

POULTRY AND PIGEONS.

WHITE WILD DUCKS.

I HAVE a pure-bred wild duck and drake that last year had two nests of young ones. In the first hatch were ten of the true wild duck colour, and one (which turned out a duck) with pure white plumage. In the second nest there were again ten of the true wild colour and one pure white drake, and a duck all white, except a black spot on the top of the head and black tail coverts—this duck is now pure white in plumage. The beaks of the two that were pure white are bright orange; the beak of the other ducks is bright orange, with the saddle on the upper beak much speckled with rich black. The legs of all three are orange, the webs of the feet of a more dusky colour. All three are remarkably slender in form, and have the long graceful shape of the pure wild duck.

This year the same pair of old birds have eleven young ones of the true wild duck colour, and one pure white. Both the old birds were from eggs taken from separate wild duck nests, are both pinioned, and the duck has had no access to any other drake.

Early this year the white drake was paired with the white duck. She has eight young ones nearly full grown, five of which are pure white in plumage, the other three white with the small black spot on the top of the head and black in the tail coverts. The black on these three is much less than it was when they were in their first feathers, and will very likely be replaced with white when they make up their plumage.

The other duck that had the black spot on the head and the black tail coverts was paired with a wild drake of the true colour. Her nests having been twice destroyed, she has only four young ones, which are not yet feathered, but from appearance three will be pure white, and one with the spot on the head and some black above the tail.

The white drake and two ducks have not been pinioned, and during last autumn and beginning of winter had full liberty of flying miles round, but never, that I know of, alighting anywhere except at their own ponds. When taking a long flight they would go an immense height, and to my mind there are few more beautiful sights than to watch their manœuvres in the air on a windy day, especially when coming down.

I am totally at a loss to account for these white birds, as the remainder of the old duck's young are as like one another and like their parents as possible, and it is more strange that the nearly white duck put to the grey drake should produce white young ones. It is again singular that the coloured feathers should be all black, not one having had a grey feather. Beautiful as these white birds are, if they would retain the black spot on the top of the head, and the black tail coverts some of them have in their earlier feathers, they would be still more beautiful.

RICHARD TEEBAY.

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