

## **COLUMBIAN COCHINS**

by Craig Hansen (2013)

I consider the Columbian Pattern to be one of the strikingly beautiful patterns in the poultry world. What follows is about my experiences with Columbian Cochins.

After looking for decent Columbians for over a year Tom Roebuck agreed to sell me 2 pairs of Columbians. When I found out the hens were still laying I drove 17 hrs to Virginia to pick them up. After 2 hrs at Tom's in Virginia I was back on the road to Iowa. I finally had the retirement present for myself that I had wanted. I hatched every egg they laid that summer and ended up with about 35. I also kept reading the Bantam Standard for guidance.

I was trying to picture what they should look like along with faults and DQ's. The only picture of a show Cochin that I could find was on the Cochin International website - results from the 2006 Crossroads show. I looked at birds of every breed with Columbian pattern at the shows I attended. I read everything I could find about the Columbian pattern from Leghorns and Rocks in the USA to Pekins in the UK but there really wasn't much information out there.

At times I wanted to cull all 35 because of faults. I ended up raising all but the worst out to about 9 months, bothering Tom often for advice on culling. With patience and guidance I learned to prioritize the faults and culled to 6 keepers for that year. Similar experiences each year since though I don't raise them out to 9 months of age anymore. I have found I have to hatch a lot of chicks and keep a few. I asked and learned about wing patterns. All of mine were too light, shafty, or incomplete pattern.

I have learned to check for foot leg color at hatching, and to look closely for split combs at 4-5 months. Tom told me early on that Shafting does not get better with age and he was so correct. You cannot cull early for wing pattern since pattern seems to change with each molt. Next step for me is to learn the earliest signs of combs that curl at the heel. I can't cull for all defects or I wouldn't have any Columbians. I pick a focus area each year to work on while trying to not undo all the work previous breeders have done. One year was wing pattern, another was working on eliminating brassiness, the next might be comb size or stronger wings or something not yet noted for improvement while always considering type in the process. My hope is that years of small continuous improvements will eventually help breed a better bird.

Bruce Robinson, Matt McCammon, and Tom Roebuck all mentioned that a slightly smutty-backed hen is valuable in the breeding pen. Bruce Robinson wrote to me "I kept the darkest females also. The females with smut on their backs are worth their weights in gold for the breeding pen otherwise you'll lose color in the birds." Tom also mentioned recently how valuable hens with good lacing were in the breeding pens.

Undercolor is supposed to be a "delicate slaty blue". Those that don't have it seem to have serious faults in the color and pattern especially in the hackle and wing area. Lighter undercolor can be seen on chicks and probably will be that way when they mature. Darker chicks have the better undercolor.

At a show recently I met some people who shared some interesting stories of Columbians about 40 years ago. They told me of road trips from the Midwest to a Mr. AL Love in the Carolinas to get Columbians in the 70's. Their enjoyment and stories of birds of the past was something I relished. I did send a pair of Columbians home with one of those gentlemen that day. Columbians sure have introduced me to some of the nicest and the most interesting people I have ever met.