

SUCCESSFUL BREEDING

reproduced from Winter 1979 Newsletter

A healthy buck is always ready to mate. A normal doe will only accept service at the more or less regular periods she is in heat or season. The first period of heat in a doe's life usually occurs soon after her most rapid growth ceases, which may be when only 3½ to 4 months old in the case of well reared youngsters in the early months of the year, or when 5 to 6 months old in the second half of the year, or in the case of youngsters in the more gigantic breeds. Thereafter the average doe usually comes in season at intervals of every two or three weeks and remains in this condition for 3 or 4 days. It is advisable when letting her miss a period to note the date on the hutch so as to be able to make the calculation and catch her at the right time on a future occasion.

Some does will apparently mate at almost any time but more often than not their condition is due to a local trouble, and although they may accept the service time after time, they will not be likely to prove in kindle unless one of the dates on which they are mated happens to coincide with the date on which they ought to be in heat. During the period of heat, and only then, ova are ripened and discharged ready for fertilization by the male sperm, at no other time can a service be successful, however willingly accepted. It is therefore important to learn to recognize the most propitious moment for mating a doe and it is one of the greatest difficulties experienced by beginners. To those who have studied their does as individuals, a change of demeanour will be evident when they are coming in season. They will become more vivacious and lively, some may show temper, others pluck themselves. Some may rub their chins on food dishes like bucks often do. The chief thing to attract attention is that a doe does some trifling thing which is not her usual habit to do. She should then be caught and examined locally for swelling and redness of the external genital organs, and especially for a purplish appearance and distended state of the small blood vessels.

No doe that is in low health, weakened from any cause, or ill fed, comes in season. This state has been described as the 'crown of health' and arises at once when the receipts in the way of food outbalance the expenditure in warmth and energy production. Hence a doe usually comes in heat when her litter is between 3 and 4 weeks old – in other words when the youngsters are beginning to be self supporting and the mother is commencing to make a recovery from

the trail of rearing them. If a doe will not breed at this time she is evidently being underfed. If this period is missed for any reason, she can be mated 3 weeks later with a good chance of success if she has not become too fat in the interval. When a litter has been lost at birth, the doe will usually mate again 7 to 10 days later.

Does will very often appear to be in heat and will accept service 3 weeks from the date on which they were mated although they are actually in young. No harm or result in any way comes from such matings and a litter has sometimes been born a week later and normally reared, but it is not a practice to recommend or allow for there is a serious risk of abortion or super foetation and it is possible for the former to occur without the breeder being aware of anything wrong but the fact that his doe has missed to both services. In normal does this period of excitement three weeks after service is employed in making her nest; it is when she fails to do this that the breeder is tempted to believe that she is not in kindle and mates her again. However, it is safer, unless the breeder is certain she has missed and begrudges the time which will be wasted in giving her the benefit of the doubt (involving a wait of perhaps another three weeks until her next period), to keep a doe away from the buck until her full time is up. Some does which have been mated but are not in kindle make a nest in the normal way and produce no litter.

The spring is the natural breeding season when all usually goes well, but does will often accept service in the autumn without maturing ova, with the result that no litter is obtained. As fecundity is induced by foods rich in albuminoids, the remedy is obvious.

When a doe is believed to be in season she must be conveyed to the bucks hutch. This rule is absolute, for although there may be exceptions, and it is possible to adopt all sorts of unorthodox methods and play all sorts of tricks without ill result with some of the debilitated and phlegmatic exhibition strains, the fact remains that it is doe rabbit nature to resent the introduction of a male into her home and it is a most dangerous proceeding for the buck to introduce him into the hutch of a doe. Even when correct methods have been adopted, many bucks have been killed by savage does, especially with the more virile hybrids. If for any reason the bucks hutch is unsuitable for the purpose, a special mating hutch free from obstruction of any sort should be used (a circular pen is ideal). The buck should be put into the hutch half an hour before the doe is introduced. The floor of the hutch at the time of mating should always be clean of straw and

debris. The rabbits must be supervised throughout. A known savage doe or one which shows the least symptom of spitefulness should never let go of, but should be held lightly by the ears (with a stout glove on) to prevent her turning on the buck.