

NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2020



The UK Spanish Chicken Breeders Group Newsletter 4

Welcome

Well, what a strange and worrying year we have before us ?

Uncertainty reigns in all areas it seems ?!

I am nevertheless hearing good things from breeders who have started to hatch already so at least that is on a more positive note.

Registrars Ramblings

I have long wondered if layer's pellets are enough for breeding birds.

For those that keep cockerels in their breeding group throughout the year, are the ingredients that promote egg production doing any damage to the cockerels?

I know many will use "Breeders Ration" but again it should be fed as required from point of lay throughout the breeding period. What would be the optimum feed for cockerels during their time off ?

For this reason I raised the question with one of our long standing Poultry Men Gareth Gough with 40 years experience with poultry and 25 years with Spanish.

Having bred poultry a few times as a teenager, I found that results were often disappointing with eggs being clear, died part way through incubation, dead in shell or weak and unable to survive more than a few days. Some chicks also had splayed legs, curly toe paralysis and beak deformities.

I had a few Barbu D'Uccle bantams at the time which were completely free range but often loitered with intent outside the kitchen door waiting for scraps or raiding the kitchen for dog and cat food. They didn't really care for poultry feed but managed to lay clutches of 9-13 eggs hatching every one, producing strong vigorous chicks full of energy.

I realised that layers pellets and wheat just weren't going to give me top notch hatching eggs so I set about improving the diet of my breeder flock. I spoke to other poultry owners for their tips, looked at the nutritional content of commercial breeder ration and then looked on the shelves of my feed merchant for horse feed additives

I could incorporate into my own breeder ration.

I started feeding this once a week for a month before I wanted to keep eggs back for hatching and continued until the flock were moulting. Results were much improved.

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The linseed or cod liver oil addresses curly toe paralysis and weak leg problems along with beak deformities as it is rich in vitamin D.

The calcified seaweed is rich in calcium and also contains the building blocks for strong feather growth which helps the parent birds maintain condition and the chicks feather up.

Brewer's yeast is high in vitamin B helping the overall viability of the egg and reducing the number of eggs which don't develop full term.

Vegetable oil is rich in vitamin E, helping maintain condition and also aiding the absorption of the other nutrients.

Producing viable hatching eggs is only part of the solution for disappointing hatches. Storage and preparation for incubation are also important.

I store my hatching eggs in a cool draught free room and turn them every 12 hours. I discard any eggs more than a week old. Any porous shelled, large/small or deformed eggs are also not set. If there are any dirty mark's on the eggs I remove these with a sponge scourer dipped in a warm solution of dettol.

For hatching I either use my flock of Silkies or a modern incubator which manages humidity itself and a separate hatcher from day 19 to maintain cleanliness in the main incubator.

Here's the mix I give my adult birds once a week.

This gives them all the nutrients they need to produce viable hatching eggs and strong healthy chicks. This will suffice for a dozen birds....

One loaf of cheap/stale wholemeal bread in a large mixing bowl or small bucket with enough boiling water to make a pulpy consistency.

Add to this:-

2tbsp calcified seaweed,
2tbsp linseed or cod liver oil,
2tbsp brewer's yeast,
2 tbsp. sunflower or rape oil.

Mix through thoroughly then add enough layers pellets to make a crumbly mash. Allow to cool and then place in a trough for the birds to eat.

Gareth Gough



2018 Spanish Blue
cockerel

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Other interesting info

We have found some really interesting articles in a Practical Poultry magazine from 2009. These can be found on our website under “Newsletters and articles” please click on the link below.

<https://www.ukspanishbreeders.co.uk/articles-and-newsletters>

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Angela Bell's cockerel

Do you have a question we can ask of some of our experts? Please tell us