THE BREEDING SEASON 1957

by S. T. Johnstone

About 770 birds were reared at the New Grounds this year, representing some 75% of the babies hatched. Altogether, 91 forms laid, and of these 72 were reared. These figures are in each case the best we have obtained. In addition, 146 birds of 15 species have been reared by Major Mark Fisher in the first season at Peakirk—a most excellent effort on which he is to be congratulated. One feels that one must stress the undoubted help that the glorious weather of May, June and July gave to our effort, but a change in the method of feeding the young must be recorded. The usual soaked biscuit-meal was replaced by dry turkey starter crumbs. This would seem to have had a very beneficial effect on the ducklings, both on their survival and on the rate of growth; particularly was this so in the case of the Shelducks.

The manner in which baby waterfowl manage to hold on to their slender thread of life, despite the various and many methods of feeding and rearing to which they are subjected by aviculturists, makes one realise how unwise it is to dogmatise upon the precise method which should be used, but the 1957 breeding results would seem to suggest that we have evolved one satisfactory means of rearing swans, ducks and geese. Lest we feel too satisfied with our efforts, we must recall the failure of the Bewick’s Swan to produce any young. The first clutch of five fertile eggs was spoiled by the pen being frightened from the nest by the visiting public. Unfortunately, the second clutch of three eggs was laid after she had sat through a full incubation period on the first, and was infertile. It is remarkable that a bird which normally breeds in the short Arctic summer should have re-nested at all under the circumstances.

The other major disappointment was the loss of nine of the fifteen Ne-ne goslings hatched—three from aspergillosis and six as a result of a gape-worm infestation. In this case the parasite was Cyathostoma, a larger and more lethal worm than the usual Syngamus trachea.

An interesting ‘first’ at Slimbridge was the rearing of three female Smew from eggs laid by the wild-caught female that we acquired in 1953. This species had previously only been bred, so far as we know, by Messrs Ronald and Noel Stevens at Walcot Hall in the 1930s.
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**Remarks**

Hybrids

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