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Origin and Characteristics Of Dark Cornish Bantams

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Dark Cornish bantams were originated by the late W. F. Entwisle, and proved to be one of the most difficult bantams to produce. We must remember that in the 'eighties', when these were originated, bantams were not as they are now. In most varieties there were not even the Old English Game bantams to use as a cross to reduce size, and the large Cornish were not so numerous as they are now.

However, a small Cornish hen was produced by that great fancier, John Frayne. For colour, type, and lacing she could have held her own with any Cornish Bantam today, but no bantam would breed with her, so a season was lost until a cross was procured between a Modern Black-Red Game bantam and an ordinary sized Aseel hen of pheasant markings. That cross produced partridges and greys, the greys showing the better lacings in their early feathering. The widest-chested of these greys was destined to breed with the Dark Cornish hen; and from these the Cornish bantams of today are descended.

Reducing the Cornish to bantam size was the work of years, but in the early 'nineties' Cornish bantams worthy of their name were able to win at the great classic shows.

Ultimately, in breeding to keep the size down, we found that shape was gradually being lost; heads were becoming too long, and there was a tendency to breed red eyes instead of the daw eyes characteristic of Dark Cornish.

However, two points were retained, colour and lacings, and when I judged Indians at Davenport in 1900, it being the club show of that year, I brought back the smallest Cornish male, with every feather on his wing being laced as in a Sebright, purchased again from the Fayne Bros. That bird, crossed into the bantams, has proved to be the source from which all the great winners of the past few years have sprung.

There is a similarity between Dark Cornish and Old English in body shape; wide chests, prominent shoulders, the body tapering away to the stern; the sturdy legs. The heads should be short and broad, with well curved, stout beaks, triple or pea combs and very stout, round bone; they must not be long in the leg, but not too short to be inactive. Cornish are natural combatants, but, unlike the Old English, they fight more with their beaks than with their legs;

they worry rather than strike. It is from this natural tendency that it becomes so essential that Cornish must have naturally powerful beaks and neat combs. In Great Britain it is customary to dub Cornish males, but in America and Canada, the greatest purchasing countries, Cornish must be shown undubbed. The white or pearl eye is a characteristic of the breed, legs yellow, and skins of a yellow tendency.

Of Cornish Bantams it has been truly said that they have never been known to become thin, and they have never been known to be ill, but when passing from this earth they just die, and with that description, after over forty years experience, I can find no fault. I have never seen one ailing.

The Dark Cornish Bantam is a handsome, useful bird. His wedge-shaped body, scantily feathered with raven-like plumage, his cruel head, and his sturdy bone, make you recognize in him a warrior worthy of battle. He is sure to attract notice, and have you observed how he always faces you? He is never found in the pen with his tail towards you and his head in the far distant corner.

His hens are of rich mahogany ground colour with the double lacing of black within the inner portion of each feather of the most brilliant beetle-green sheen, and with the neck hackle to match in its density of black.

The most difficult points to produce are the neck hackles of the males, freedom from white in under colour, clear from bronze in saddle and saddle hackles; in the hens, freedom from the mossy pepperings upon the feathers, and the distinct, clear, double lacings upon breast, cushion and thighs. The correct shape is easy enough to get in both sexes, but the points which I have enumerated are those which will be found most difficult to procure.

Cornish Bantams, if good, improve as years advance — a good yearling is destined to make a better adult. They widen in shape and let down in body with advancing years. A well-laced hen improves in her lacings, but she may become too pale in ground colour. That, however, remains to be seen; some wear well in this respect; others become of a pale, washy shade. The cocks become wider and stouter in bone, shorter in tail, and more sturdy-looking; some show more white at the roots of the hackle and the saddle hackle; others retain their youthful density until the end.

Cornish have long been bred in two families, those destined for producing the most perfect females and those for producing males high in perfection. They are one family, led in diverse ways, and while it is quite possible that one pen produces winners of each sex, there are those who lean more towards production of males only, or females, as the case may be.

To produce a male, it matters not what the colour of the hen or pullet may be, neither does it matter if she is merely single-laced or mossy in places, or throughout. Her shape, head, and

bone, and her blood are the points which matter, and these only. Her father, grand father, and her brothers should be good, and her mate the most procurable. For female breeding, double-laced females, free from moss, with rich ground colour, should be mated with a male selected for his double lacing in his 'chicken' feather.

Clear double lacing on his breast and wings in his 'chicken' feather must be the deciding factor; from equals in this respect select, when matured, the best shaped and stoutest boned.

One cannot accurately form any opinion of a bird's value as a pullet breeder when he is fully matured, and so in the Dark Cornish, as in most varieties, it is best to breed and rear one's stud and to purchase the best female or females procurable.

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