

PARTRIDGE COCHINS

by Matt McCammon, originally published in the November, 2010 Poultry Press

This month I will include a couple of articles focusing on the partridge variety. I raise partridge and I consider it to be one of the most striking patterns in all of poultry. It is also one of the most difficult to breed and keep going. I bred out of my nicest birds ever in 2010, but I have shafting like never before in the young birds.. Very frustrating! I'll keep working and learning tips from articles such as these that I found helpful. These are excerpts from various authors. I have left out some introductory comments for space concerns. Walter Brown writes in his article..."To my mind, the greatest drawback to the breeding of partridge Cochins is the idea that special matings must be made—one for the males and another for the females. I think most breeders today will say that they can produce very good males and females from the same mating. If this is true, there is no reason why anyone wanting to keep a few bantams should not take up the pretty partridge Cochins. To raise both exhibition males and females from the same mating, I would get my foundation stock from the same blood lines. Then I would select a male with good top color, not too dark, an even shade of red from the hackle to the saddle as possible. There will be some red in his breast, also some red in the lower body feathers and in the fluff; all but the red in the breast is allowed by the present standard. There will be a very little penciling or brown spots in the black of the hackle and saddle. For his mates, I would select two or three females of a rich mahogany color, feathers well penciled especially on the thighs. If you have it good on the thighs you will have it extra good in other sections. From this mating we should get good exhibition females and some fairly good exhibition males. I think very few breeders practice double mating, so all would be on the same footing and have equal chances in the show room."

The following comments come from an article by Millard Capp. "Many breeders consider double mating the only way to breed the Partridge color. From my experience I suggest the following double mating. For cockerel mating select the male as near to standard color as possible, with good rich red surface, brilliant black breast free from red, well striped saddle and hackle. Type should be considered as well as looseness of feather and quality. To such a male mate females as good as you have with good even mahogany top color showing prominent striping in the hackle. Fluff coloring may be more or less broken up, but not smutty. From this mating, one can breed some good exhibition males, but the females will generally be good only for cockerel breeders. To the double-mating enthusiast they are invaluable for breeding purposes. For a pullet mating, select females as near standard as possible with good even top color of mahogany, penciled most profusely with good distinct lustrous greenish black. Hackle on females should be penciled and not striped. To these females mate a male that is a trifle lighter in under color and top color than in a cockerel mating with a great deal of red in breast and fluff, showing as little striping in hackle and saddle as possible. On the females try to get the most distinct penciling with sharply defined black penciling the most desirable. From such a mating you should get some good exhibition females, but the males will be good only for breeders. Occasionally, from each pen, there will result a bird of the opposite mating that will be an unusually good exhibition bird. It is best not to sell partridge Cochin bantams until they are six months old and ten months is preferable. They improve even up to a year of age, and the older better birds please the customers more."

Lastly, according to Joe Davin, "to breed exhibition pullets choose a pair or trio of females that come close to the standard. Mate them to a male with hackle feathers heavily striped and with back and wing bows inclined more towards the dark side of brick red. To breed good cockerels, choose a male to head this pen that is close to the standard. His mates should be females that are poorly penciled all over and very light in the hackle. In both these pens be sure that all birds are of good type and that the foot feathering is full and extends to the end of the middle toe." (This foot feather deficiency is still a bit of a concern even in 2010).

I believe the partridge bantams are better now than they have ever been. Several breeders are actively breeding the variety. I recently was told by a very experienced master breeder of Cochins that never have partridge Cochins been bred as well colored and typey as they are now. That is quite a compliment to those that have been working on them. If you are interested in a challenge, try some partridge Cochins, large fowl or bantams.

