

# The Case for Lemon Splash (photo #1) (and some other irrelevant information) By Bill Mackowski (August, 2024)

17 years ago, when I started taking a serious interest in showing birds, I was drawn to Cochins. My grandmother kept a small flock of Cochins and I had hatchery Cochins as a young boy. Even my boys had them in their younger years.



Now with my great granddaughter, we were embarking on a new hobby and what I'd hoped would be a great experience for a young girl living on a farm in spite of all of life's distractions vying for her interests. We started our journey with a new incubator, a few dozen mixed eggs and an order of hatchery Cochins as backup.



Our first year was a roaring success. We hatched a few chicks - much to Maddie's amazement - and our hatchery birds thrived (photo #2) each with their own name and personality!

Maddy sought out everyone she came in contact with to talk chickens. Word got around and come fall we received a call from the livestock coordinator at our local fair, "Would Maddy like to exhibit her Cochins in the petting pens at Old McDonald's Farm?" No need to ask again.

She met everyone in the county, and they all knew the names of every one of Maddy's Cochins. At only five years old, she was the princess of the chicken pens!

Fast forward.....one of the varieties of Cochin we raised was Lemon Blue, although only hatchery quality. I was really taken by the colors and patterns. (I'm still a sucker for eye candy!)

About that time, I placed an ad in a local farmers exchange for some adult Cochins of varieties other than those we had. I soon received a call from a fella in a town south of us that had several varieties of pullets for sale. Little did I know I was about to meet the man who would mentor and guide me through my Cochin adventure! In addition, he became a very dear and much appreciated friend: Dr Bob Hawes, Mr. Buff Cochin (photo #3)



Bob not only bred, raised, showed and judged poultry for over 70 years, his judge's number is 29, and his test was administered by Alice Roberts Lisc #1! The very first ABA judge! He is also a founding member of Cochins International and a poultry geneticist!

Our first conversation was about 10 minutes deep when I realized he was a wealth of information on poultry and Cochins in particular. Our visits, trips and conversations became a regular occurrence, mostly always deep dives on everything from proper husbandry to breeding birds. Actually, with me asking questions the entire time, and he providing the answers!

Although Bob and I were at the University of Maine in the same time frame, he was a professor of Poultry Science and I was a student in the Wildlife Biology program. We had never crossed paths, but as it turned out we had and have a long list of mutual friends

During one of our early conversations, I mentioned my interest in the Lemon Blue variety. Bob explained about the required matings to create the variety and how few of them he had actually judged or seen shown.

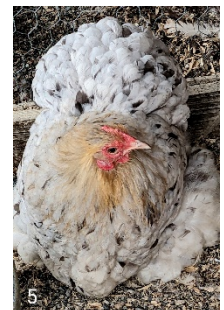


Still intrigued, I set about trying to locate a breeder working with Lemon Blues. (photo #4) All roads led to Marty McQuire in Alabama. Marty had developed the recipe for breeding the variety to conform to the SOP.

Lemon Blues in Bantam have been recognized since 1966 but very few breeders continued to breed and show them. I was about to find out why! When I contacted Marty, he wasn't currently breeding them; but he did put me in touch with two girls that were breeding his original line of birds and showing them occasionally: Ann Ray and Ivy Young. Both of whom were more than gracious with their knowledge of the variety and willing to send me a few starter birds. I was off and running, looking forward to the challenge, but totally oblivious to the

height of the mountain I was about to climb. As most of you probably know, the breeding of Lemon Blues initially involves Brown Reds and ideally Lemon Splash (photo #5) if none available, Blue Splash.

I was fortunate enough to obtain some beautiful Brown reds from David Laatsch, John Boroughs and Robert Hardina. Now I was really in the business of creating Lemon Blues!

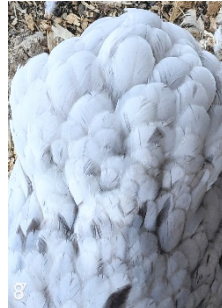


Following Marty's breeding blueprint ( available on the CI website under breeding varieties ) my first-year breeding BR to Lemon Blue and Lemon Blue to Lemon Blue gave me the Lemon splash I needed to work with. Without going into a detailed description of each year's breeding, I soon found out how critical Lemon Splash is to a Lemon Blue breeding program.

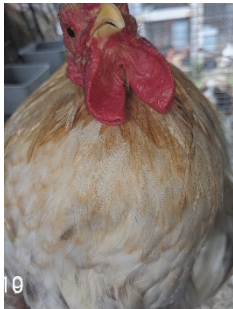


Brown/Reds (*photo #6*) add type. Splash from Blue adds lacing to the blue, but Lemon Splash adds the proper lemon hackle and lacing. In addition, most Lemon Splash females seem to retain the exceptional type of the Brown reds. As a side note, breeding back to Brown Red for type is not a quick fix. The F1's are usually very orange hackled, and it takes a few generations to clean that up.

Also, LB x LB bred Lemon Splash females usually have the proper lemon hackle color that is called for in the Lemon Blues (*photo #7*) and most have the beautiful wide cushion feathers (*photo #8*).



The Lemon Splash males also generally exhibit excellent type and many have the proper lemon hackle color and breast lacing (*photo #9*) while others have the orange hackle color influenced by the Brown Reds. Lacing is key in breeding Lemon Blues. You not only need the fine lemon laced upper breast, (*photo #10*) but the dark blue lacing of the body found on quality Blue Cochins.



Not all Lemon Splash will be perfect, but when you are breeding Lemon Blue to Lemon Blue, technically 50% of your hatch should be Lemon Splash. More than enough to choose from. That brings me to the point of this article.



Anyone seriously interested in breeding Lemon Blues to the SOP, soon finds out you need to hatch big numbers. Right out of the egg only half of the birds are potential show birds. The other half are only destined for your breeding program, but you need to grow them out so as to evaluate their potential contribution!

I've felt for years as Cochin aficionados, we are missing an opportunity to enjoy and show a beautiful variety of Cochins. Lemon splash have all the body specifics called for in Cochin type from foot and eye color to wing carriage, abundant soft cushions, and feather width to beautifully feathered boots! In addition, they exhibit a very rare and unique color pattern not seen in many other poultry breeds.

I would hope that someone at some point would take it on as a project to have the Lemon Splash variety in Cochins recognized.

The intriguing part of that is since there is no SOP description for a Lemon splash pattern, a knowledgeable breeder working with a qualified judge could write the very first color and pattern description for Lemon Blue Splash, forever leaving your mark on the wonderful world of Cochins!

The commitment required to undertake the recognition of the Lemon Blue Splash variety is likely not in my future for a number of reasons.

For one, I live in Maine which is not exactly a hotbed of Cochin breeders. Neither is all of New England, for that matter, and even though I am working on that, I doubt very strongly that the requirement of five breeders showing at an ABA national, would ever happen in New England.

To undertake the recognition there would need to be a group of breeders living in close proximity working to standardize the pattern and willing to travel and participate in an ABA National. This opportunity is just waiting for the right individuals or group to introduce an exceptional new variety to show halls all over the country! I'm a pretty optimistic kind of guy, but at seventy-six years of age, reality is setting in, and let's face it, all of our wishes just don't come true.

Cochins are the aristocracy of the poultry world, not only in appearance but in temperament. Admittedly I'm partial to the rare and parti-colored varieties and feel their beautiful patterns and colors are

the lure that will draw people to Cochins. Every time we add a new variety, it will appeal to a new group of folks who have an appreciation for their beauty.

It seems such a waste to have half the hatch of a Lemon Blue breeding program to end up being culled, when you could also be working with the perfect companion variety to the Lemon Blues, like the Blue ,Blue /Splash patterns.

I'm a big believer that If we are going to interest folks in our hobby, and our chosen breed, we need to offer something that really strikes their fancy - pun intended!

## Random Notes on Lemon Splash

I find undermarked birds mature into a more acceptable pattern than over marked, which just gets more over marked. When you are confident in the type of your overall line, you can tell, and cull for pattern at a pretty young age in BR and LB. (photo #11)



Males are showing potential much younger, but by year three, are getting almost too full bodied . . . remember a cockbird should only weigh 30 ounces!



In my lines of LB, LS and BR, the females really come into their own in their second year, both type wise and pattern. (photo #12)

The lighter the hackle in LB usually means lighter blue overall and to quote a very accomplished Cochin breeder, "Shafting never gets better with age."

The orange hackle on LB and LS males never gets lighter (photo #13). Darker bodied males never get lighter. The standard calls for variations of lustrous dark blue and slaty blue. A fine line between too dark and too light.



Black caps have a place in the breeding. Use them to offset slightly over marked males with excellent type, but this won't help with way over marked birds.



Lemon Blue is as challenging a pattern as I have found to work with. It takes a lot of space, a lot of birds, and a lot of matings to even get close! But you CAN breed SOP compliant birds and win shows with Lemon Blues. (photo #14)

Lemon Splash x Lemon Splash makes washed out Lemon Splash. In selecting Lemon Splash breeders, the lighter the lemon in the hackles the better. Select for FINE breast lacing (lacing is critical) and lighter wing bows.