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Ducks: Tending a Small-Scale Flock for Pleasure and Profit (Hobby Farms)

Cherie Langlois

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Written by hobby farmer Cherie Langlois from Washington state, Ducks is a fantastic overview of these entertaining and adaptable waterfowl. The author begins by asking “What do these water-crazy birds have that make them as much an asset to farms as landlubbing poultry?” She provides many answers that defend the virtues and versatility of ducks and argues that the duck is superior to the ubiquitous chicken in many ways. As a zoologist, Langlois has a gift for elucidating the details of the waterfowl’s anatomy, traits and behavior, all revealed in the first chapter “Meet the Duck.” She proceeds by leading readers through the process of choosing the right ducks for their hobby farm, considering the various domestic breeds (from bantams to heavyweights) as well as the sex of the birds and number of birds/breeds ideal for beginning a hobby-farm flock.

The book offers advice on housing these very adaptable birds that thrive in various climates and regions throughout the world: space requirements, ventilation, flooring, feeders, and fencing. Naturally, ducks need water to thrive in the form of an existing lake, a manmade pond or simple duck pools, all discussed in the housing chapter. “The Duck Diet” chapter discusses the nutritional needs of the flock and various feeding options farmers and ranchers can consider. Seasoned duck aficionados interested in getting into the business of ducklings will find much information in the breeding chapter, which catalogs methods for hatching, incubators, mama duck and baby care, and more. The health of livestock is always a major consideration for the hobby farmer, and the chapter “Flock Health and Handling” offers a mini course in disease prevention, proper hygiene, recognizing symptoms of illnesses, and dealing with common maladies.

The advantages of duck farming—the superior quality of duck eggs, down, and meat--are the focal point of the final chapter “Harvesting the Rewards,” likely the first chapter the dubious duck farmer will read prior to taking the dive into ducks. The book concludes with appendices of endangered duck breeds and duck diseases, resources, a glossary of terms, and a complete index.

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