Seasonal reminders

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Poultry Notes

The March-April period affords the poultry farmer an opportunity to prepare the ground for sowing greenfeed crops such as oats, barley, rape and lucerne. Brooder houses and rearing quarters should be cleaned out, floors disinfected with a 2% solution of caustic soda (1 lb. caustic soda to five gallons water), and all woodwork and lappings in the house sprayed with creosote. This gives the creosote a chance to soak into the woodwork long before the chickens are received.

Where flock breeding is practised, the breeding from selected adult hens is an effective means of increasing egg production, improving the viability of the flock, and strengthening the birds’ resistance to disease, particularly leucosis. It also enables the flockowner to substantially reduce the incidence of broodiness.

In the past, most breeders have experienced difficulty in securing eggs from their hens for incubation purposes early in the hatching season. To overcome this obstacle this Department has been experimenting with the force-moulting of hens and subsequent artificial lighting of their laying sheds, and a technique has now been developed which we feel makes the breeding from hens a practical possibility and an attractive economic proposition. The adoption of this technique by commercial breeders will, we feel, enable those breeders to improve the quality of their stock to a marked degree.

Breeding stock should be selected and the hens force-moulted late in March by a specified restriction of food and water. This results in the lay being reduced to about a two per cent. level within two weeks. After a further three weeks the sheds are artificially lit and the production can be returned to a 50 per cent. level within a further five weeks. Subsequently this level of production should be maintained for several months.

It is not suggested that all chickens hatched in the State should come from adult hens, but it is considered wise for commercial breeders to secure at least their own replacement stock from hens. Once the future of the pure-bred flock is assured, the first-cross chicks could be hatched from eggs laid by birds in their pullet year. Details for force-moulting of hens are available from the Department of Agriculture on application.

During March, the egg production from hens will fall and relatively heavy
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culling is required to maintain a satisfactory lay during this period. Should it be desired to retain late moulting hens for commercial egg production during the second year, they too should be force-moulted during March and provided with artificial lighting three weeks after the force-moulted treatment commences. Where breeding hens are concerned it is probably an advantage to with-hold the lights for an extra fortnight.

A breeding ration containing adequate amounts of riboflavine supplied through buttermilk powder, whey powder, or synthetic “Ribon” should be fed to ensure good hatchability, three weeks prior to the commencement of the hatching season and continued right through the hatching season.

Beekeeping Notes

A UTUMN is the ideal season for re-queening hives. Any old and unsatisfactory queens should be removed and replaced with young vigorous queens.

This helps to ensure strong hives that will winter well, and make good use of the late winter and early spring flows.

To make certain of having good queens on hand when they are needed, they should be ordered by the beginning of March to allow the queen-breeder to plan his production programme.

Well before the approach of winter, check over your equipment and note any that needs repair or replacements. Order materials early so that it is on hand in time for a planned programme of winter work.

There are still some apiarists who have failed to register for 1953. Beginners are reminded that the possession of even a single backyard hive entails an obligation to register as an apiarist.

Established apiaries must be re-registered annually and the due date for 1953 registrations was December 31, 1952. The scale of fees for registration and re-registration is 2s. 6d. a year for one to 25 hives, plus 1s. for each 25 or part thereof in excess of this number.

Application cards for apiary registration may be obtained from the Department of Agriculture, Perth.

Wheatbelt Notes

CATCH crops of barley or oats may be sown on stubbles or pasture land during March, in order to provide an early green bite for the stock. April work in the paddocks will consist of cultivating the fallow after rain has germinated the weed seeds. Early green feed crops may be sown on fallow, also late and mid-season wheat varieties according to the district and depending upon suitable conditions.

Handfeeding will probably be required for all sheep during March. Give up to 1/2 lb. of grain per head per day to the mated ewes, plus some hay as the paddock roughage becomes scarce. The extra grain feeding pre-
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vents losses from pregnancy toxaemia of ewes and is also helpful to weaners. Other sheep will probably find hay sufficient for their needs. Watch water supplies carefully this season.

Topdressing and renovating of pastures will be another March activity in many districts. Oats may be sown as renovating crops on clover land.

Handfeeding may still be necessary in April, particularly for the mated ewes. Crutching minimises fly trouble and reduces the quantity of "daggy" wool at shearing time. Inoculating against entero-toxaemia (braxy-like disease) may be conveniently carried out during crutching operations (April, May, June) and this is also a good time to carry out "Mulesing" for prevention of fly strike.

April is a good month to establish new pastures. Sow early using good inoculated seed and liberal quantities of superphosphate. Do not graze your old pastures until the plants are well-rooted. It is better to continue with handfeeding until the pastures can be grazed without damage.

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**Orchard Notes**

JOANATHAN and Delicious apple varieties are very subject to pre-harvest drop when hot dry conditions occur at the beginning of March. If excessive dropping is expected spray immediately shedding is noticed with one of the many naphthalene acetic acid proprietary lines. Granny Smith apples required for long storage should be picked between mid April and mid May and wrapped in oil wraps. An article on superficial scald in this variety appears elsewhere in this Journal.

**Autumn Sprays for Citrus.**—The most important spray is a 4:4:40 Bordeaux spray for brown rot in mid-April. This spray will also act as a nutritional spray if copper is deficient although, in cases of acute deficiency, soil dressings are also advisable. Where it is desired to apply zinc, this may be incorporated with the Bordeaux mixture with good results. However, if practicable, nutritional sprays should be applied during the spring flush of growth in preference to autumn.

**Cover Crops and Fertilisers.**—Leguminous cover crops are very beneficial in supplying organic matter and improving the general condition of the soil. Planted with the first winter rains the plants will make good growth before the cold weather sets in. New Zealand blue lupins are very popular particularly in citrus orchards, but where late planting cannot be avoided or where partial shade is experienced tick beans will usually prove more satisfactory. Field peas may also be used.

Autumn is the most satisfactory time for applying phosphate as it will assist the growth of the cover crop and is more likely to become available to the trees through this medium. An application of 1 cwt. of superphosphate and 1½ bushels of seed per acre should give good results. Nitrogenous fertilisers should be saved for the spring dressing.

**Fruit Fly.**—Efforts to reduce the fruit fly population during this period will prove beneficial when the navel oranges commence to colour. Fig trees are often breeding grounds at this time of the year.
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