

A CONVERSATION ON PROPER TERMINOLOGY

*The below text was written by **Tom Roebuck** for the Cochins International Facebook Group in June of 2014. It was an important conversation then, and it still holds true today.*

Since this group is open to new fanciers and veterans alike, and the intent is that's an educational forum to share ideas, questions, and information, I am going to attempt to discuss a topic without offending anyone.

A male chicken under a year old is called a cockerel. A male chicken over a year old is called a cock bird. A female chicken under a year old is called a pullet. A female chicken over a year old is called a hen. A Roo is the shortened version of the word Kangaroo, which is a marsupial from the family Macropodidae (macropods, meaning 'large foot'). Kangaroos are endemic to Australia. Roo is also a fictional character created in 1926 by A. A. Milne and first featured in the book Winnie-the-Pooh. He is a young kangaroo (known as a joey) and his mother is Kanga.

I expect 8-year old Showmanship entrants to be able to tell me that a male bird under a year old is a cockerel, or that a male bird over a year old is a cock bird when I ask them to explain the difference between a cock bird and a cockerel, yet we adults struggle with this terminology. Again, my goal here is not to offend any of our many group members that use the term "Roo" to describe a male chicken. However, I've also read plenty of posts on other groups and sites where people gripe about being treated harshly by "serious fanciers" because they used terms to describe their birds that are not part of accepted poultry terminology. I'll focus on the male birds, because ultimately that's where the rub seems to lie. Maybe people are uncomfortable using the term cock bird or cockerel or maybe their smart phone won't let them type this "4-letter" word. I don't know why, and that's not really the point here. The point is more that this group is meant to bring people together with a common interest; in this case Cochins. There's also a legitimate expectation (IMO) that this group of people would share a common understanding of the proper terms for the sex of a chicken, based upon it's age, what the different body parts of a chicken are called, what the common defects/disqualifications associated with Cochins may be (bare middle toe for instance (DQ)). It's been said many times on this group and in others that there are no stupid questions, and I believe that to be true, but I also think that there is a responsibility on folks new to the poultry fancy to do a little research on their own and learn about their new hobby. Most of this information is at our fingertips via the World Wide Web, and it can provide a good foundation for those many questions we may have.

I include the following scenario in an attempt to illustrate what I am saying above. Let's say I am brand new to raising Cochins and I am attending the Ohio National Show for the first time. I am interested in purchasing a Black Cochins Bantam cockerel from noted Master Breeder, Mr. I. M. Cochins. I walk up to Mr. Cochins and introduce myself and tell him I am interested in purchasing a "roo" from him to go along with the girls I have at home. Mr. Cochins looks at me a bit puzzled and gruffly states that he doesn't have anything available, and I walk away dejected. On the other hand, if I were to walk up to Mr. Cochins, introduce myself and tell him I am interested in purchasing a Black Cockerel with good wing carriage, good feather width, and a five point comb, and that I am trying to improve the Blacks that I have at home, that paints an entirely different picture for Mr. Cochins. Using the proper terminology gets a conversation going on the right foot, lends some credibility your side of the conversation, shows you know a little bit about your subject, and also shows that you've done enough research to know what you want to improve. All of those attributes I used in my opening sentence with Mr. Cochins can be gleaned from the Standard of Perfection. Mr. Cochins looks at you and says, "come down the aisle with me, I may have something that fits your needs," and you have just started an exchange with someone that could very well provide years of knowledge to you and become a mentor. It's perfectly fine to admit you're new to the hobby when you strike up a conversation with a veteran breeder/exhibitor, but knowing at least a little bit about the hobby goes a long way.

The intent here is not to dump on members that use improper terms. No one will be banned from this group for how they reference a male chicken or a female chicken, but using common terminology establishes a common base (IMO). Again, not meant to offend, but intended as an informative topic. I am also aware that it's a touchy subject, so hopefully I don't have to delete my own thread shortly after I post this.