

WORKING BIRDS AT VERGENOEGD

Chris Ashton and John Faure; all photographs by John Faure

John Faure is a waterfowl keeper with a difference: his show birds double up as a working flock at the vineyard. Situated in South Africa, his waterfowl collection at Vergenoegd includes several breeds of geese, Indian Runners, Call ducks and wildfowl as well.

John's family has lived in SA for over two centuries. The house dates back to 1773, and wine making has been a family business since 1820. Vergenoegd hosts its visitors at the winery's restaurant, and the Runners have become a star attraction, especially when the ducks are herded onto the lawn after the day's work foraging for snails (see last month's Fancy Fowl). This duck parade, and the swim on the 'dam' (lake), has become a real photo opportunity, and must advertise the Indian Runner as 'the duck to have' in SA.

John is a keen breeder, exhibitor and judge, winning Showman of the Year for 2009. His birds are top quality stock, some of them having originated in the USA. He has good quality dark-phase Mallard Runners as well as Buffs, Black, White, Blue and even Trout and Apricot Trout. As you can see from John's photos, the birds are a super type. They were photographed in December - not the best time for the southern hemisphere of course.

John has joined the increasing number of waterfowl breeders becoming globe-trotters. In the summer of



Calls by a box of the Vergenoegd Estate Wine



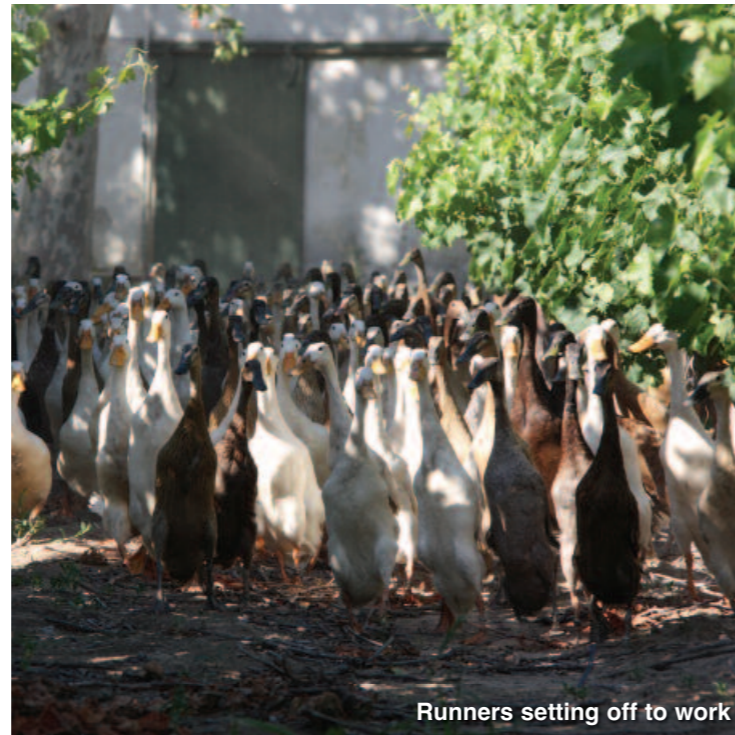
John Faure herding his runners into position



2009 the family, which has ties in the Isle of Man, visited the UK and also did a round tour of breeders including ourselves, Graham Barnard, Graham Hicks, Denise Moss and Anne Terrell. He's a member of the Indian Runner Duck Association, and interested in the colour genetics of the birds.



On his return to South Africa, the incubators were full, and the first lot of hatchlings growing to be ready, by October, to join the other working ducks in the vineyards. Whilst John experienced a lot of rain here in the wet summer of 2009, they also had an exceptionally wet winter in South Africa. The snails did thrive, and presented a much bigger problem, in the bunches of grapes, than usual. So the working ducks, tall enough to reach up well into the vines, were in big demand to help produce the wine which, of course, has their image on the label.



Runners setting off to work

Websites with more information:
www.runnerduck.net
www.vergenoegd.co.za



Runners at work



Runners back at home after a good day's work