

brooding and rearing of

DUCKLINGS AND GOSLINGS

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Breeds of Ducks

Three breeds of ducks common in North Dakota are Rouen, Peking and Muscovy. Ducks are raised primarily for meat for family use and to sell locally.

Breeds of Geese

Breeds of geese common in North Dakota are Toulouse, Embden and African.

Crossbreeding

Crossbreeding of ducks or geese is not recommended.

BROODING REQUIREMENTS

Natural Brooding

Goslings and ducklings can be brooded successfully by broody chicken hens and by the females of most breeds of ducks and geese. If the young birds were not hatched by the broody female, place them under her at night. Be certain that the brood hens are free of lice and mites.

Provide the hen and her brood with a dry, comfortable shelter. The hen will need feed and plenty of fresh, clean water. The water should be provided in a container which will not tip over and which will be high enough to prevent the young from getting into the water and getting wet.

Artificial Brooding

Modern hatcheries produce day old ducklings and goslings in large numbers. Commercial growers brood and rear them in about the same way baby chicks are reared.

Ducks and geese are easy to raise because they are hardy and not susceptible to many of the common poultry diseases. Brooding requirements are simple and special housing or equipment is not necessary.

Because of the rapid growth and early feathering, they do not require as long a brooding period as do baby chicks.

TYPES OF BROODERS

The infrared heat lamp type of electric brooder is recommended for brooding small groups of birds. When using infrared brooders, allow one lamp for 25 goslings or 30 ducklings. When infrared brooders are used, room temperature is not so important. Heat usually is not required after the fifth or sixth week, and, in good weather, the young birds can be taken out to pasture.

Many commercial raisers use hover type gas brooders, but any type of good baby chick brooder may be used successfully. When hover brooders are used, you can determine the number of goslings and ducklings per hover by cutting the brooder's rated chick capacity in half.

TEMPERATURE

The behavior of the young birds is a better guide to their well being than a thermometer. When brooding temperature is too hot, the birds will crowd away from the heat. High temperatures may result in a slower rate of feathering and growing.

When the temperature is uncomfortably cold, goslings will tend to huddle together under the brooder or perhaps crowd into corners. Keeping a light on the birds at night will discourage such crowding. An infrared brooder provides enough light for this purpose.

When the brooding temperature is right, the goslings will be well distributed over the floor. At night, the birds should form a circle around the hover light or a donut shaped circle under the heat lamp.

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A starting temperature near 90° at the edge of the hover is about right. The temperature should be reduced about 5 to 10° per week until a 70° is reached.

THE BROODER HOUSE

A special building is not required to brood ducks and geese. However, it must give protection from the weather and be reasonably well lighted and ventilated. For brooding small numbers, a colony house or any small building may be used. For brooding large numbers, a large poultry house, a large brooder house, or a barn is recommended.

Allow about 1½ square feet of floor space per bird and cover the floor with absorbent litter. Shavings, vermiculite, ground corn cobs, sawdust or peat moss are all good litters.

When brooding goslings or ducklings, dampness, is likely to be more of a problem than with baby chicks. Removal of wet spots and frequent additions of clean litter are recommended.

FEEDING

Goslings and ducklings are ready for feed and water when they arrive from the hatchery. Use crumbled chick or poult starter for the first week to 10 days. Then, pelleted grower ration plus cracked corn, wheat, oats or barley can be fed. Keep the feed before the birds at all times and provide insoluble grit.

Place feed for the first few days on a rough paper, paper plates or egg filler flats. Do not use chick box tops or other smooth-surfaced lids or paper as feeders. The use of slick-surfaced materials causes leg injuries.

Be certain the feeds you are using contain no coccidiosis preventive. Certain types of these drugs, sometimes included in chick starter and growing mash, are harmful to goslings. They may cause lameness or even death of the birds. Coccidiosis has not been a problem in waterfowl production in this area.

Ducklings commercially grown are generally ready for marketing in 7 to 8 weeks. Goslings usually are marketed in the fall at 24 to 30 weeks of age. Finishing ration should contain some protein similar to turkey finishing rations.

WATER

Plenty of drinking water should be available to the birds at all times. Goslings and ducklings use enormous quantities due to their rapid growth. The waterers should be a type the birds cannot get into. This is important in the brooder house.

Water for swimming is unnecessary, however, ponds provides an easy way to water goslings on pasture. Hog waterers make good range waterers for waterfowl.

PASTURE FOR GOSLINGS

Arrange to provide pasture or lawn clippings as early as the first week. When the weather is mild, goslings only a few days old can be let out and allowed to graze.

Grass is a natural food of goslings. Considerable savings in feed can be made by providing good pasture throughout the growing period. At five or six weeks, goslings can live entirely on good pasture, although some supplemental feeding is recommended until the birds are completely feathered.

In North Dakota, blue grass, timothy, brome grass and some of the clovers provide excellent pasture for geese. Small grains such as barley, wheat and rye are excellent early fall pasture. Goslings or geese do not relish sweetclover or alfalfa. About 1 acre of pasture for each 20 to 30 birds is needed. The amount depends on the size of the goslings and the quality of the pasture.

When pasture is poor, additional feeding of grain is necessary. A pasture rotation system is recommended to provide green, succulent grass at all times. Protect the goslings from wet grass or rain for the first few weeks, especially when the weather is cool. Shade must be provided in hot weather.

Because ducks are not as good foragers as geese, it is not necessary that they have pasture. Ducks will, however, eat some green feed and insects. Most farm flocks probably will not be confined.

FENCING

Usually it is necessary to fence the pasture or fields. Most woven wire field fencing is small enough mesh to confine birds of 4 to 6 weeks of age

or older. Two-inch mesh poultry netting commonly is used for younger birds. The fence does not need to be high because the birds seldom fly; 18 inches to 2 feet height is adequate. Some waterfowl raisers have had good success using an electric fence.

SEX DETERMINATION OF ADULT GEESE

On most North Dakota farms, it is customary to dress or sell the surplus stock in the fall. Usually, the breeding stock for next year's flock is selected at this time. As the young geese are about 6 months old at the time of selection, it is difficult to separate the sexes by visual means.

Sex determination can be made with considerable accuracy by examination of the reproductive organs. The process, as described by the late T. H. Canfield of Minnesota, is as follows:

After the goose is caught, lift it by the neck and lay it on its back, either on a table or over your bended knee, with the tail pointed away from you, move the tail end of the bird out over the edge so it can be readily bent downwards. Then insert your pointer finger (sometimes it helps to have a little vaseline on it) into the cloaca about half an inch and move it around in a circular manner several times to enlarge and relax the sphincter muscle which closes the opening. Next, apply some pressure directly below and on the sides of the vent in order to evert or expose the sex organs (figures 1, 2, 3 and 4).



Method of holding goose for sexing.

Fig. 1

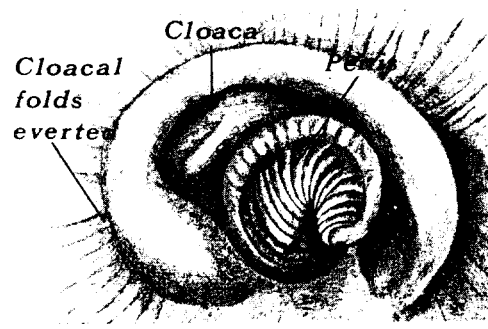


Fig. 2 Exposed reproductive organ of immature male, showing concentric rings.



Fig. 3 Exposed reproductive organ of mature male. At full maturity the organ may reach a length of 2 inches or more.

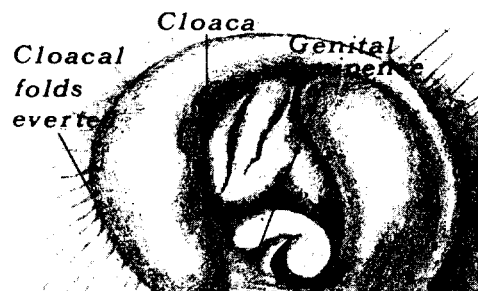


Fig. 4 The adult female eminence. Shape and location vary little from the corresponding conditions in the gosling, though the size is much

In some birds the male organ is somewhat difficult to unsheath. An inexperienced sexer may easily call a bird a female if, after slight pressure, the corkscrew-like male organ is not exposed. However, only the presence of a female genital eminence will positively identify a female.

