

## Pairing Time-Are You Ready? Submitted by: Ross Hunt

Usually the first thing that happens as you begin the pairing of your Giant Homers is to throw away all the pairing notes that you have made in the last few months.

One rule of thumb is don't let the judge mate your birds. You know your birds especially their pedigree much better than he does. Some breeders pay too much attention to color. Yes, color is a consideration but not everything. The body of a Giant Homer is 36 points on the Standard of Perfection, As Giant Homer Great Jack Anderson once said "build your barn, then paint it!" For example, several breeders are working on the Milky Factor. This rare color, in the Giant Homers, was almost lost again in recent years from sickness and other reasons. Grover Williams, Jim Barrett, and we at H & H Lofts have launched an effort to up-grade this beautiful color. We have the bodies but have to regain the Giant Homer head which is 15 points. We have the heads on some but progress must be made. Again, Giant Homer bodies are 36 points, heads are 15 points for a total of 51 points. Color is 10 floating points in addition to the 100 basis points.

At the time of mating, if you use individual pens, always trend to return the cock to his previous pen. This practice is not etched in stone, but does work in most cases. Giant Homer matings are matings of contrast-what one doesn't have the other does. When possible mate an older bird to a younger bird. This is not always possible but is a good practice when you can. "Timing"-Timing could, might, or should be close to everything but at least is a big help. Joe Braun, one of our top breeders, and I had this discussion several years back and came to the conclusion that timing was at least a great benefit. Here at H & H, we put lights on the young and old birds from 4 a.m. to 8 a.m. November 1<sup>st</sup> until the birds are mated and after. This prevents short days from ever coming into play before breeding season. Our breeding season starts December 1<sup>st</sup>. Another practice that can be put into play is to put a couple of 2-year-old cocks that are full of get up and go into the hen pens (both young and old) for about an hour every day for a week before mating the pairs. Stimulus in its purest form.

Genetics, Genetics, Genetics! is like the Location, Location, Location-you can't beat it! There is no guarantee to success but it does gradually increase your chance of success in the show room. Most breeders don't use or believe in genetics as we do.

It has been very successful for us. It will not hurt your breeding program to apply some degree of genetics program to it. By constant out crossing, the bloodline of a superior Giant Homer will be lost in several generations. Why not go the other way and preserve his/her genetics for generations to come?

When the breeding season gets into full swing, your pairs will need extra care as they are working full time. They will need their regular supplement of vitamins. Some breeders give vitamins every day, some several times weekly-either way is a plus! Here at H & H we give a vitamin/lactose mixture 4 times weekly and are very satisfied with the results.

Another and maybe the most important supplement that can be given during the entire duration of the breeding season is 38% Calcium Gluconate at a rate of 2 tablespoons per gallon of water. It is inexpensive and can be purchased at your local feed store or Tractor Supply Store. Calcium is an essential nutrient and the hens are depleting their bodies pretty quickly by egg laying, feeding their youngsters, and then laying again. Some hens will get to the point of just lying on the pen floor. When this happens 10-15 cc/ml of straight Calcium Gluconate down the throat will usually have them up and around pretty quickly. Repeat this for 2 to 3 days. Calcium Gluconate, through their parents, is also very good for the development of the youngsters in the nest as well as the grow pens.

Infertility-if you have a pair that has two rounds of infertile eggs don't fool yourself, they have problems and changes must be made. Every breeder has their remedies be it swapping pairs, substitute from the singles pen or other ways. Do not wait, two rounds are enough.

We do hope that you have a successful breeding season and that you raise that CHAMPION!