

## **BUFF COLUMBIANS**

by Matt McCammon, originally published in the February, 2011 Poultry Press

Only buff columbian bantams are an accepted variety, and I have never seen any large fowl of this color before. I have always admired the buff columbian color pattern. I have bred buff columbian Wyandotte bantams for more than 20 years. I have had some recent success in the show halls with them, and it has been a long time coming. A few years back, I was able to get some buff columbian Cochins from Tom Roebuck. He had gotten them from a breeder in New England I believe, perhaps some that originated with Alan Swenson who communicated with me way back in 1994 about his creation of buff columbians from a Cochin/Brahma cross. I am not sure of the genetic or breeding background of these birds, but I know they were typical buff columbians. Females were pretty decent in type and males were not. Tom shared a couple of pairs with me and I appreciate it. One lesson I learned when breeding the buff columbian wyandottes was that I could get good females pretty easily, but not good males. If one uses columbians in the cross, nice buff columbian females can be produced. So for years, I had nice typey buff columbian Wyandotte females with no decent males to pair up with them. In wyandottes, columbians are of better than average type and have good color markings. So I took several nice columbian females and crossed with my best buff columbian Wyandotte male. That results in a sex-linked cross. The female chicks are buff columbian and the males are columbian. If placed side by side the females are obviously buff in the down color with grey backs and wing butts. The males are yellow with grey backs. The reason it is convenient to be able to sex them at hatch is due to the fact that the males are worthless. They will never amount to good columbians as they become brassy in the sickles as adults. Cull them at hatch. Your females will be pure buff columbian, and will likely have better type and color if the parents were strong in type and carried good dark undercolor and appropriate striping where needed. Where I went from there to get good buff columbian males is something for a Wyandotte article, but the point is that one can improve buff columbian females if a good typey columbian Cochin with dark undercolor is used in the cross. Now columbian Cochins are not developed to the point of the columbian Wyandotte, so I don't know if I would recommend this be done with Cochins. But if I happen to notice a good columbian Cochin female, you better believe I will try to add her to my flock, and when I got the birds from Tom I talked him into giving me a columbian female also.

I used this columbian female with the buff columbian male, and the cross was just what I had experienced with the wyandottes. The females were nice in type and depth of undercolor was intensified. Width of feather and skull and finer head points were all strong with the buff columbian females before, and the outcross did nothing to change that. I culled the resulting columbian males, and we were on our way! The pure buff columbians are pretty easily sexed at hatched also. The female chicks are smokier in the down color, with more grey in the back and wings. The males are buff on the upper surface of the wings, sides of head, and belly and they have less grey overall. So I ended up with several more nice buff columbian pullets after the first year, and just a few of the better cockerels to show for my effort. One issue I had to deal with on the males was vulture hocks, or the appearance of them. Cull for it or it will haunt you for hatches to come! From this foundation breeding, I was able to produce very nice females for several generations to come. I showed a few at bigger shows just to get them talked about.

The males, however, would often mature with white in the primaries or the lesser wing feathers. That was something I could not breed away. I am guessing it resulted from the original columbian blood that I introduced, but I had never had that show up in the wyandottes before. The variety lays well and often will breed themselves. They will artificial, but I allow them to breed on their own usually as I don't show them much and don't mind if the females are with the male. The females are probably fluffy enough to require plucking, but the males are active and will keep working at it until they have done their job. (Unlike many lazier Cochin males). I usually keep only two trios each year to breed with. I just don't have the space, and the demand itself doesn't require I keep many. Tom Roebuck shared a very nice male with me this fall, and he was better than the one I had decided to keep back. He had no white in the wings and no signs of stiff hock feathers. So he will be my breeding male for 2011. Neither Tom nor I raise many, and it would probably take a breeder raising several hundred a season to really get them where they need to be, but it can be done.

I know Craig Carroll has told me that he gets buff columbians from his wheaton Cochin matings. His wheatons are super typey, and I hope to someday get a buff columbian from him to add some genetic diversity. Up to this point, he often culled them because he didn't know there were folks working with them. Buff columbians are involved in the creation of the mille fleur Cochins too. So we may be hearing a little more about the striking buff columbians in the future!

