

Local youth shows poultry at the Royal



By Mark Pavilons

The young frizzles are a bit flighty. The rosecombs have a distinct appearance and the bantams can be a bit bossy.

Make no mistake, King's Michael Day knows his birds ? he can spot each one a mile away and knows them by name.

The 12-year-old Kettleby Public School student is gearing up for The Royal Winter Fair, where he will be showing more than two dozen of his birds in various poultry classes.

He enjoys it, not so much for the competition, but just seeing how good his birds are. This will be his third year showing and even at his age, he knows the ins and outs of what makes a show-winner. It's all about breeding and ensuring the colours remain pure and vibrant.

Along with the ducks, Buff Brahmas, Mille Fleurs and Rosecomb chickens, Michael is quite taken by the pair of geese and the lone peacock who live at the Keele Street farm in northern King.

Michael knows all their qualities and quirks. Some are driven by instinct and attack their food, while others are more tame and keep to themselves. They have distinct personalities, and while they may not be logical animals, they are capable of learning. Most of them have names and Michael can spot the best plumage or imperfections in their feathers. Qualities that an outsider may find appealing in the birds would likely get them disqualified. It takes a trained eye to know what to look for in a show bird.

The competition at fairs and the Royal is a lot of fun. Awards do help in buying, selling and of course, bragging rights.

Michael's mom Vicky enjoys the benefits of having chickens ? the farm fresh eggs. Once they have names, they tend ?not to eat them,??but Michael warns to name the more uncooperative birds ?Lunch.?

Vicky herself will show rabbits and guinea pigs at the Royal.

Those who regularly show their animals are a friendly, helpful group of people who constantly share information, tips and advice.

Vicky noted their expertise is invaluable since there are very few small animal vets around. Some farmers boast generations of experience raising animals, so their knowledge is second to none.

Michael's hands-on approach has given him a great deal of knowledge and he's in charge of all aspects of caring for his birds. Living in rural King, they must also be aware of local predators, the most cunning of which is the weasel. Michael has even been able to spot ailments and certain diseases. He keeps a close eye on the ducks, whose feet are designed for swimming and not walking.

The birds appear social in their own groups, and will often display their dominance, revealing just who's boss.

The Days will no doubt have fun and learn a few things at this year's Royal.