

Buying and Selling Hatching Eggs By Matt Lhamon

First off, I equate the buying and selling of exhibition poultry hatching eggs to buying one of those scratch off lottery tickets at the gas station. Most times you lose and occasionally you get a winner. I approach buying hatching eggs like I do when I exhibit birds in a show; I expect nothing so I am never disappointed and sometimes I am pleasantly surprised.

I did an experiment this spring since my interest was sparked in NB White Polish Bantams this winter when I saw and purchased a couple cockerels at the Florida Sunshine Classic Show. I walked by and did a double take and in my 50 plus years, I couldn't remember ever seeing one.

When I got back home, I put a few feelers out to my friends in the Polish Bantam fancy and I found out they are very rare and uncommon as the Bearded Whites are more popular. So, I proceeded to order a few dozen hatching eggs off folks recommended on EBay and other various sources.

My rules for buying hatching eggs. 1. Research the seller and if possible, check the feedback from previous customers. 2. Avoid shipping if at all possible and pick the eggs up at a show or at the seller's home. 3. Make sure they are coming from a mating that has been tested for fertility and the seller has gotten fertile eggs from the mating. 4. If they are shipping the eggs to you, they need to be adequately packaged and sent Two Day Priority Mail. The faster they get them off to you, the better your chances of a successful hatch. 5. When the eggs arrive, unbox and set in the hatching tray outside the incubator for a few hours to let them rest and acclimate to the environment. This is important because they may have been chilled in shipment. 6. Constant temperature and humidity is vital to a successful hatch so make sure your incubation methods are working and successful before you even try to buy hatching eggs.

I was very fortunate with my experience with shipped in hatching eggs this year. I had 88 make the shipping event intact. Of the 88, 78 we're fertile. 74 viable embryos we're moved from the setter to the hatcher on day 19. 68 healthy chicks were hatched. This was exceptional and I believe it was because they were gathered and shipped in late April and it may have helped my hatch rate. Cooler or hotter weather will have an effect on the process.

Sellers can guarantee nothing but the eggs are from fertile matings, packaged correctly and shipped promptly. The rest is up to chance and dependent on the buyer's skills and husbandry methods. Do not complain if the eggs are damaged in shipping and air cells are distended. It happens sometimes and not the seller's or buyer's fault. Remember buying hatching eggs is a gamble like that scratch off lottery ticket!

My partner, Mike Sayre and I (M&M Exhibition Poultry) both retired in January of 2022. In 2023, we have decided to sell hatching eggs and started chicks at our homes and the shows we attend. We will also ship out a few settings of hatching eggs to a few customers. We have both sent hatching eggs out before with varied success. The biggest detriment to a successful hatch

is the shipping process like I stated above, if you can avoid shipping it will help your hatch percentage. The second biggest issue is the lack of proper incubation skills on the buyer's end. I know that I sent out two dozen eggs from the same mating to two different customers a few years ago, one hatched 17 out of 18 and the other hatched zero. The seller has zero control once the eggs leave their hands. Once you get possession, what happens is now your responsibility. If you get a good hatch, be happy and get them in the brooder. If you get a poor hatch, analyze your processes and learn from what went wrong. Don't get on the Internet and bad mouth the breeder over things that were out of their control and all in your control. These types of customers are why most breeders will not attempt to sell hatching eggs.

Our decision to sell hatching eggs was based on the poor experiences we have had with live bird shipping the past few years. We agree that probably the worst way to get a start in exhibition poultry is with hatching eggs but sometimes it is the only option and worth the risk. For example, several dozen will be going to Alaska next year because it is basically the only way to safely get them a start.

Our rules for selling hatching eggs; 1. All eggs come from fertility tested matings which we have already hatched chicks from. 2. All matings are from our same matings we use for our show birds, we don't make up sub-par matings just to peddle hatching eggs! 3. All eggs are gathered, stored and properly cared for prior to shipping or customer pickup. 4. If we are shipping, they will be shipped promptly, packaged correctly and sent 2 Day Priority Mail to the customer. 5. Follow up with the customer to ensure arrival was successful. 6. I am always curious as to the rate of hatch and incubation procedures are kind of my thing and like to hear what others did or didn't do with their settings and hatch rate. 6. Remember there are no guarantees and it's a gamble like that scratch off lottery ticket!

Finally, I would be remiss if I didn't mention a couple masters of the hatching egg game that have gone on to greater rewards but I know they are smiling down upon those of us still here! John Wunderlich, Harry and Vi Halbach, Wade Fullington and Ralph Sturgeon are all past sellers of hatching eggs that I purchased eggs from and had fantastic hatches. They knew the business and I hope we can do half as well as they did when they sent hatching eggs to their customers! Some of my prized possessions are at the old hatching egg and mating brochures the breeders used to send out to solicit sales as some were works of art. I hope this article sheds some light on the process and magnifies the risk vs reward of obtaining hatching eggs to jumpstart your breeding programs.