

BLUE COCHINS

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

In this edition, I am going to include some tips and information about breeding the blue color variety. Blue Cochins are found more commonly in some parts of the country than others. We only have one master breeder of blues, Sandy Isler. I first purchased my show quality blue Cochins from Sandy way back in the late 80's. She had some of the best around. We have had many discussions about the best way to breed blues. The following is NOT the opinion of either of us. This is just information that I hope you will find helpful when choosing your breeders or exhibition birds. This article was written in 1992 by David Plant of Australia. He has achieved near Andalusian color on his birds. These are parts and pieces of the article.

MAKING A START IN BLUE PEKINS (COCHINS) by David Plant, 1992

One of the most difficult colors to breed is in fact the Blue Cochin because of the oft-used comment "two Blue Cochins will not breed true to color". However, the most interesting part of breeding blues is the challenge to sustain the exhibition shade of colors of the birds you breed.

To make a start in your initial purchase, I would advise any interested fancier to first watch closely, two or three shows where blues are exhibited. Make contact with the breeders who appear successful at these shows. The breeder will more than likely advise you the best way to commence your purchase to breed blues that you can exhibit the following year.

My initial suggestion would be to obtain one blue male, one blue female, one black female (not blue bred), and one splashed male. With this combination it is possible to breed Blues of several different shades, some of which will be of exhibition color. It is important, however, to decide whether your initial pair of blues will be a cockerel breeding color pattern or pullet breeding color pattern. Mixing either cockerel breeding lines and pullet breeding lines often results in confusion of the resultant blue color pattern. First mate your pair of blues together and then a second mating will be Splashed male to black female. Be very careful in how you go about disposing of the progeny from your first season's commencement. It is important to realize that many of these blues will change the shade of color after their first molt. If possible always go back to the breeder from where you purchased your birds and let him or her have a look at your new stock.

To breed exhibition shade males, use a male with darker top color and a laced body feather. The laced female will contain the color genes to produce resultant males with rich slaty blue top color and laced body feathers on the males. This will also produce females of the same pattern. This mating will also produce splashed that will bear the same color genetic make-up as the parents so when that splashed progeny is mating to a pure black, the resultant offspring will to a lesser degree bear the rich dark slaty color make-up thus producing a more even shade of blue when mated to black.

Laced females will of course also be produced from this mating. It is important over successive years to strictly adhere to the selection of birds for a cockerel breeding line that bear distinct lacing on the body feathering and it is imperative to avoid the use of any birds containing any traces of rust or impurities in top color of the body feathering. Laced females

will breed males with rich navy top color and laced body plumage. Mealiness often occurs when cockerel breeding lines and pullet breeding lines are mixed and produce non-acceptable show standard color. Some effective ways to remove the mealiness from future progeny are to introduce white Cochin blood to a blue mating which often effectively removes streaks of foreign color in the feather pattern of the resultant progeny. The offspring are a paler blue, however. One could also introduce a splash Cochin to a blue mating whereby the white factor in the splash assists in eliminating the mealiness of the blue offspring. The blue body color is not washed out so badly in this cross. This mating also helps rid the bird of black streaks throughout the blue feathering that result from too frequent crossings with blacks. Ensure that the offspring from a splash to black mating are bred back to blues to retain depth of color.

Mr. Plant further discusses breeding splashed to pure blacks or blue-bred blacks to produce well colored offspring. I would have to disagree with this. I have found, and I think Sandy Isler would concur, that the blue-bred blacks bred back to the splashed or the blues will often lead to the red or gold cast found in so many blue males. I never keep the blue-bred blacks. I cull them at hatch, or if I have a large enough clutch hatching I arrange for someone to come take these little chicks as soon as they are dry. I don't want to get them confused with any pure blacks I have hatching. It is important to recognize that a black that results from a pure black to blue mating is not a blue-bred black. It is pure black and should not be a carrier of the genes that lead to discoloration in the blue males. Some may disagree with this, but I have never had problems with this reddish or gold in the hackles since I quit using any blue-bred blacks. I hope you have enjoyed the information concerning blue color genetics. I have hatched a nice bunch of blues this year using similar programs. I haven't hatched many and will probably not have enough to sell, so good luck finding quality blues. There are a few breeders in the club, so ask around and we'll see if we can't get you started with some beautiful blue Cochins, be they large fowl or bantam.

