

NOTES

NOTE ON WILDNESS IN DUCKLINGS

JOHN C. PHILLIPS

Bussey Institution, Harvard University

The writer was much interested this year in the behavior, as regards wildness, of certain young ducks hatched under hens. The common, so called "English Mallard" of the English game preserves has long been kept by man and acts at all ages like an extremely tame bird. It is a pure pred Mallard, but how long it has been under domestication is not known. It flies readily.

Not until this year, however, were my pure wild Mallards, *Anas boschas*, induced to lay. The eggs were taken, three nestfuls, placed under hens and hatched. They hatched well, and from the first the young ducklings were extremely tame and easy to manage. They took ordinary feed off the ground, and grew well in competition with other larger ducks in the same enclosure, though at all ages they preferred sunken or floated food. They differed from common ducks as regards their behavior in being much quicker on their feet and livelier in action. From the first they showed great skill and interest in catching insects.

At the same time there were hatched a large number of back crosses between common tame Mallards and pure wild Black Ducks, *Anas tristis*. One of these crosses produced young which were three-fourths *Anas tristis*, while in two other crosses the young were only one-fourth *A. tristis*. The three-fourth *A. tristis* ducklings, although raised under the same conditions as the wild Mallards showed from the first extraordinary wildness. They were extremely hard to manage, did badly under ordinary methods of hand rearing, and required much special care and special feeding. Even then the mortality among them was enormous, while among the wild Mallards it was practically zero. Besides their extreme wildness, the most noticeable trait of the three-fourth *A. tristis* ducklings was their marked aversion to picking food off the ground. Food *had* to be floated on

the water pans or submerged. This habit of course, is also commonly seen in ducklings of other wild species, such as Pintails (*Dafla acuta*).

The one-fourth *A. tristis* hybrid ducklings were at first very wild, far wilder than the pure wild Mallards, but they changed with age and became much more like ordinary ducks. They did not show any special aversion to taking food off the ground.

In the wild state *Anas tristis* and *Anas boschas* are very similar in habits and commonly intermingle, *Anas tristis* being more of a coastal bird and having a different breeding area. The different actions of the young under confinement is very interesting, showing in the one bird an adaptability little short of marvellous, and in the other closely related species a condition that would wholly prevent domestication and almost prevent breeding in the pure state. I may say that the female of *A. tristis* very rarely lays eggs in captivity, though the male crosses quite readily with other species. A control in the behavior of the pure wild Mallards was obtained by a number of young hatched by these same mothers in a secluded inclosed pond. These young are as wild as any wild ducks in the open, and it is rarely that one is able to get even a glimpse of them. *Their wildness then is immediately modifiable in the rearing yard.*

Behavior such as is carried by *A. tristis* certainly seems to be of a markedly dominant character and analagous to that seen in half bred wild rats and hybrid mice between wild and tame stocks.

Whether there is any tendency to a segregation of traits of this sort remains to be studied, but to the writer it does not seem as if this work would be at all easy or satisfactory to carry out among ducks.

SINGING MICE

CHARLES A. COBURN

The Harvard Psychological Laboratory

In the literature of animal behavior appear several references to the production by mice of sounds of musical quality.

The "singing" of mice is described variously by different writers. Lee¹ states that it consists of a series of chirps at the rate of three or four per second. At the beginning of the

¹ Lee, Henry. Singing Mice. *Popular Science Monthly*, 1878, Vol. 14, pp. 102-105.