

Settling

by David Black, Sunderland, England

My system of settling young tipplers is to take the youngsters away from the parents checking them over first that they have no health problems from the breeding part at around 25 days old. I place them into a weaning cage or section of the loft where they can have access to good corn and water. I use little seeds that they can easily pick up and learn to eat that way first. What I find at this stage is the youngsters appear to be nervous and all of them will crowd in one corner and look very reluctant to want to come to the food or take a drink. A good idea at this stage is to place a good young dropper hen in there with them that will show them the way. They would normally find the food ok but some don't seem to find the water – a good sign to look for is the eyes squinting or blinking meaning they are not finding the water. This is when you need to dip the bird's beaks into the water. Birds getting no water can cause all sorts of problems later so it's best that they can have access to water at all times during this stage and should be checked upon regularly. Any youngsters falling behind can be put back in with their parents to catch up then put back later. I do this for around 3 days before taking the food and water away.

The next stage is getting the tipplers in and around the trapping area. My weaning cage has access to the trapping cage so the tipplers get the first look out at the outside world. Some are reluctant to go out into the open area. So sometimes I place them in there myself – this then is the start of the first stage.

Learning the tipplers to trap at this stage is easier since none of the tipplers can fly and can easily be picked up and placed on the loft top. I pick one bird out at a time leaving the rest of the youngsters in the trap. I have a few white droppers out with them to associate home and make them feel safe. The bird out on its own doesn't like it by itself and like sheep it wants to be next to the rest of the youngsters in the trap. My trap device is a box with a square missing from the roof of the box which the youngster can see through and it drops no more than a foot deep to be next to the rest. This is repeated by changing a different bird until all have had a few turns and accustomed to going into the trap. Once trap trained they can be called back into the weaning cage which again most are reluctant to go back in but once one bird reacts again like sheep the rest will follow. I would then have the white young dropper in there to encourage them back in. When all are back in only a few grains are given because the next day they need to earn their food. Again I repeat the process the following day putting out the hungry droppers first then allowing the youngsters into the trap. The youngsters may be more inquisitive than last time and it's then you can place again one at a time on the loft and throw a bit of seed in there, it will soon be in next to the youngsters competing for food. Also at the same time they're getting used to being handled and it is then when you are sure all the youngsters know why they are dropping into the trap. Now more can be placed on the top once they all know the drill and eventually all can be placed on the top along with the droppers, which means the youngsters have to be fast to the seed or no dinner,

Depending on how well the tipplers reacted to your instructions and to this process is how well they are fed when getting them into the trap – remember they are back out again the next day so

always have them wanting more. Keep an eye on which tipplers are winning the race to the seed and which are been left behind, they may need pulling to one side to be given more feed. This is repeated for around a week or so getting them on the loft top as much as you can to compete with the droppers and this is the only time they re going to be fed on the loft top or in the trap. Under no circumstances should they be chased or scared. This is their routine now; loft top only and only feed with droppers no free food because they have to earn it.

By the second week the tipplers will be well drilled into chasing seed and a good way to get them to fly a little bit is to have an area for them to fly to. I had another loft opposite about 14 feet away which when you throw the seed from one loft to another the droppers will be used to this drill and the tipplers will follow. Some will miss the odd time and have to spin around and land back onto the loft with the trap. This still gets them used to landing back to the loft top and gives them the little practice they need to stretch the wings. This is about the time you think the birds should be ready for the air.

By the 3rd week or just before depending on the weather conditions of being parted from their parents all the recent work put into the tipplers should put them into good stead. It is then the risk of losing them starts. The day I want to settle tipplers I start the normal process out with the droppers in the trap with the tipplers. I open the lid and by this day have them extra keen. I play with them a few minutes to remind them once again.

I then put away all but one of the tipplers and leave only one of them out – normally a big ugly beaky cock that you're not worried about loosing. Everyone has favourites and I don't want the lot up at once loosing all the nice hens. The droppers are put away with the trap locked so he can't get in. This is the first time he has been on the loft top left alone so he will probably be confused and strike to the air. As soon as he gets any height, out with the droppers. Without anything to fly with down he will come no bother, he now becomes the leader bird.

Repeat this process a few times a day being careful that he's responding ok after a few minutes in the air and coming straight to the droppers. This is when you can add another bird the next one out of the batch that is not appealing to the eye. They then go up together hopefully the leader bird keeps next to it and again any sign of height or puling apart the droppers are out working the loft. From above this is seen as competition for food and down they should come. This is when patience is most vital, you may have to stand and wait. Sometimes having other youngsters from the batch working with the droppers gets them down plus the youngsters get a look at them above coming to land.

Try and have plenty of time on your hands around this period each time adding another bird until they are kitting well. Remember you're not after any sort of time but drilling the birds by teaching them to drop and dropping is a priority at this stage. As you go you will realise that its all to do with food and you will get the food right as you go.

I have had plenty of success settling youngsters over the years this way – losing very little.

Hope this works for you.

