

indian runner

Roundup for 2009
by Chris Ashton

Mallard drake: the exhibition mallard colour is mallard - the colour matches the Rouen with no white around the underflap.



Mallard duck



Silver Duck

The huge amount of interest in self-sufficiency, food security and getting outdoors in the garden this year has meant an increased demand for ducks. Sales of heavy ducks are reported to have gone down, probably because Khaki Campbells and Runners have gone up in Ireland. Call ducks have gained in popularity—because they are cheap to keep. One can never guess what most people will decide to do.

IRDA membership has increased perhaps due to the self-sufficiency trend, and we hope membership will continue to grow. Many of the Indian Runner issues are of general interest to all waterfowl keepers so other breeds are covered from time to time. Light ducks (e.g. Crested, Bull and Blue) are a little less popular than a touch of Runner in their ancestry. So, it's possible that we can run a feature breed on the related ducks in some of the issues to come.

The keeping of utility ducks for egg-laying and meat production with utility Runners colours tend to get mixed up. Buyers often want just females, and at rock bottom prices too. They don't realize what the costs of small-scale production are like. Ducks are happier, as well, with just one or two ducks, depending on the size of the paddock. It's possible that the breed is being pushed into selling more females than you want to—buyers can source commercial Chiltern Whites and Khakis if they need to maximise egg production, and these commercial females can be mixed with the Runners to get the best of both worlds.

Entries at shows have generally been good this autumn. Peterborough's total entries were up to 394, including 59 Runners. Runners entries, exhibitors were encouraged to come up from Cornwall, and were very popular. And it was good to see more IRDA members showing at the BWA's Solihull as well. Competition is useful for maintaining pure breeds; it allows discussion and consensus on colours, and which are being made.

which are getting in short supply. It's nice to have dark phase Khakis and Buffs coming along but breeders need to be aware of what is happening, which is only possible with a basic understanding of genetics. From Runners definitely need promoting—they are a basic, original colour from Indonesia—and it needs more people showing and breeding them. They got a real boost this year, with the exhibition colour gaining Best Runner and Best in Show, which was great to see. Well done Cornwall and Jahan!

On the Continent, Runners have had a very special year. After the 2008 show, the IRDA Newsletter 22, Runners had a big section at the Hannover Autumn Youngstock event. 697 Runners were on show at this world-class exhibition centre where the birds, ranging from 12 to 18 weeks old, and ducks filled two massive halls. There were international exhibitions, display stands of wildfowl, and birds on sale. It's not cheap to enter or visit, even the catalogue costs about £140, but it's a great reference book.

Such a large exhibition is not possible in the UK because of the price of lining space here, and the smaller number of exhibitors. A bird entry costs £2 euros and, for exhibitors who travel from Belgium and Holland to pen their birds two days before the show is open to the public, then it's a real step up. This is, however, Europe's show window, and the quality of the birds and the judging really shows.

These big exhibitions in Europe are a great opportunity for exhibitors to be brought to the show 12 days in advance of the public viewing to allow judges time to assess only limited classes. A specialist judge will assess just 60-100 birds of one breed or even one colour, in contrast to a UK show where the judge can assess up to 200 birds of many varieties. Assessment in the UK, by necessity, is therefore rather cursory.

It's also unlikely that a UK judge of many classes will have expertise in all 40 breeds of

waterfowl she or he is expected to judge, let alone the numerous colours. The best judges have kept and bred the birds and know what to look for, but finding sufficient competent judges of so many varieties is a problem.

The UK system does have its advantages, not least for the birds. Most UK shows are held in a heated hall, so the birds have a pen for just a few hours. This is infinitely preferable for waterfowl which often live outside all year. A heated show hall is not a good place for them, and a short one-day show is good in this respect. I am certainly not advocating 3-5 day shows for the UK!

Smaller shows on the continent are now trying out the UK system of heated halls, but the exhibitors are often travelling and accommodation expenses for the humans, as well as the stress for the birds.

So how does one organise a show that lasts for up to five days? The cages for the birds have to be bigger and well bedded with absorbent materials. The show also provides large drinkers and feeders which are changed daily. The exhibitors are given a very good water supply and water really round, so the birds are very well looked after. The birds are clearly well-accommodated to close contact with people and manage the show period surprisingly well.

Organising the judges is probably more of a headache because so many classes are required, but the job of judging itself is quite straightforward. One judge per breed, and one for the public is excluded, and one can concentrate on the job.

Where entries are huge - 43 Trout Runners females for example - 1,2,3 prize cards are meaningless for so many top-quality birds. So, the continental system of using grades from 90-97 is preferred. Birds are just 'sufficient' at 90. There can be numerous excellent birds, and a show such as Hannover is very much better than the UK.

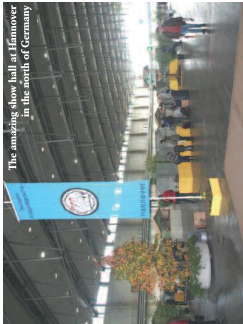
Grade cards in special holders give the catalogue number (e.g. 617, in the class of 21 White Runner females), name of the judge, class of bird, and a numerical assessment between 90 and 97. 100% does not seem to be achievable. By starting at 90, the system is assuming that a bird is at least 90% of the way to being a top quality bird. Around £12 per bird there is no point in entering poor quality birds - as can happen in UK shows where cross breeds have even turned up in the winning pens!

Most exhibits achieve between 91 and 94, the best birds gaining 96-99 points and the VM (Fédération-Médaille: Association Mondiale des Vétérinaires d'Élevage de la Région de l'Est de l'Europe-Honour Band). So top prizes are still awarded, but all good birds still get credit.

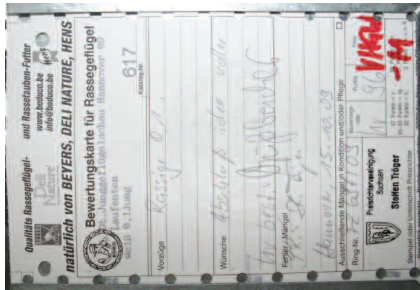
Birds are on sale directly from these show pens, and there are very good examples for sale, at top prices. After the expense of entering the best at this show, then the high prices are not a surprise. Prices are set by the exhibitor, and exhibitors are often queuing up the day before, and long and early queue up the day before. First come is first served, and popular birds may have gone by the time you reach the counter.

Where classes are big in the UK—over 7 entries present, let's say—then it would be useful to use such a grading system as well as the top shows. The grades and the judge's comment would then indicate the quality of the birds. The exhibitor would be able to see the judge's comments. That's something to consider for the big 2010 shows if the entries are large enough. This year, it could have applied to the male and female classes in Whites and Blacks at Solihull. Applying it to limited classes would make it less arduous and give exhibitors useful feedback on the quality of their birds. The standard of White Runners is high at the moment and exhibitors should be encouraged by useful feedback.

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The amazing show hall at Hannover in the north of Germany





The gradcard awarded to the winners.

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