

Do I breed early or do I wait?

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OK, since I live in Florida and all the people here, specifically Colorbred people, begin breeding early. I am defining early by stating it as pairing up in November, and birds laying and hatching in December. Well, this was in response to shows occurring earlier here, multiple shows in October, so the birds must be finished off from the molt and matured enough to show well in October. This obviously presented a problem to type breeders, especially we who breed larger breeds but also all type breeds. Simply put, if you breed normally, starting in February for your first round, your second round of young will hatch out, wean and molt and will not be ready.

A few years ago, I was down at the SFBBA show in Miami at the end of October with a friend. I brought to the show my best birds at that time, about 20 of them, Irish Fancy's and Parisians. This friend won with some great Irish and a Fife took best in show. A few months later, second weekend of December the FCF show occurred. At this show, I won best Irish Fancy over my friend. He appropriately asked me, "where were those birds, why were they not at the Miami show"? Last year 2019, the same thing occurred again. I showed birds at the FCF show in December I did not show in Miami, FCF October or the Nationals, and won best Irish and Best in Show with an Irish, not shown anywhere but at this show. The answer is again, different birds were shown at each show.

I do not do teams, where people have teams set aside for different shows. Sometimes a team is made up of birds to show, given the knowledge of what a specific judge is known to judge for, or teams so as to not over show any birds in respect to their health and wellbeing. I simply did it because I used the birds that were ready, or looked their best at that specific date. Later shows I had other birds that looked better because they had finished off and now looked better than the ones I showed earlier. This all was because depending on when the bird hatched and made it through the molt, it was the best at that time and better than the ones showed earlier. This past year it was so evident some of my birds were even better in January, and could have showed and won, but just were not good enough for the earlier shows. The truth was so stark, I reluctantly came to the fact I have to breed earlier.

Now I started moving my birds up last year or 2019. I moved them to start breeding at the end of January, instead of the end of February I had done all my years before. So I had to take my entire flock and push them a month earlier. It worked, but I did get many clear eggs the first round, and thus ended up with fewer than I normally would have. No worries, I knew this would occur. This year I moved them again to pairing them up in January a few weeks earlier than 2019. This obviously has all aspects being utilized earlier, conditioning, lighting you name it. My birds had gone through my conditioning regiment and by the second week of January were on 12.5 – 13 hours of light.

I have not settled my mind on agreement that doing this is something I like doing. I truthfully know to compete at shows I have no choice; I have to do whatever it takes to have my birds finished off and showing their best by October. Whether it be a Flighted or unflighted bird, they must be complete with the molt by end of July to be their best for shows in October.

Well in truth, I am pulling out every trick in the book I know to move my flock ahead. I know it will settle in and my whole flock will be on this new time frame, but right now it is taking more work than before. I figured it would take 3 to 5 years before all settled in and I think that will be correct. This year some were ready before others, but more than last year, so all is moving. I still have some that threw clear eggs, but recycling and fertile eggs occurred round two, but quicker since I watched and addressed faster than before. Utilizing fosters help this process as well. If you have premium pairs, keeping birds that you normally would discard helps by using them as foster pairs/parents.

I know everyone has heard of this being done, defined as breeding early. I know many have now instituted it and as you've seen on FB, people had chicks by the end of January. My first hatched the first week of February, and if this continues, which I believe it will, the top winning birds will soon all be raised early. The simple fact is, a bird that is 8-9 months old and has finished the molt 2 months before another will always show better, when all else is equal. Obviously, I said that last line the way I did because a great bird, no matter what will always win, but if all is equal, the bird that has finished off and matured longer will show better.

I am writing this because so many have spoken about it and others still breed as before. I want everyone to know what is occurring and understand at the shows, the why behind some wins. The bird I won Best Irish with in December truthfully in October looked so bad I would have discarded it if it still looked like that in December. I had many, when pairing them up in January, you would have heard the words coming out of my mouth, over and over, "where did you come from and where were you a month ago". So, it is of course your own decision, I am just sharing information.