

MOTTLED COCHINS

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

The flavor of the month is the beautiful mottled variety! Of course this is my favorite. I have bred and shown mottleds for over 20 years. Notice I included the word "bred" before "shown". I consider myself a breeder first and there are a few tidbits I have learned during those 20 plus years. I have either read it, bred it, or fed it long enough to notice quite a few interesting tips about my mottled beauties. Here are just a few of these tips. First, mottleds are exceedingly typey. For whatever reason, they are as typey as any black or white out there. Blacks can be used to improve the mottleds if necessary. Remember that mottled is recessive and will not show up in the first generation. If the F1 birds are bred together, some mottleds will result. I have used mottleds to actually improve blacks. Breeding mottleds to blacks will put great yellow (even gold!) feet on the blacks, redden the eye color, and widen the skulls. Occasionally these black males will get too light in the undercolor, but not always.

The main challenge for a mottled breeder then is color. First the breeder has to realize that mottleds change as they age. They get more mottling as they molt through the aging process. So a properly marked pullet or cockerel will generally not make a nice hen or cock due to over-coloring. When I was trying to get the color more stabilized in my line, I had more of this variation with age than I do now. It seems that my present cocks and hens will get to a certain point and not mottle anymore. They never get splashy or spangled like they used to. The main reason for this is in the male line. For years, most winning mottleds were females. Many exhibitors didn't ever show males as they weren't worth bringing out. I don't think this is good. My males are every bit as good as my females now. I just couldn't settle for the fact that half of all the birds I raised were not able to be shown just because of their sex. So I kept a lot of males and culled them for years until I got three super colored males. By super colored I mean that they were not striped in the hackle, but mottled. They had outstanding tipping, not splotching on their feathers. They had good dark undercolor instead of white. They kept black wing feathers well into their third year, and they had white tips on those wing feathers most of the time. I bred from these males for two years and nearly every male produced was equally good in color. That is not an exaggeration. Once I was able to get males with this color, they bred more properly colored males. Females from these males are properly colored with fine tips and not splotches that haunted us in years past. Once females reach two years old, they generally keep that adult coloration even after their molts. That allows me to show them for longer periods of time and some of my best females are four years old.

This reinforced the lesson I learned years ago that males control the color and the females the type. In the mottleds, you can have it all. Typey females are common and good males can be had if you breed enough of them and know what you are looking for. A polka-dotted bird doesn't make a mottled. So pay careful attention to the standard and network with other breeders. I feel the mottled Cochins will appear a bit more spangled than some of the other stiffer feathered breeds. Good Cochins have wide, heavy feathers that naturally have more surface area to hold the white pigment. A mottled Japanese or d'Anver doesn't have that same feather quality. Obviously, it is going to create a different overall appearance. That should be taken into account when they are being judged.

One more important point: do not try to set up your breeding pens to balance one bird that is too light or too dark. You will be sorely disappointed. Breeding only the most correctly colored birds together will produce more properly colored birds. I have taught myself this lesson time and again! So I hope these lessons will prove helpful to mottled breeders, or to blue mottled breeders as the only difference is the background color. Exciting developments are being made with mottled large fowl, and I can't wait to see a great class of these at Indianapolis!

