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AMERICAN SPARROW BETTER BEHAVED THAN ITS ENGLISH COUSIN.

While one usually thinks of the English species when the word "sparrow" is mentioned, there are some forty species of sparrows in North America which are helpful rather than harmful and should be encouraged rather than discouraged; at least this is the opinion of the United States Department of Agriculture's investigator, whose "Some Common Birds Useful to the Farmer" has just been issued as Farmers Bulletin No. 630.

While the English sparrow is noisy and obtrusive, the American species are unobtrusive both in song and action. These native sparrows although so seldom noticed by the majority of people, may probably be found in nearly every part of our country, although not more than half a dozen forms are generally known in any one locality.

The American varieties resemble the English sparrow in general, although a few are more brilliant. A California species has a red head, as have several species in the East which are not so common. The snowbird is a sparrow which is particularly common in winter. It is a slate color with a white breast.

While American sparrows are noted seed eaters, they do not by any means confine themselves to a vegetable diet. During the summer and especially in the breeding season, they eat many insects and feed their young largely upon the same food. Examination of stomachs of three species—the song sparrow, chipping sparrow and field sparrow—shows that about one-third of the food consists of insects, comprising many injurious beetles, as snout beetles or weevils and leaf beetles. Many grasshoppers are eaten. In the case of the chipping sparrow these insects form one-eighth of the food. Grasshoppers would seem to be rather large morsels, but the bird probably confines itself to the smaller species. Indeed, the greatest amount (over 36 per cent) is eaten in June, when the larger species are still young and the smaller most numerous. Besides the insects already mentioned many wasps and bugs are taken. As a whole the insect diet of the native sparrows may be considered beneficial. There are several records of potato bug larvæ eaten by chipping sparrows.

Their vegetable food is limited almost exclusively to hard seeds. This might seem to indicate that the birds feed to some extent upon grain, but the stomachs examined show only one kind, oats, and but little of that. The great bulk of the food is made up of grass and weed seed, which form almost the entire diet during winter, and the amount consumed is immense.

In the agricultural region of the upper Mississippi Valley by roadsides, on borders of cultivated fields, or in abandoned fields, wherever they can obtain a foothold, masses of rank weeds spring up and often form almost impenetrable thickets which afford food and shelter for immense numbers of birds and enable them to withstand great cold and the most terrible blizzards. A person visiting one of these weed patches on a sunny morning in January, when the thermometer is 20 deg. or more below zero, will be struck with the life and animation of the busy little inhabitants. Instead of sitting forlorn and half frozen, they may be seen flitting from branch to branch, twittering and fluttering, and showing every evidence of enjoyment and perfect comfort. If one of them is captured it will be found in excellent condition; in fact, a veritable ball of fat.

The snowbird and tree sparrow are perhaps the most numerous of all the American sparrows. Examination of many stomachs shows that in winter the tree sparrow feeds entirely upon seeds of weeds. Probably each bird consumes one-fourth of an ounce a day.

The writer of the new bulletin has estimated the amount of weed seed annually destroyed by these birds in Iowa. On the basis of one-fourth of an ounce of seed eaten daily by each bird and an average of ten birds to each square mile remaining in their winter range 200 days, there would be a total of 1,750,000 pounds or 875 tons of weed seed consumed in a single season by this one species. Large as are these figures, they unquestionably fall far short of the reality.

The estimate of ten birds to a square mile is very conservative, for in Massachusetts, where the food supply is less than in the Western States, the tree sparrow is even more abundant than this in winter. In Iowa several thousand tree sparrows have been seen within the space of a few acres. This estimate moreover is for a single species, while as a matter of fact there are at least a half dozen birds (not all sparrows) that habitually feed during winter on these seeds.

Further south the tree sparrow is replaced in winter by the white-throated sparrow, the white crowned sparrow, the fox sparrow, the song sparrow, the field sparrow and several others; so that all over the land a vast number of these seed eaters are at work during the colder months reducing next year's crop of worse than useless plants.

NEW JERSEY FARMERS PROTEST ON ADVANCE IN FREIGHT RATES.

The farmers south of Camden, N. J. and in Burlington, Ocean and Monmouth counties are up in arms against the increase in the freight rate made on stable manure from New York city and other points by the Pennsylvania Railroad.

Thousands of carloads of stable manure are used by the truck growers and general farmers in the section named. The automobile has displaced horses to a large extent in the cities and has reduced the production of manure, forcing the price up to the top notch the grower is able to pay, and now the railroad adds a 40 per cent. increase in the freight rate, making the cost of manure almost prohibitive.

The farmers say that in view of the fact that practically all their produce is shipped by rail, it is to the interest of the railroad company to aid them in producing the largest possible crops, instead of tempting the growers to try getting along without the use of stable manure, the most valuable of fertilizers.

The farmers say that the railroad companies appealed for their assistance in the attempt to repeal the full new law, and in consideration of the favor have nearly doubled the freight rate on manure, which the farmer must have, and the action is considered by the farmers as a strange way of showing gratitude.

POTATOES AS STOCK FEED.

If the present overplus of potatoes in the hands of the farmers cannot be disposed of for human food they may be fed to farm animals. Potatoes alone cannot be used to advantage as a feed, nor can they be fed in any great quantity. Potatoes have not been used to a great extent as a stock feed in this country, according to Prof. I. L. Stone of the Cornell experiment station, and there is for that reason but little information on the subject of feeding potatoes to live stock. In Germany, however, the question has been studied and the conclusion arrived at there is that they may be used in feeding cows, horses, sheep and pigs.

Potatoes are said to be best adapted to hog feed, but to secure the best results they should be cooked and should then be mixed with corn meal or other ground grains to form a thick mush. Skimmed milk added to this feed makes it more valuable. Potatoes have less than one-fourth of the feeding value of corn meal. If their cost is as low as 15 cents a bushel they are still more expensive than silage, yet 15 cents a bushel for potatoes is said to represent a considerable loss to the farmer, who can scarcely produce them acording to crop experts for less than 30 cents. Still it is pointed out that it is better to get this much value out of them than to have them a total loss.

Prof. Stone points out that potatoes add succulence to a feeding ration where corn silage is not available and that some succulent food is desirable in all rations. Even as small an amount as half a peck a day fed to dairy cows where no other succulent food is used, will produce a marked effect in increasing the milk flow, and a peck or more a day may be fed to advantage. They should, however, be introduced in the ration gradually and should be run through a root cutter in order to avoid risk of choking the animal.

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POULTRY NOTES

IMPROPER FEEDING DEADLY FOR CHICKS

Great Care Should Be Taken in Nurturing Them During First Few Weeks.

HEATING ALSO A FACTOR.

By A. C. SMITH.

The great loss of chick life has been studied long and diligently, and because the loss was not prevented the students came to the conclusion that there must be some mysterious reason for these big losses which have sounded the death knell of many large undertakings of this character.

No one in these days disputes the germ theory of disease, but germs or no germs chicks that hatch strong and normally should be and can be raised if properly fed and cared for. Eight or nine tenths of the losses can be attributed to improper care or improper feeding.

To avoid the technical side of the case and still deal with facts as they are, most of the losses by disease occur while the chick is still young, before it becomes 3 weeks old, perhaps we might say 2 weeks or 10 days old. Head lice kill many, it is true, but bowel trouble of one form or another is responsible for the death of a great majority. Why should they have bowel trouble? There may be various reasons, but the actual facts are that most all troubles of this nature are due to either improper feeding or improper care. By the latter we include improper housing, insufficient heat and various other items too numerous to mention.

As a rule a greater proportion of brooder than hen raised chicks are lost. This is though bowel troubles, due to the fact that the operator is afraid of overheating the chicks. There is little danger of this if the brooder is properly instructed, because if the warm chicks will retreat just a sufficient distance from the brooder to be comfortable. On the other hand, if the house is not sufficiently warm the chicks have huddled up for heat and soon chill. This chill affects the digestive organs and bowel trouble results.

An experienced brooder operator needs no thermometer. The chicks tell him if it is warm, a better clue to ideal conditions than any thermometer. The observing operator soon learns when the chicks are comfortable and also when they are not. He is not misled into thinking that his brooders need more air when he finds his chicks are there in the morning. Better keep the hover too warm, by far, than the least bit too cool. Hover chicks cash and will get away from too much heat, but cannot get away from the cold.

Hen reared chicks get chilled too, but the hen can usually keep the chick warm. In the early spring she is provided with suitable protection and she protects the chicks from cold at necessary intervals. Later in the season, when allowed the freedom of the earth, one temptation to her to go out is juicy worms, but in getting them she gets wet with the dew, which is bad for the little chicks, as they are not as yet able to withstand the dampness. Small chicks should then be confined to the coops or houses during the night and in the morning until the sun has thoroughly dried and warmed the ground, when they should be allowed to roam it will on pleasant days with the mother hen.

It is, of course, absolutely necessary that all the food given chicks of tender age should be the sweetest and most wholesome, but that is not all. Some investigators have found that the first feed should be withheld for twenty-four hours after hatching, another has decreed that thirty-six hours is the proper time, while another goes to the extreme of directing that the first feed should be given seventy-two hours after hatching. For the average normal chick it is probably about twenty-six hours is the right time for the first feed. If allowed to go much longer than that they seem to weaken and become discontented, as may be fairly inferred from their actions. Weaker chicks require a longer time.

If chicks are not given or allowed access to fine sand from the very first, an important point in their feeding has been overlooked. Chicks hatched in an incubator seldom get this, and this simple omission accounts for many deaths through disorders of the bowels. A gizzard is part of the digestive system of a chick, and this part must have the implements with which to do its work. If the small chick the implements are fine bits of sand. The gizzard is soon supplied with this substance in the case of the hen hatched chick when the chicks have access to earth.

The question of what to feed is important, but it is not only important to give the best and wholesome food is provided but it is equally important to see that these are put into the proper form, that is, we must not consider alone the kind of food particle but also the size and consistency of that particle. As for instance, no one would think of feeding chicks whole corn, no matter how sweet or how well seasoned, it is too hard, also too large. Manifestly chicks of tender age cannot digest either too large or too tough or too hard kernels. On the other hand, if the particles are too fine the food becomes too pasty, and collects in a mass or ball as soon as wet by the juices of the crop. The food is then more resisting to both the juices of the digestive tract and to the mechanical action of the gizzard. Formerly it was the generally accepted notion that the first food of young chicks should be soft or semi-soft, as bread and milk, hard boiled eggs or soft mash, but while such food is well for a few days, if fed judiciously and for a pleasant variety when chicks are given different foods for a principal diet they are not necessary and fully as good results are obtained by feeding finely cracked well screened sweet grains.

The old fashioned pinhead oatmeal made an ideal food of just the right consistency for baby chicks and could be fed from the first. Corn and wheat when cracked to about this size make splendid chick feed, even for the first feeds. Undoubtedly it is still better to feed all three than one or two only. The present steel cut oatmeal is available in almost every market and can be fed for a few days at the beginning of a chick's life. Commercial chick feeds are as a rule good. They have two good qualities to recommend them, variety and consistency, as they usually contain several kinds of seeds and grain, and these are cracked to the right size.

Chicks do better when kept on fine litter and when those feeds are scattered at least four or five times a day in this litter. Hay chaff, if sweet and free from mould and decay, makes an ideal litter, as does cut alfalfa or clover. These are quite expensive, however, and should not be used when a cheaper suitable litter can be obtained.

Even early in life chicks need green food. When not on range which provides such an abundant quantity it must be supplied. Many kinds may be used, such as cabbages, lettuce, apples, &c. It is best always not to attempt to cut this fine enough that the chicks can eat it, but to cut in small cakes so they are obliged to pick out minute particles. In this form green food aids digestion and also keeps the chicks busy.

The second stage, or what may be termed the feathering age, may be said to extend from two weeks to six weeks of age. Coarser and somewhat cheaper foods may be fed. The quantity of grains may be increased and the quantity of meat reduced by wide margins of the ordinary size. The quantity of hard grains may be reduced gradually due to three.

At ten days or two weeks of age it is advisable to feed a dry mash. The basis of this is wheat bran, but the ingredients and proportions may vary considerably without affecting the results as determined by the chick's health and growth. Equal parts of wheat bran, corn meal and ground oats which have been passed through a fine sieve to remove the hulls make a mash that is about as good as those of more complicated composition. During this age the system demands large amounts of protein and ash. To provide these constituents add to this mash 5 per cent. of beef scraps that have been well and thoroughly prepared and are sweet and from 10 to 15 per cent. of bone meal.

The third stage, or what might be termed the "range age" may be said to exist after the chicks are from six or eight weeks old until maturity. Nearly all dangers of losses by disease having now passed, all sorts of economies, both in foods and labor, should be considered, such as allowing free range and hopper feeding, &c.

Place the house or coop so that it receives the earliest morning rays of the sun. Provide shade, but let the chicks choose it. Do not place the house in the shade. The chicks will grow faster and will be healthier if you do not. It has been tried season after season.

The essential features of successful chicken raising often overlooked are: To keep them warm to protect them from dampness, to destroy lice of all kinds by rational methods, to provide light and an even balance of the different kinds of food necessary, viz. grains, greens, grit and mineral matter. Seventy-five to 90 per cent. of all normal chicks hatched should be raised to maturity unless destroyed by some natural enemy.

LAKENVELDERS

LAKENVELDERS NEED LITTLE FOOD TO EAT

By L. PAUL GRAHAM.

This is one of the old breeds of Holland whence it was introduced to England, Germany and America. The first specimens of the variety made their appearance in America only about a dozen years ago, although the breed has been known for upward of eighty years in Holland. It is thought to be of Campine origin and shows similarity to the latter variety in shape, head and in the egg color, which is slaty blue.

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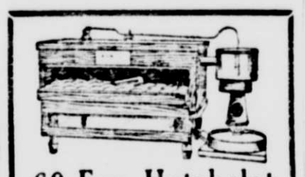
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