

TAKE THE COCHIN VARIETY CHALLENGE!

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

I have had several requests from members and breeders for the names of people who raise some of the rarer varieties, such as red Cochin bantams. I was asked at a show about silver penciled bantams. Did you know that 17 varieties of Cochin bantams are accepted by the ABA? If we see half that many colors entered in a show, we think we have really seen something. I know I sound like a broken record, but we really need careful, committed breeders to take up the challenge and start working on these varieties. I am almost certain that some of them would have to be purchased from hatchery stock and improved from scratch. Reds, Silver and Golden Laced, Buff Columbian and Columbian, Partridge and Silver Penciled, Birchen and Brown red, and Lemon Blue are just some of these beautiful, challenging varieties awaiting committed breeders who can take them to champion row. I raise 6 varieties and I realized quickly that I could not raise hundreds of each variety each year. I raised 250 brown red Cochins last year and kept about a dozen! I try to do that with at least one variety each year. Usually one saves himself about 4 or 5 years of breeding by committing to hatching and raising that many, but it sure takes a lot of work and feed.

Another very important step in bringing some of these varieties back from the brink of extinction is networking. By this I mean a breeder needs to find another breeder or two or three who raises the same variety. They then need to compare notes and share birds to help the process move along faster. I have done this with the barrels, buff columbians, and partridge. If I did not raise many of one of these varieties and had a poor crop of males to choose from, I know I could call one of the other breeders committed to that color and I would have one as soon as it could be sent here. I would do the same to help one of my friends. Therefore, we each can raise about 25-50 of each color most of the time, but when that is multiplied by the number of breeders in the network we have several hundred to choose from. Some of these rarer varieties could be improved quickly in this manner. I have used the Rare Varieties Report published by the Wyandotte Bantam Club and edited by Matt Lhamon to get a lot of tips about crossing varieties in order to improve type, color, or both. This booklet may not be in print any longer, but it is worth the effort to find it. In most cases, these rare colors can be made better by crossing them to existing varieties instead of to other breeds. This booklet goes into detail about what colors can be bred to make other colors and it doesn't use genetic symbols or jargon.

If you are a veteran or a novice breeder, we need you to take the challenge. Take one new color "under your wing" and see what you can do. Spread the word as you succeed; it is amazing how many people want to back a winner. Soon you will have people calling and e-mailing to get a start. Your name will be etched in that variety's history. That's a pretty neat thing! Someday, when another little booklet is made to teach future generations about breeding new colors and improving old ones, I would like to think my name would be in there somewhere with hints or observations from my experiences. Join in the fun!