching eggs frozen by leaving them exposed too long.

February

Another cold month, often accompanied by snow. But eggs are now coming steadily and the heart of the farmer is made glad.

Continue to feed plenty of good food and keep up the supply of grain as well as soft foods. Turnips and mangolds may be fed occasionally now, and the birds will appreciate the change, but make certain that the frost does not get near them. Never feed any frosted vegetable to fowls.

Swedes are generally liked, and they are safe to feed after Christmas. Anything of this nature assists digestion, and while it helps to cheapen the feed it may increase the size of the egg. Ground meat meal or bone meal should form a fifth part of the diet.

The eggs from pens you have mated are now fertile and you can set them under a broody hen

or place them in the incubator. Make sure they are of normal shape and size and not more than ten days old. Better still if they are all under a week old. Do not set more than ten or twelve eggs under a hen in this cold season.

Heavy breeds only should be bred during the first two months of the year. Early February is the best time to start breeding for table poultry. The birds hatched about the last week in February grow wonderfully fast and well.

Thoroughly disinfect and clean out the incubator, making sure that the lamp is burning properly and that the wick is all right, for the season. Any chickens hatched out in February should be allowed out on every available opportunity when not too cold, especially when the sun is shining, but care should be taken to prevent them getting wet. See that the grass on which they run is cut down close to the ground. A covered shed near them will afford protection in an emergency. See that the male bird is sufficiently fed: some will not feed when hens are busy and in that event must be fed separately. He should get plenty of oats and a fair quantity of meat meal.

Leghorns and other light breeds should be mated about the end of the month, as well as all cross breeds with a Leghorn cockerel. Be sure your broody hens are free from insects. Even if none are visible sprinkle Biddy with an insecticide powder and feed her chiefly on whole maize.

March

The tide of eggs is steadily rising, and what are not required for breeding should, when fertile, be sold for incubating purposes. A big business is done in eggs for hatching and the price will vary from twice to six times the figure got for commercial eating eggs.

March is a very busy month between looking after chickens, continuous hatching and the disposal of surplus eggs. Fertile eggs that go by post or rail require very careful packing. Special boxes may be bought for that purpose, and great care should be taken to see that the eggs are packed tight so that the contents will not be unduly shaken.

If the weather is mild let the chicks out of doors as much as possible, but never go away and leave them. A sudden storm of hail or snow might lose you the lot. Even a heavy rain-storm will kill young chickens.

Your incubators should now be going in full blast and light breeds should be hatched from now onwards to the end of April. Be it remembered that it is now or with the hatching of heavy breeds. Better also to be too early than a week too late with light breeds. Time steals away like a thief in the night, you can never catch it up

Do not coddle the chicks; it is wonderful how they do in dry, cold weather, but do not allow them to get wet.

April

April is the last chance for breeding to advantage. Chicks bred April when eggs are most wanted and fetch the highest price. They grow so well. A May chick is a gamble with the bird proving profitable. Owing to the Jewish festival taking place during this month there is a big demand for fat birds, and as prices rule high any of the unprofitable sort should be cleared out.

Keep a watch on the chickens for parasitic pests, and don't forget to spray your poultry houses with a strong disinfectant. I have found nothing better or cheaper than a weak solution of sheep dip - about a pint of dip to a pailful of water.

You will now be able to separate some of the cockerels from the pullets, and these should be got ready for the market as soon as possible. With the birds being allowed their liberty and plenty of insect life some fish meal or meat meal need be added to their soft food. They ought to pick up about one-fifth of their food and a little less grain will suffice. Hens that are laying heavily, however, should not be stinted. There is a big demand for day-old chicks during April.

May

Many people hatch in May, and if any accident has prevented you getting a full stock before this month, get your eggs down at once, on the principle that it is better late than never. Only light breeds are likely to pay if hatched

during this month, but cross breeds may be hatched for table purposes. Very few if any farmers can make table poultry pay, and unless you have special qualifications better leave it alone. Make eggs your speciality.

Many heavy breeds will now be going broody. Watch them closely and deal with them at once. If allowed to sit a few days they are difficult to break off. See that the bottom of your broody coop is made uncomfortable, so that sitting will become a burden to the birds. The bottom may either be made of wire or strips of wood, through which the cold air will circulate to cool their fevered blood. Raise the coop on bricks a few inches from the ground, and place it in full view of the hens that are at liberty. Feed sparingly, but do not starve, else the birds will take long to get into laying condition again.

Once more sort out cockerels, and those you do not intend to keep for breeding purposes dispose of as soon as possible. As a rule people keep surplus cockerels far too long. Another Jewish festival will enable you to get rid of more of your fat birds. May is a month for growth, and see that your young chicks get all the food they can eat.

June

Shade will be required for chickens young and old in flaming June. If you have no trees, shrubs or natural shelter you must erect some. Four wooden posts held together by light framing about 2 feet high,

with canvas stretched across, is as cheap a shade as anything. It will be more effective if you also cover one of the sides and move the shelter round with the sun. Hurdles will make a shade that is better than nothing. Keep the drinking-water out of the sun, and give it fresh at least three times a day.

Allow your birds out in the open as soon as they come down from the roost, for on hot days the morning is the best time for man and beast. Do not feed anything in the middle of the day in very hot weather.

The poultry-houses may be lime-washed or painted over with creosote to kill the insects. Look out for red mite in all the crevices of the wood. Creosote will deal them a death-blow.

During all the very warm weather do all you can to assist your birds to keep cool.

July

It will now be possible to pick out all your Leghorn cockerels from the young pullets as well as many of the heavy breeds. Do not keep unwanted cockerels, as they will soon eat away the profits.

With birds laying heavily they drink enormous of water, and see that they are never a moment without it, stint them in food than in water at this time. The more they drink the more eggs they will lay, and you should rejoice every time you have to fill the water trough. Feed fairly generously, so that the birds will not slack in the

egg supply or begin to moult too early. Eggs are beginning to mount in price and it is essential you should get plenty for the market.

With proper handling few birds should begin to moult just yet. Keep a watch on your young stock, and keep putting food into them, but do not make it stimulating. Some of the birds - a small minority - may be backward, and these should be separated from the quick growers and specially catered for. In a month you will be able to tell which of them are to be any good. All the others get rid of, even if you have to give them away.

It is now a suitable time for doing odd jobs in the way of painting or repairs. A nail in time saves nine.

August

The young birds are now growing big and some are getting into the adult stage. If your early light breeds are getting too forward and their combs begin to redden, keep them on hard food for a time. You do not want any pullets to lay before the end of September. If you have any backward ones separate them and feed generously with a proportion of animal food. Nothing is better than ground green bone if you can get it fresh, but if not, better use meat meal or fish meal.

The moult will now be overtaking the laying hens and without doing anything drastic it will be well to

feed them sparingly on hard grain only for, say, three days, when the feathers should begin to fall. A bird moults much better in the mild months than later on when it is cold. Once the moult is in full flood begin to feed well again, and after a week or so give them all they can pick up. You will now get a plentiful supply of feathers and a shorter supply of eggs, but if the birds have laid well you will not grudge them their well-earned rest.

All stock cockerels should now be in the cockerel pens and the others should be disposed of. Do not keep one more than your needs demand.

September

Get all your young pullets into the layinghouses where they are to start their autumn work. Aim to get the bulk of them going at the end of the month or a little later. Eggs are now scarce and dear, and when pullets get a good start it is wonderful how consistent they are. Birds that have not been forced unduly should with slight pauses continue to lay all the winter and spring months. It is a pretty and heartening sight to see all the heads of the pullets showing the red flag which they hoist when laying.

It is too early (nor is it desirable) to get many pullets' eggs this month, but it is encouraging to see them make a start. To know that the birds are matured and ready for the great reproductive drama is about as much as one requires in September. Give the pullets plenty of animal food. The

older birds are still undergoing the moult and laying fewer and fewer eggs.

The pullet and the hen should always be made to slightly overlap the laying season so that the supply of eggs will be continuous. Happy the man who is successful in keeping up the supply. Don't forget to spray your houses monthly up till September, and watch the red mite.

October

A dull month if your pullets are backwards great month if they have got into the swing of laying. This is the month to crow over your neighbour if your pullets are laying and his are not. The price of eggs is rising steadily and from now till Christmas the man who has eggs to sell will make money. It is now you will regret that you delayed hatching a fortnight too long. A fortnight lost at the beginning of the season means a month late at the other and most profitable end.

Nights and mornings are colder, and it will be advisable to see that all the houses are weather-proof. Damp and draughts are the greatest enemies to the laying bird. Dry cold does not matter.

Keep your houses and your litter bone dry, and feed all birds, old and young, without stint. No insect life excepting a few stray earwigs is available now, and this must be made up in the form of animal food.

November

A dull, dark month outwardly, but a joyful one to the farmer who hears his pullets cackle in joy as they lay their egg. A terrible month to the man who has hatched late, is getting no eggs and has to pay out a heavy weekly food bill. It is the time to make pious resolutions about early hatching next season.

A few of the older hens may be beginning to lay again, but as a rule do not expect eggs from the old hens this month. The cold may be intense and the scratching - shed must be kept free from draughts, while maize should be fed every other day in place of wheat. Oats are also a fine feed for cold weather.

December

Something will be far wrong if you are not getting pullets eggs now. Most of them should be approaching full lay and the egg basket should be fuller and fuller day by day.

Eggs are now fetching fancy prices-three times as much as in April. What a harvest for the clever egg-farmer who has most of his stock in lay.

Plenty of meat meal should be added to the mash, and maize meal will also contribute to the perfect dietary. Give the birds their biggest feed at night when they may be sixteen hours on the perch. Keep them all cosy, and see that all the cracks and openings in the boards are filled up and made draught-proof. If you do your part and house them

suitably the birds will keep themselves warm enough.

Do not allow them out of doors in bitterly cold winds or wet, but a fine frosty day will delight them. If all has gone well you and your poultry will have a happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year. ■