Bat Bird

Bat Bird is a chicken that plays a baseball game with a human. The game is played on a chicken-sized field. When it is the chicken's turn at bat, a signal light near the bat is turned on. The chicken pulls a rubber loop to knock the ball up the miniature field and into a score box. If the first stroke of the bat does not send the ball into a score box, the chicken keeps trying until it scores. Every other time the bird makes a score, the YES signal is sounded. A lighted scoreboard tells whether the bird has made a single, double, triple, or home run. Now it is the person's turn. The human plays by pushing a button to operate the bat and likewise plays until the ball lands in a score box. Each player takes a turn until the game is

** 13 **

completed when one player has received 6 points.

Chickens that do well on the loop-pulling part of the chicken "aptitude test" are candidates to be Bat Birds. Bat Bird trainees are placed into a standard Bat Bird unit -- standard except that the electrical feeder is operated by a pushbutton held by a trainer, rather than being fired by an automatic control device. Usually the chicken recognizes the loop right away and begins to pull at it. The trainer rewards the bird for pulling the loop. The pulls may be weak at first. Sometimes the trainer will reward the chicken even for touching or looking at the loop. After a few weak starts, the bird usually starts pulling at the loop vigorously enough to move the ball.

Now the trainer rewards only pulls on the loop that move the ball way up the field. When the bird is doing this regularly, the trainer now waits to reward the bird until the ball actually goes into one of the scoring slots. At this point, the bird is ready for its final training stage, and the trainer can disconnect the pushbutton and use the special electrical control device. The performance now runs automatically. When the bird sees the signal light come on next to the bat, it starts to pull the loop, batting at the ball until it makes a score -- the ball does not go into a scoring slot every time the bat strikes it. The number of times the bird needs to pull on the loop to activate the bat varies from trial to trial. So we say the bird is on a VARIABLE RATIO schedule of reinforcement. And this ratio is doubled later in training when the system is set so that only EVERY OTHER ball falling into a scoring slot feeds the chicken.

Bat Bird training is now complete. From one to two months are needed to train a Bat Bird chicken.