



THE INDIAN RUNNER DUCK



Written by Jamie Carson, Poultry Judge and Breeder of Indian Runners

Jamie Carson is an APA & ABA General Licensed Judge, judging several of the very best shows in North America each year. He has specialized in raising White Runners for the past 15 yrs and is an APA Grand Master Exhibitor. He has had several big wins at APA & IWBA Nat'l Shows. Jamie also raises lots of other breeds in ducks, geese, chickens, guineas & turkeys. His brother, Matthew Carson, is well known across North America for his Peking ducks that have been shown very successfully. Jamie hails from Canada where he lives with his wife and two daughters.

A basic overview of Indian Runner Duck care, management & choosing show-birds:

I believe that it is safe to make the statement that the Indian Runner Duck is one of, if not the, most unusual breeds of purebred fowl. Either when caged for exhibition, being judged in the ring, or "on the run" at home on the farm, Runners always gain the attention & curiosity of both the poultry enthusiast as well as the general public.

From the first time that I laid eyes on this breed, I have been amazed by and attracted to their unique carriage & confirmation. I think that it would be nearly impossible to do this great breed any justice in one short article. Although, I will do my best to cover the basics of the breed here, briefly covering both what we are looking for in show birds as well as touching on what has worked well for me in managing the breed here at home.

Our world of exhibition poultry is filled with a great variety of beautiful birds, of an extreme range in both color & body types. As is the case in breed, it is the type that makes the breed, & the color that makes the variety. So, it is so very important that we as breeders work hard to preserve the distinct body types of all of our breeds. The American Poultry Association currently recognizes several color varieties of Indian Runners. Without writing nearly a whole book on the subject, there is no way that I could even attempt to describe (in my words) what we are looking for in regards to the colors of the individual varieties, so I urge you to study your latest copy of the APA Standard of Perfection for the fine details on them. I will however mention a few

points on the confirmation of the breed, that may give you a better understanding of what to look for when choosing your breeder and exhibition birds.

The unique body type, carriage, & head qualities are of the utmost importance in Runner Ducks.

1. In a few words, the ideal bird can be described as *tall, lean & refined*. Good Runners need to be tall, in fact "the taller the better", as long as the bird also has the proper body. By this I mean that I would much prefer to see a great type bird with a little less height, than a tall bird with a coarse body & "beefy" head. The Runner's body itself should be long, sleek & round, with a long thin neck that blends smoothly into the body. One of the most common faults in this breed is "chestiness", meaning that the bird's shoulders are very distinct.

2. The Runner Duck's head & bill should be long, straight & refined. The eye placement should be as close to the top of the head as possible. Coarse heads are undesirable as well. The ideal Runner head should have very little depth from the top of the skull, to the bottom of the jaw.

3. Before moving on to the next topic, I must also mention the Runner's very unique body carriage. When properly displaying themselves, the body should be held nearly perpendicular to the ground, with its tail carried in line with its back. Another common fault that we see are persistently cocked-up tails. It is not often that we see birds that consistently carry their tails directly in line with their back, though should be done when standing erect.

In fact it has been my experience that the Runners that are always "pushing" their tails down (even when not "showing"), this often show signs of leg weakness.

4. Indian Runners are a naturally high-strung breed and often don't adapt well to our standard show cages, thus many will seldom display themselves to their advantage.

5. Because of this, it is now becoming a very common practice that this breed is ring-judged, meaning that all competitors in the same class are placed together in a large circular pen. *As of the 2002 National Convention, the APA now officially recommends this method of judging Runners.*

5. Ring-judging is not only a very efficient way to evaluate the class by comparison; it also makes it possible for the judge to properly study the bird's carriage & gait. By "gait" I am referring to the way that the bird walks (or runs!). The gait of this breed is like no other, as they should walk upright with a smooth, quick step, while other breeds "waddle".

6. The information that I have included here is to only serve as a very brief overview of what I feel that judges and breeders should be looking for in exhibition-type Runners, both at home and in the show-room, and is simply my own personal interpretation of our Standard of Perfection. Taking this into account, I urge you to consult the APA Standard for more detailed information, as well as other Runner breeders & judges.

7. Next, I will comment on what has worked well for us, in relation to feeding, care, and general husbandry of the breed. I must remind you though that the following is definitely not the only way to successfully manage this breed, as I am well aware that

there are several other very well-known Runner breeders who do things rather differently than we do.

8. I will first start from the beginning, meaning *the care of the breeding birds*, in the spring of the year. Indian Runners are normally excellent layers, & fertility is seldom a problem. Most Runner males are very capable of covering 5-6 females, and often more. I believe that one of the biggest reasons of poor fertility is due to the number of drakes in the breeding pen. Although it is probably best & most common to only use one male in each pen, some breeders prefer to "flock" mate their birds. If more than one drake is used per pen, the males will often compete so much for the "attention" of the females, that the rate of fertility is actually affected. I would only suggest using more than one male in each breeding pen, if there are at least 5 females for each of them. We traditionally try to have the majority of our ducklings hatch during the month of May, as when hatched then they are normally nicely finished & well grown to compete well at the fall shows.

9. We start feeding our breeding stock a good quality waterfowl breeder ration (with no other "grain") shortly after the first of March. I believe that it is very important to start them on this "better feed" at least one month prior to collecting your first hatching eggs, as it will properly condition your breeders, thus produce healthier embryos. Our first eggs are normally set during the early part of April. Most Runner breeders use artificial incubation with great success, while others simply let the ducks hatch their own little ones or give their eggs to a bird of another breed. Most Runner females will do a good job of raising their own family, although it is very important that they be given *a nice quite area to do so, as they are often easily frightened*, which may result in broken eggs or injured babies. Artificially hatched birds will require a supplemental heat source for several weeks (depending upon your environmental temperature), which is often supplied using a heat lamp. We normally start the little guys at about 90 degrees F, & then gradually lower the temperature as they grow. A good quality waterfowl starter crumb has worked the best for us, & is supplied to them on a free-choice basis (with clean, fresh water). At 4-6 weeks of age (depending on their rate of growth), we then switch them to grower pellets. Normally by this time the birds are also let out into a small yard during the day, though never given access to swimming water until they are fully feathered, which is normally at about 8 weeks of age.

10. At approx 10 weeks of age, we then allow the young birds access to clean swimming water. It is important to monitor them very closely at first, to be sure that they know how to get out of the water. It is normally at this same time (if they are nearly as tall as their parents) that we switch their rations to offering them free-choice whole oats, as well as a small amount grower pellets once or twice a day (as much as they'll clean-up in about 10 minutes). This method of feeding tends to keep them from becoming **too fat** (which greatly affects the required "sleek" appearance that we desire), although still maintains a good level of vitamins, protein, & minerals to keep them healthy.

11. Exercise is very important for Runners as well (for birds of any age), as it keeps them trim, & their legs strong. We tend to encourage this by placing the feed trays up to 50 feet from their watering area. This forces the birds to "run back & forth" almost constantly while eating, as they require a drink after consuming a few mouthfuls of feed. We normally keep our young birds (as well as the breeders once we have stopped collecting eggs) on this diet throughout the fall & early winter months. When the colder weather arrives, we then switch them to a free-choice mixture consisting of two-thirds whole wheat, and one-third waterfowl grower pellets. I realize that many

waterfowl breeders feed some corn to their stock through the winter months, though our experience has been that they gain too much weight on it, which can result in production problems, come spring. Our wheat-pellet mixture is used not only for our Runners, though for all of our other ducks & geese as well, & brings them all through the winter in good breeding condition. If you live in an area where extreme winter temperatures are not a concern, I would probably maintain the Runner flock on the oats-pellets diet described above, though I can't speak from experience on that point.

12. Next, before closing, I will comment on the **housing requirements** for Indian Runners. Runners are a very easy breed to accommodate. The height of our lowest fences here is approx 2.5 feet. Since most are not great flyers, fencing of this height has worked well for us. Although, our perimeter fencing is 4 feet high, & made of 2 by 4 inch welded mesh, to help protect them from unwanted "visitors". Whether it be when growing, breeding, or maintaining adult birds, the size of their enclosure can really never be too large. Currently, our breeding pens are 10 by 70 feet in size, with each having access to a brook running through the far end. These same pens are used for growing young birds once they have reached 4-6 weeks of age (are kept confined inside prior to this), although they are not given access to the brook, until are fully feathered. Each of these pens has access to our building during the day, although all of our stock is securely locked in at night, which has greatly decreased our problems with predators. We also have one larger pen, that is used to house the adult birds, both when done breeding for the year, as well as throughout the winter months. This pen measures approx 60 by 100 feet, with the birds having access to a brook, as with the smaller pens. I fully realize that not all breeders have this amount of space available for their birds (& some likely have far more), which is fine as well. It has only been for the last 6 years that we ourselves were able to provide the birds with these accommodations, as before this time we lived closer to town, & only had room for far smaller runs. Smaller pens work fine as well, although we must ensure that they not become crowded, which will result in muddy yards & poorly conditioned birds. Although water in the form of a pond or brook really does cut down on the workload of caring for the birds, it is by no means necessary. Again, before moving to our present location, our birds only had access to clean water supplied in large pans and/or "kiddie pools". As long as the water in these containers is not allowed to become dirty for long periods of time, the birds will still stay in great condition.

In closing, I hope that the above information that I've compiled on Indian Runner Ducks has been of interest to you, the reader, & hopefully of benefit to some new Runner enthusiasts as well. We have been fortunate to enjoy a good amount of success both breeding & showing Indian Runner Ducks over the past several years, with the information included here being the basics of what has worked well for us. I receive several inquiries each year asking what systems we use in caring for and choosing show & breeder birds in our flock, which is the main reason that prompted me to finally sit down to write this article. I hope that you have enjoyed reading this information, at least as much as I have enjoyed writing it.