

SOURCES OF BIRDS

By Tom Roebuck, September, 2018

At one of the fairs I was judging this summer a lady asked me how she could go about getting a certain breed of chicken. She said that she had been at our show last fall and talked to a man there that had some but he wouldn't sell any of his birds. I asked her if she could remember his name and if she had gotten his number while at the show. She couldn't and didn't. I told her that in many cases persistence pays off and many breeders want to make sure you are serious before they let any birds go to you or anyone else. But it's more than that really. We are creeping our way toward fall and all of those young birds that were hatched this spring will wind up in the show halls, chicken swaps, auctions, sale areas at shows, or the cull pile.

So just how does someone new to this hobby find good birds to work with? Before we get too far down this path I think it important to set the stage and identify the types of sources. Everyone gets into a hobby (if they have one), for various reasons. I am by no means passing judgement on anyone for their reasons for being in the poultry fancy or minimizing their goals for their Cochin projects. Some people see this hobby as a way to make a quick buck, some love the thrill of having a bird on Champions Row and tallying up Master Breeder points to reach a certain level. Some are in it to breed birds that are as close to the standard as possible and get that ever elusive perfect bird. There are serious breeders and there are bird multipliers. The number of serious breeders in any breed of chickens can usually be counted on two hands. Not all of these people frequent the show hall but on the rare occasion that they do, they are usually tough to beat.

Where you find your birds really depends upon what your goals are. If you are looking for top notch birds, that you can start a breeding program of your own with, then find a serious breeder. Where do you find them? You can ask other fanciers, you can look in the breeders directory, or you can go to a show and reach out to breeders right in the thick of things. I recommend a larger show though. Smaller shows with maybe one or two Cochin exhibitors may not give you as many options, especially if those exhibitors only hatch 10 or 15 birds a year. Strike up a conversation with the breeders. Most are very approachable and love to talk about their birds. If your intent was to pick up birds that very day, unless you have prearranged for delivery of birds, I wouldn't expect to go home with something out of their show cages. You might get lucky, but more often than not, the birds that are being shown aren't for sale. "So how do I get birds?" Patience and persistence. Ask if they have birds available. If they don't, ask if they could recommend another breeder that might, or if you are hard set on birds from this breeder then ask if you could be put on a waiting list for when they do have some available. Your successful breeders are not usually prone to bringing a bunch of extra birds to a show and throw them in sale cages at the shows. You have to put some effort into it. Call them, talk to them about what you are interested in. Ask questions. Expect to pay a decent amount for a good Cochin. If breeders were to take into consideration their time and effort, and all the little things that go into getting a bird to the point where it is show hall worthy or for use as a breeder, each bird would easily have a \$1,000.00 price tag on it, so when they tell you that a single bird will be \$75 to \$100, keep in mind how much work is behind what you are buying. You can shop around if you want, but your time is also valuable as well.

If you are looking for decent birds to start with but just don't want to pay top dollar that is okay too. At some of the larger shows, their sales area will harbor a gem or two and usually not as high on the price scale. Again, though, find out as much as you can about the background of the birds. Make it a point to get as much info as you can. As they say, knowledge is power.

In this day of instant gratification, nothing frustrates me more than when a parent contacts me for a bird or birds that their child can take to the fair and win the show with. What is the lesson there? Money can buy rewards?

Any hobby is supposed to be fun. Raise Cochins for the reasons that suit you. Just because it's pretty doesn't mean it's a good example of the breed. Read and know the standard. Again, knowledge is power. Ask questions. Find a mentor. You can be an adult and have a mentor. Patience, and watching the fruits of your labor grow, and seeing the improvements in your line over the years is the fun part; at least in my opinion it is. Do your homework and seek out a reputable breeder if your goals are also a long term breeding program. Above all else, don't take yourself or your hobby too seriously. That takes the fun out of it, and you won't be in the hobby long.