

ON DOMESTICATED HYBRID DUCKS (*ANAS BOSCHAS* + *OBSCURA*).

By ELISHA SLADE.

The Mallard (*Anas boschas*) and the Dusky Duck (*A. obscura*) breed regularly in this neighborhood (Bristol County, Massachusetts). A brood of ducklings of the latter, about a month old, was caught in the summer of 1876. They bred in 1877, one female laying eighty-four eggs in eighty-five days before she wanted to set. During the year 1877 the drakes were destroyed by accident, and of the young which were raised all were ducks. In 1877 young wild Mallards (*A. boschas*) were caught; and, being unable to procure a dusky drake (I wanted very much to have a flock of *A. obscura*), the Mallard drakes were mated with the dusky ducks. I now have in my yard one of the dusky ducks of 1876, and one Mallard drake of 1877, and the rest of the birds are lineal descendants of this pair. The hybrids show in color a very nearly equal blending of the two species in each sex, and are perfectly fertile *inter se*. The birds mate regularly without quarreling, and in every instance have remated each spring—the union lasting for life, probably. The only restraint on the birds since 1877 has been an annual clipping of the left wing; otherwise they have full liberty. When the ducks set, every egg hatches, and the period of incubation does not vary thirty minutes from twenty six days and four hours. The eggs set under hens hatch on the twenty-sixth or twenty-seventh day, according to circumstances. The ducks lay from sixty to ninety eggs each before wanting to set, sometimes in one place, but occasionally in different places; and if not indulged in setting will lay again in a few days. They have averaged ninety-six eggs apiece for the spring and summer term, and twenty for the fall term of laying. Prior to 1880 the young ducks were difficult to raise, probably from the changed condition of food and environment, but since then they are as hardy as common ducks. Rats (*Mus decumanus*) are a scourge, in fact are very destructive, and have destroyed ten to twenty or more ducks, from a day to a week old, in a single day and night. If there was any possible way of protection from this source of loss, I should as much expect to raise the same per cent. of ducks as of chickens.

The later-hatched birds have increased in size to some extent, have somewhat thicker legs, and, from abundance of food and lack of flight exercise, are slightly less graceful in movement than the earlier birds. But they are not yet demoralized by domestication nor denaturalized by the tribute they are paying to the science of natural history. There are no ponds nor streams on my premises, and their supply for drinking and bathing is furnished two or three times daily in shallow dishes.

I have one pair of birds mated and fertile, of which the male is three-fourths Mallard and one-fourth Dusky Duck, the female three-fourths Dusky Duck and one-fourth Mallard.