

off the fire. Ten to thirty seconds pass before the billy is swung back over the fire—the masters differ on the exact time. The billy comes to the boil again and is lifted off smartly.

There are two main schools of thought on the best way of making the leaves settle. One insists on tapping the sides of the billy smartly with a stick. The other grasps it firmly by the handle and twirls it round in full circles, not spilling a drop. Another school of thought which is frowned on by the master of the art uses half a cup of cold water to make the leaves settle.

The tea is ready. Your bushman usually likes it black—without milk—but sweetened with sugar. More effete types use milk, usually condensed.

Making billy tea is a symbol of the comradeship of the men in the bush. The phrase “care for a cup of tea?” which greets newcomers is time-honoured in the outback. It is not too much to claim that billy tea is as symbolic of the Australia beyond the cities as the gum tree is.

—With acknowledgment to “Corroboree”.

OUR GIRLS



Annabelle Knox, of Karuah, loves a spin on her motor bike



But Margaret Roberts, of Box Ridge, Coraki, prefers to make music

Artificial Light is the Key to Egg Supply in the Winter

To get eggs in the winter is a problem. The natural time for birds to lay is in the spring. However, poultrymen have overcome this difficulty and if the home gardener follows their example and uses artificial lights and laying cages, eggs can be as plentiful in winter as in spring.

Cages take up so little space and can be kept in any shelter or outbuilding that is light and airy, but able to protect the layers from weather extremes—from cold and wet, which always brings down egg production.

Birds in cages don't have to compete with one another for feed so they lay more eggs. The bird at the bottom of the so-called peck order is able to contribute her quota, as the others can't chase her away from food or water.

There is much less trouble with parasites, like coccidiosis or round worms in cages. In fact there is much less trouble even with common colds when birds are kept in this modern way, and healthy birds always mean more eggs, other things being equal.

But the key to the problem of winter eggs really lies in artificial light, which helps to duplicate spring conditions by shortening the nights. The main conditions of spring are warmth—which can be provided by good houses, and extended hours of light—which can be provided if lights are used to supplement the hours of daylight.

Once we were told that the increased winter production under artificial lights, which lengthened the total hours of light, was due to the birds being able and encouraged to eat more food. But when pellet feeding was introduced, which enables birds to eat all they want in the shortest possible time, this was found not to be the case.

Now we know the longer hours of light stimulate the pituitary gland through the nerves of the eyes, and this master gland fills the blood with hormones that start the egg producing organisms into action. Hens must have 14 hours of light, either natural or artificial, in order to lay profitably.

In spring or summer, the long days provide the 14 hours of light, but in winter we need some sort of lighting system to do the trick.

It is the easiest thing to have an extension of the electric light from your house to the fowl house, with a switch somewhere handy in your house.

On commercial poultry farms a time switch is used to switch the lights on early in the morning and off at sunrise, so as to give the birds a total of 14 hours light. In home gardens the expense of a time switch is hardly justified and, if one is not improvised by using the old alarm clock to switch the lights on in the early morning and your thumb to switch them off when you get up, the additional light can be given in the evening, to make up the 14 hours of total light.

Birds in cages don't have to find their perches after the lights go out, so no pilot light is necessary. But in the case of birds on deep litter floors, a dim pilot light must