



A flock of ducklings waddles across the Corwin farm. Their ultimate destination is the oven, but it's a good life while it lasts



Jim Miller, 47, has worked with ducks for a quarter century. Miller, in charge of breeding for Corwins, is shown collecting new-laid eggs



Lloyd Corwin candles batch of eggs before placing them in incubator. After almost a month, eggs are moved to hatcher where birds emerge



Henry F. Corwin and his granddaughter Janet hold ducklings at various stages of growth: after one day, one week, two weeks and four weeks



Mabel Stegner, left, is a consulting home economist and publicist for Duck Growers Marketing Co-operative. Her assistant is Julia Lawsing

Collier's for March 24, 1951

Pampering Your

DUCK

By JOHN W. RANDOLPH

SOME decades ago a few shrewd citizens living on New York's Long Island discovered that the best way to make a duckling grow fast was to make him happy, and that the best way to make him happy was to pamper him with lots of duck-pampering machinery.

Already satisfied that their watery corner of the country was the best of all possible duck worlds, they proceeded, with notable efficiency, to machine-pamper these perpetually astonished birds literally to death—by the millions.

The result is that this Easter Week the first of a year's crop of some 5,000,000 Long Island ducklings will go to market—not casual barnyard waddlers, but belt-line factory products, bred, fed and bled in a clocklike operation that would do the automobile industry proud. This first spring production, hatched eight weeks ago, and the millions of ducklings to come during the summer and fall, will bring about \$10,000,000 to a tight little empire of 68 duck operators who still fondly call themselves farmers, although their establishments are really duck factories.

The owners of these factories—where at one time you may see as many as 50,000 snow-white Pekings swarming garrulously over less than 50 acres—may differ sharply about the relative merits of various incubators, air-conditioning units, mechanical pickers, or even feeds. But they form a solidly unanimous admiration society for the natural duck-raising advantages of that 15-square-mile tip of Suffolk county around the Eastport-Riverhead section of eastern Long Island, where their enterprises are concentrated.

The sandy soil, covered largely by pine and scrub oak, is just right for their purposes. So, in their eyes, is the brisk climate, the pure air and the pure water. So is the merely commercial, but undisputably helpful, fact that they are only two hours by rail from New York City, the greatest duck market in the world.

Whatever the natural and strategic advantages, men and machines have done the rest to make the Long Island Peking the happiest duck ever seen. Mechanics make his life a blissful little idyl that is never interrupted, although swiftly terminated.

Great electric incubators and hatchers bring him on exact schedule into a warm world. Central heating plants, air conditioning, and immaculate quarters keep him comfortable, safe and healthy (with emergency generators at hand in case anything slips).

Thousands of tons of scientific feed are shunted onto private railroad sidings, moved onto private grain elevators by mechanical conveyers and transported right to him by private narrow-gauge railway without a human hand ever touching it. This, aided by constant electric light, keeps him eating 24 hours a day. Trucks, rolling on runways through his quarters, regularly carry away his straw litter, and everything that fumigation, soap and water and paint can do keeps him and his surroundings clean.

Oh, the Peking lives a fine life, eating and luxuriating and socializing all the time. Not because his owner is an overwhelmingly tender man (though more often than not he is really fond of ducks), but because a gloomy duckling will never weigh six pounds when he is exactly eight weeks old. A happy one weighs pretty close to that, and then he can be killed, picked, washed, cooled and shipped—by machine, of course.

It is not hard to keep an individual duckling happy for eight weeks. He is not the intellectual colossus of the animal kingdom, and his range of interests is somewhat limited. He is not wildly imaginative, and rarely conceives difficult whims or desires. He is not overly introspective, and spends very little of his free, or noneating, time brooding in corners over his own insufficiencies.

In short, the fact must be faced that the duck is a good-tempered, greedy, talkative slob who wants nothing more than plenty of food and water, safety, comfort and other ducks to associate with. Give him that and he will eat and thrive and gain weight like mad, which is his duty and his pleasure.

It is reasonably easy to do all this for a couple of dozen barnyard ducks. But Long Island duck men raise about 60 per cent of all market ducks in this country. A big duck plant may have 60,000 or 70,000 Pekings of all ages marching and gabbling to-



Milton Budd (left), Dr. Ellsworth Dougherty at Long Island Duck Disease Research Lab

day in the spring sunshine of its yards and the fluorescent light of its buildings.

Between now and November 15th such an establishment may raise as many as 200,000 of the creatures for market.

To do that, the duck factory every day has to feed its charges about 2,000 tons of prepared pellets, a task not to be confused with scattering a few handfuls of cracked corn. It has to have pure drinking water in all of its buildings all the time and pure swimming water outside, a complicated and expensive matter in itself. It must provide uninterrupted tranquillity, gentle handling, and no excitement. It must maintain a vigilance in sanitation and hygiene that hospitals might copy; any disease that gets into a duck plant is Black Death.

To make sure that all this shall not be in vain, the duck men have organized themselves into the efficient and powerful Long Island Duck Growers Marketing Co-operative, Inc.—one of the smallest and most self-contained co-ops in the country. Headed by a dynamic lawyer named Marshall

Spear (who never raised a duck in his life), it is nearly a unanimous proposition—64 of the 68 Long Island duck operators belong to it, pay it one cent for every duck they sell, and back it aggressively.

The co-op helps the operator get from 28 to 31 cents a pound for his ducklings. When he gets 30 cents, according to Spear's figures, the housewife pays about 40 cents in New York, 42½ in Chicago and 45 in San Francisco. The co-op also runs a pool of 55 members who freeze about 10 per cent of total production every fall and hold this off the market until the big-production period is over and the year-end surplus begins to fade off the market. And that is about a million dollars' worth of duck meat.

In addition, the co-op keeps under fee a New York consulting home economist, Mabel Stegner, whose staff peppers newspapers, magazines, the radio, TV and every other conceivable publicity outlet with duckling recipes and any other data that might promote the sale of ducks. The United States government helps in this promotion job through its Production and Marketing Administration, whose marketing boss in New York, Chester Hannan, is Marshall Spear's father-in-law.

At its headquarters in Eastport the co-op operates, with Cornell University and the state, the Long Island Duck Disease Research Laboratory, a five-room affair staffed by Dr. Ellsworth Dougherty, Cornell veterinarian, and Milton R. Budd, laboratory assistant, both of whom are paid by the state.

Nearly all the co-op members are in the Eastport area along the bays, creeks and inlets on both sides of Long Island where Great Peconic Bay splits it into two fingers. They each raise from 50,000 to 250,000 ducklings a year, and for most of them their present production is their capacity. The empire is not likely to grow very much, since the difficulties of establishing a duck factory are apparent. You can summarize them this way: It just costs too much.

Take, for example, the plant of Henry Frank Corwin and his son Lloyd W., who raise about 200,000 ducks a year for market. They have a 50-acre place with a half-mile of buildings; a 2,000-foot private canal; a mile of miniature feed-carrying railroad; a picking plant; a self-filling feed elevator and warehouse; batteries of incubators and hatchers, and from eight to 20 workers, depending on the season.

Though Henry Frank Corwin started in 1910 with only 30 breeding ducks, a couple of sheds and some fencing, it is hardly likely that his establishment could now be bought for half a million dollars. The Corwins, who will talk to anybody any time about ducks, are not men to trumpet their financial affairs. But it is easy to reckon that they sell more than \$350,000 worth of ducks every year and spend more than \$200,000 on feed alone.

The family has been around Long Island since 1640, when Matthias Corwin came to Southold. Born in England, he had already been a "freeman and landowner" of the Massachusetts Bay Colony and had also helped found New Haven, Connecticut.

The Corwins moved to Aquebogue, near Riverhead, in 1773. They are there now, eight generations later, on the same land along Meeting House Creek. There Henry Frank, (Continued on page 71)



Gentlemen's Award

In spite of years of rich living, Joe the Cat was neither a heel nor a snob. And for a friend—like the frightened little boy

LUCAS had it first from Eileen Sampson, who lived next door. "You've seen them, of course," Eileen said.

"Them?" Lucas was sitting in the sun beside the pool, watching her young son, Thomas McCoy, scuttle about on the grass. Young Thomas bumbled to himself. Joe, the McCoy cat, and Vincent, the McCoy monkey, sat at a safe distance. "Seen who?" Lucas said.

"Our new neighbors. Their name is Baker," Eileen said. "They've bought the Robertson house."

"That's a nice little house," Lucas said. "I've always admired it." She thought about the house, her eyes on young Thomas. "What's the matter with them?"

"Well," Eileen said. She lifted one plump shoulder. "They both work, for one thing." Her tone stated clearly her opinion of wives who worked. "And they have a small boy. He runs around loose." She paused and looked meaningfully at young Thomas. "I don't want him playing with my Jennifer," she said. "And John agrees. And if I were you . . ." She left the sentence unfinished.

Lucas mentioned the incident to her husband, Tim, that evening. They were having their customary highball in their bedroom. "That's a fine, neighborly way to behave, isn't it?" she said.

"It is indeed." Tim had a publicity folder in his hand. He waved it at her. "I got this in the mail—" he began.

"She doesn't even know them," Lucas said. "And suppose Mrs. Baker *does* work. So do you. So does Eileen's precious John."

"Not John. He sits and looks important." Tim waved the folder again. "There's going to be a cat show, sponsored by the town," he said, "and my name was given to somebody as a cat lover." He shook his head, grinning. "Joe, in a cat show. Can you imagine the shambles that would be?"

"I'll bet he's a nice little boy," Lucas said.

Tim lowered the folder slowly. He stared into the bottom of his highball. "Who?"

"The Baker boy!" she said violently. "Tim McCoy, you haven't listened to a word I've said."

Tim put the folder on the bed. "We'll start all over again," he said. He held up his empty glass. "Another?"

"Not now. You go ahead." She sat there, brooding. "Tomorrow, I'm going to see if I can find him and see for myself."

"Good hunting," Tim said.

He went out into the pantry and mixed himself another highball. Then he went into the kitchen and heated milk in a pan and laced it heavily with

dark rum and poured it into the white bowl. Cook, at the sink, said, "They've eaten."

"This is dessert," Tim said. He went out through the back door and called.

Vincent, the monkey, came first, cantering across the lawn and up the steps. He rubbed against Tim's leg and squeaked mightily and then settled down at the bowl.

And then came Joe, moving slowly and with vast dignity, his stub tail high. He chirruped.

"How'd you like to be in a cat show?" Tim asked.

Joe chirruped again. He moved in beside Vincent and fell to.

THE next day, which was Wednesday, did not even begin well. Tim cut himself shaving and bled persistently, staining a face cloth and a bath towel and two fresh white shirts.

"You would think that you'd cut your arm off," Lucas said. "Tim! It's started again, and that's the third shirt!" She lunged for Kleenex and stubbed her bare foot against the leg of the bed.

In the nursery young Thomas dug deep with his spoon and catapulted mashed banana past Miss Henderson's cheek and onto the wall.

In the kitchen, Cook, whose temper early in the morning was rarely serene, broke eggs into the fry-