

# Indian Runner

Roundup for 2009  
by Chris Ashton

The huge amount of interest in self-sufficiency, food security and getting outdoors in the garden this year has meant an increased demand for ducks. Sales of heavy ducks are reported to have gone down, probably because they cost a lot to feed, but requests for Khaki Campbells and Runners have gone up. In Ireland, Call ducks have gained in popularity—because they are cheap to keep. One can never guess what most people will decide to do.

IRDA membership has increased perhaps due to the self-sufficiency trend, and we hope membership will continue to grow. Many of the Indian Runner issues are of general interest to all waterfowl keepers so other breeds are covered from time to time. Light ducks, e.g. Crested, Bali and Abaco Ranger, all have a touch—or more than a touch—of Runner in their ancestry. So, it's possible that we can run a feature breed on the related ducks in some of the issues to come.

The keeping of utility ducks for egg-laying does not necessarily benefit pure breeds. Runners colours tend to get mixed up; buyers often want just females, and at rock bottom prices too. They don't realize what the costs of small-scale production are like. Ducks are happier, as well, with just one or two drakes, depending on the size of the flock. So if you breed birds, don't be pushed into selling more females than you want to—buyers can source commercial Chiltern Whites and Khakis if they need to maximise egg production, and these commercial females can be mixed with the Runners to get the best of both worlds.

Entries at shows have generally been good this autumn. Peterborough's total entries were up to 394, including 59 Runners. Solihull was up to a very respectable 128 Runner entries. Exhibitors were encouraged to come up from Cornwall, where keeping waterfowl has always been very popular. And it was good to see more IRDA members showing at the BWA's Solihull as well. Competition is useful for maintaining pure breeds: it allows exchange of bloodlines, promotes discussion and consensus on colours, and gives a shop window for 'new' colours which are being made.



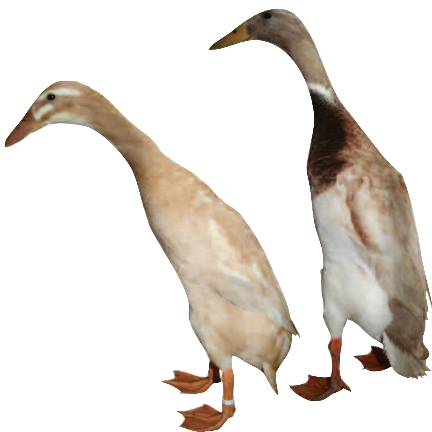
Mallard duck



Silver drake: the same colour as the Silver Call and Abaco Ranger

Silver Duck

**Mallard drake:** the exhibition mallard colour is not the same as the wild mallard – the colour matches the Rouen with no white around the undertail.



New colours are generally not really 'new'. They are often the colours, such as 'khaki' or 'maggie', which belong to other breeds. These colours certainly promote interest in Runners worldwide, and we hope to have news of how Matt Branagh's flock in Australia is doing in the care of Rumball Runners. Take a look at Kym Rumballs website (from the IRDA [www.runnerduck.net](http://www.runnerduck.net) links page) and you'll see how the colours are out there. Details may be different, names may not be the same, but the Runners are turning up the same colour genes half a world away.

Runners are truly international. This year, IRDA member John Faure visited the UK on a waterfowl trip. Runners are essential for pest control in his organic vineyards and, as a waterfowl enthusiast, he has gone to the trouble of developing pure breeds, including geese and Calls, in SA.

John's colours are South African and USA based, so he already has dark phase dusksies which are the Buffs and Khakis from the USA. That's why they also have respectable Mallard Runners (also dark phase) over the pond. The story is different in the UK where our Runners were basically light phase dusksies from Walton's Lombok imports of 1909.

Some of our Runner colours are now getting very 'mixed up', to the detriment of the pure light phase dusky Fawns



Turn over to continue reading

which are getting in short supply. It's nice to have dark phase Khakis and Buffs coming along but breeders need to be aware of what is happening, which is only possible with a basic understanding of colour genetics. Fawn Runners definitely need promoting—they are a basic, original colour from Indonesia—and it needs more people showing and breeding them. They got a real boost this year with Julian Barrett's Fawn female gaining Best Runner and Best in Show, which was great to see. Well done Cornwall and Julian!

On the Continent, Runners have had a very special year. After the 100 Year Jubilee celebration (Nov 2008, see IRDA Newsletter 22), Runners had a big section at the Hannover Autumn Youngstock event. 697 Runners were on show at this world-class exhibition centre where the birds, ranging from pigeons, geese, chickens and ducks, filled two massive halls. There were international exhibitions, display stands of wildfowl, and birds on sale. It's not cheap to enter or visit: even the catalogue costs about £14 but, with all the results recorded, it's a great reference book.

Such a large exhibition is not possible in the UK because of the price of hiring space here, and the smaller number of breeders/exhibitors. Not that Hannover Show is cheap to enter. A bird entry costs 12 euros and, for exhibitors who travel from Belgium and Holland to pen their birds two days before the show is open to the public, then costs certainly do mount up. This is, however, Europe's shop window, and the quality of the birds and the judging really shows.

These big exhibitions in Europe typically run for 4-5 days. Birds are brought to the show 1-2 days in advance of the public viewing to allow judges time to assess only limited classes. A specialist judge will assess just 60-100 birds of one breed or even one colour (white Call ducks for example), in contrast to a UK show where a judge can assess up to 200 birds of many varieties. Assessment in the UK, by necessity, is therefore rather cursory.

It's also unlikely that a UK judge of many classes will have expertise in all 40 breeds of

waterfowl she or he is expected to judge, let alone the numerous colours. The best judges have kept and bred the birds and know what to look for, but finding sufficient competent judges of so many varieties is a problem.

The UK system does have its advantages, not least for the birds. Many UK shows run for just one day, so the birds are in their show pen for just a few hours. This is infinitely preferable for waterfowl which often live outside all year. A heated show hall is not a good place for them, and a short one-day show is good in this respect. I am certainly not advocating 3-5 day shows for the UK!

Smaller shows on the continent are now trying out the UK system at a cheap and cheerful alternative for their local shows. One-day shows certainly cut down on the travelling and accommodation expenses for the humans, as well as the stress for the birds.

So how does one organise a show that lasts for up to five days? The cages for the birds have to be bigger and well bedded with absorbent materials. The show also provides large drinkers and feeders which are regularly topped up by the catering team who bring the food and water trolley round, so the birds are very well looked after. The birds are clearly well-accustomed to close contact with people and manage the show period surprisingly well.

Organising the judges is probably more of a headache because so many specialists are required, but the job of judging itself is quite enjoyable. Over the judging period, the birds are clean and fresh, the public is excluded, and one can concentrate on the job.

Where entries are huge - 43 Trout Runner females for example - 1,2,3 prize cards are meaningless for so many top-quality birds. So, the continental system of using grades from 90-97 is preferred. Birds are just 'sufficient' at 90. There can be numerous excellent birds and credit must be given where due, and the assessment system for a big show such as Hannover is very much better than the UK.

Grade cards in special holders give the catalogue number (e.g. 617, in the class of 21 White Runner females), name of the judge, class of bird, and a numerical assessment between 90 and 97. 100% does not seem to be achievable. By starting at 90, the system is assuming that the birds are the breed standard - certainly with the price of entries at around £12 per bird there is no point in entering poor quality birds - as can happen in UK shows where cross breeds have even turned up in the winning pens!

Most exhibits achieve between 91 and 94, the best birds gaining 96-97 points and rating VHGWM (Fachverband-Medaillen: Association Medal) and VHGWEB (Fachverband-Ehrenband: Association Honour Band). So top prizes are still awarded, but all good birds still get credit.

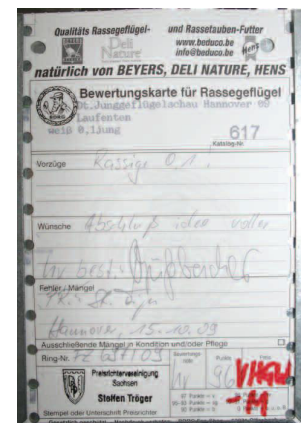
Birds are on sale directly from these show pens, and there are very good examples for sale, at top prices. After the expense of entering the best at this show, then the high prices are not a surprise. Prices are stated in the catalogue and the first day open to the public sees a long and early queue to the pay desk. First come is first served, and popular birds may have gone by the time you reach the counter.

Where classes are big in the UK—over 7 entries present, let's say—then it would be useful to use such a grading system as well as at the top shows. The grades and the judge's comment would then indicate if there were many (or few) good birds and add interest to the day. That's something to consider for the big 2010 shows if the entries are large enough. This year it could have applied to the male and female classes in Whites and Blacks at Solihull. Applying it to limited classes would make it less arduous and give exhibitors useful feedback on the quality of their birds. The standard of White Runners is high at the moment and exhibitors should be encouraged by useful feedback.

(Photos copyright Chris Ashton)



The amazing show hall at Hannover in the north of Germany



The graded card awarded to the winners.

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