



MALINES

By: Pieter Debruyne

Many people have heard about the MALINES. They know it from the supermarket or the restaurant; unfortunately not as the elegant, impressive giant who vigilant steps around in the yard, keeping a watchful eye on his hens. Now-a-days the Malines is very popular with the fancy breeders as well as with the supermarkets. A lot of people wittingly choose the Malines for their first poultry breed. And they hardly ever regret it. I think it is a beautiful breed with many qualities and it fascinates me more and more.

Description of the breed

The Malines is a very imposing chicken that is very docile and calm and that soon will get confident with its keeper. The build is of a heavy utility (meat) chicken and should be long, large, heavy and broad, with a well fleshed breast and a long, horizontal back. The back of a fully grown cock measures twice a man's hand. The tail is carried almost horizontally, in line with the back. Grown cocks weigh over 5 kg and the hens weigh mostly 1 kg less. The rather small wings are carried horizontally and close to the body. The head is broad, heavy and firm with orange to red coloured eyes. The beak is rather short, powerful and white. The small singlecomb has 4 to 6 even serrations; the blade is carried horizontally. The wattles are oval and medium size. Both comb and wattles should be fiery red. Legs and toes are flesh colour and medium length (in no case extremely long) and properly apart, which gives a powerful impression to the bird. Legs and thighs are very muscular, to equalize the weight of the animal. The toes are thick and round, the back toe is correctly directed backwards. The plumage is rather downy and gives a good isolation.

The leg feathering is typical for the Malines; the legs and outer toe are fully feathered; the other toes have some stubs only.

There are a few differences with the other variety, the Turkey head- Malines. Undoubtedly, the most important differences are the small, triple comb and the dew lap. Also it is a bit more 'reachy' in carriage, due to influence of crossings with the heavy Bruges Game.

At the moment the Malines is recognised in the following colours: cuckoo, gilded cuckoo, silver cuckoo, white, blue and ermine. However, most of them are in the cuckoo colour and these are mostly of the best quality. The white Malines is seriously advancing and so is the blue.

As a utility fowl, the Malines is one of the most interesting chickens; it is a general purpose fowl, combining a rather good lay (140 to 160 eggs a year) to a very good flesh growth.

Below: White cock from Reginald Deyaert



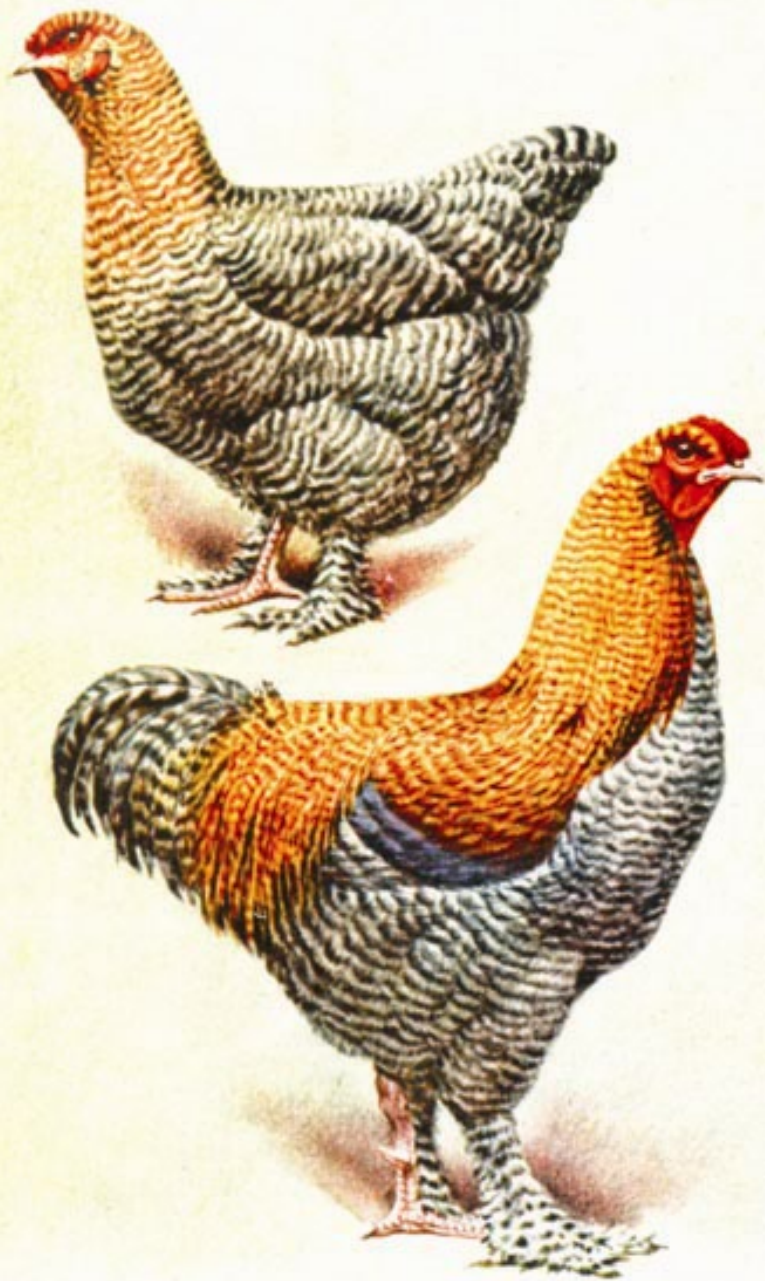
The tail feathers of the cock are very fragile and are easily damaged. In order to prevent those damages, you should see to it that the aperture to go in and out of the pen is large enough.

This breed is certainly not easily tempted to fly. Young chicks will once in a while try to spread their wings and flutter upwards the fence, but only very rarely a single one will succeed. An enclosure of 4 feet high will do to keep them inside. The Malines does not make high demands; a proper pen and a spacious run with enough room for chickens of their size, will do. They don't need a huge run, but will appreciate it very much to be out in the sunshine, to stretch their legs and to have a sand-bathe.



**Right below: a fantastic Turkeyhead cock from
Jan De Boitselier**





**Left: Gilden cuckoo
Turkeyhead Malines,
drawing by Rene Delin**

Origin

Several centuries ago, each region had its own type of fowl, which was entirely adapted to the local circumstances. Around Malines in Belgium, a certain cuckoo coloured poultry was known, renowned for their superior flesh quality, cuckoo colour, white legs and skin. In those days they were already called Cuckoo Malines. By means of the Zoo of Antwerp several varieties of Asian breeds were introduced and many years of selection and crossing with Brahma, Cochin and Langshan made the "Cuckoo Malines" such as it is today. One has combined the impressive body construction with the superior flesh quality and fertility of the Malines of former days.

Rather rapidly the Cuckoo Malines took up an important place on the Belgian poultry market. And several years later, the Malines was already known

in our neighbouring countries. Especially in favour of the German market, there have been some crossings with the Bruges Game. From this crossing they created a sub-variety that was named 'Mechelse Kalkoenkop' (Turkeyhead Malines), because its head resembles a turkey's head, thanks to the triple (pea) comb and the dewlap. This variety is heavier as the singlecomb and has a more attacking attitude.

After the standardisation of the breed in 1898, the first breeder's association was founded which addressed to both professional - and fancy breeders. Unfortunately, by the war, pullet sickness and development of cheaper chicken breeds, the popularity of Malines was seriously offended. Thanks to some faithful breeders, which had to 'recreate' the breed from only a very narrow basis, one has succeeded in bringing back the Malines at high level in rather short time. In 1979 the nowadays "Speciaalclub for the Mechelse hoen" was set up, with a still growing number of members. By an agreement of the Malines Club with Belki N.V., which produces these chickens at large scale now, the Malines table fowl is for sale in several supermarkets in Belgium and the Netherlands.



Left: Drawing by Delin

The cuckoo colour

When hatched, the cuckoo Malines chicks are darkish grey to black colour, with a yellowish spot on the head. The male chicks are a bit lighter coloured and sometimes have this yellowish spot on their bottom as well. After having moult to their adult plumage, they should meet the following description:

Cocks

The feathers of the Malines cocks have a blue-grey ground colour which is crossed 3 to 4 times by bars of a darker blue-grey to grey-black colour, which is less distinguishable as with the females.

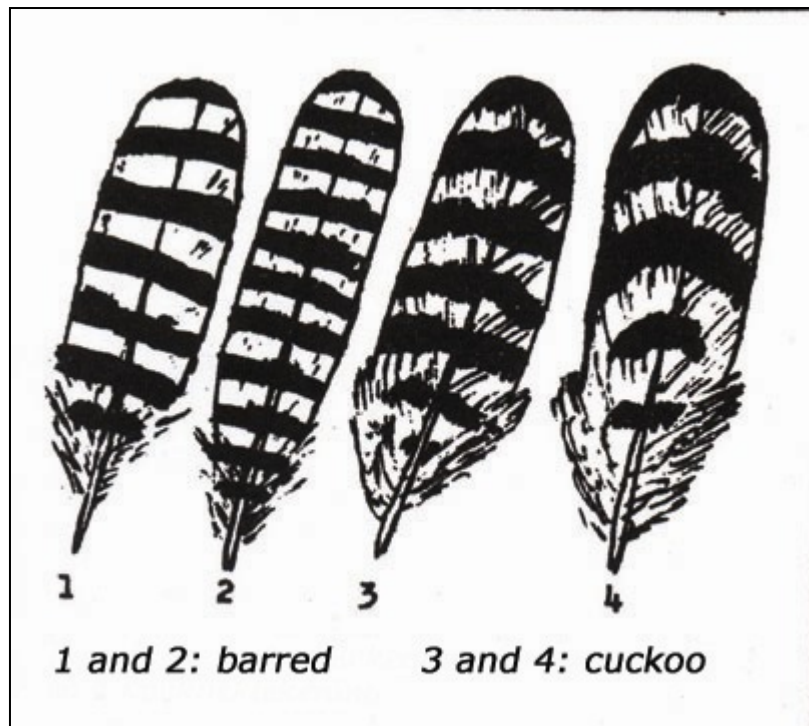
Hens

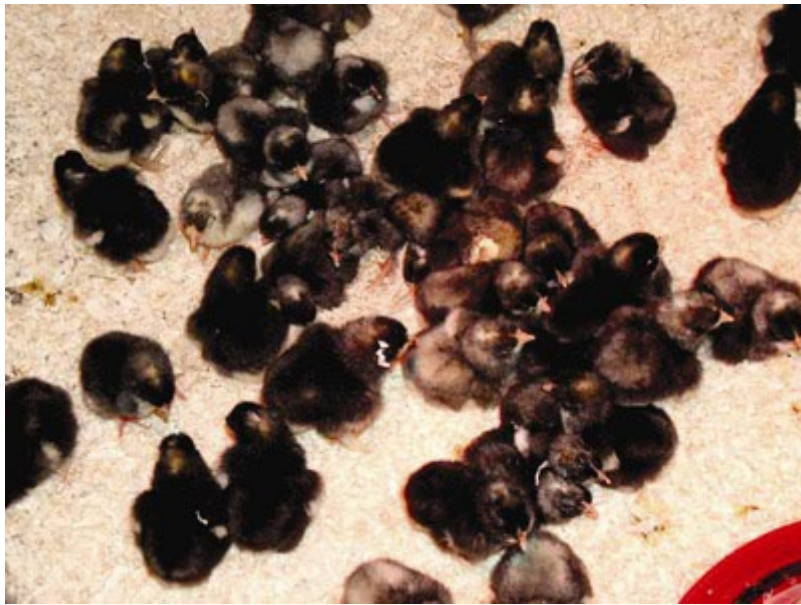
The female has the same colour as the male, but the females look darker. The feathers have transverse bars of dark bluish grey on a whitish to light blue-grey background. The marking can be slightly vague but should be distinct and regular. The tip of the feather should end with a dark bar with a green shine. The down is almost without any barring.

The difference between cocks and hens is caused by the sex-linked cuckoo factor, which gives the whitish bars to our birds, which in fact are black coloured. As the cocks have this factor twice, they have broader whitish bars, which make them look paler than the hens. A correct cuckoo marking is evenly and regularly all over the body. The whitish bars must be clearly outlined in the darker. The colour should not be diluted or vague.

A fault that is often seen at the hens is that they show too little barring on head, neck and tail. That can be improved only by using pale, but correctly barred cocks.

Another problem is the black pigment in the beak. Here too it is important to use rather pale cocks. A cock with black in the beak will cause a lot of black in the beaks of his offspring and dark animals in general. Finally it is also important to pay attention to the brownish colour in the hackle feathers of the cocks. However, this is something that appears in almost every older cock, thus some tolerance is not misplaced.





Left: in this group of chicks you can already clearly see lighter and darker coloured chicks.

Breeding

Malines is a nice breed to keep and their young chicks don't need too much 'extra' care. The correct temperature and day/ night rhythm are very important for the young ones. A good quality chick starter feed contains everything what the young chicks need. After they are some days old, green feed and chopped nettle can be given to a limited extent. According to the day and night temperature, the young chicks can be placed to unheated runs outside when they are about 6 or 7 weeks old. From eighth weeks old, you must keep a closer eye on the chicks and beware that they are not 'falling from their legs'. From this time, sufficient movement and an adjusted ration is very important. It is not the intention keeping the animals 'thin' though; they must be fed sufficient for their growth and appropriate muscular strength.



Above: Young chickens in the meadow



Left: young hens from Steven Polfliet. Right: a number of young chicks.

It is very important to pay attention for coccidiosis and lice; because of this the young chickens can be impeded in their development.

From 4th or 5th month the cocks and hens must be separated to avoid scuffles between the cocks and ensure that the hens are not damaged by the cocks.

One of the most difficult things at breeding Malines is fertilisation. The last years several initiatives have been taken by the Malines Club to improve this by crossing several non-related blood lines and this with positive results.

It is obvious that with too fat animals cannot be bred in a normal way. Since Malines really likes to eat, the owner must pay attention to feeding. A good qualitative feed, preferable meal instead of pellets, and strictly rationed, works wonders. It is almost certain that the correct portion for the Malines chickens is 100 to 150 gr. each. However, from time to time the cock can be given some extra as a reward or stimulant for good performances. A vitamin cure, some barm or some oats may have a positive result. Today's complete nutritionally balanced poultry feed formulation allows us to give these extra's without disturbing the balance. Clean, fresh water and grit must be available at all times.



Right: A very good Malines cock from Steven Polfliet



The best Malines breeding pen has approximately 5 hens and a cock. If there are too many hens, there will always be some hens that are ignored by the cock. As explained earlier, a cock with a somewhat pale coloured plumage is often very interesting as a breeding cock.

Left: Enjoying the 'free range'

Points of interest on breeding Malines

Like all breeds, the Malines also have their points of interest or frequently occurring problems. The most important is of course the 'overall image' which must fit the standard description. Certainly the weight and volume must be sufficiently present.

Compared to smaller breeds, the chickens often have bowed toes, caused by enormous growth or by heredity. To prevent these bowed toes, it is very important to keep the correct temperature at brooding. Moreover a vitamin- or mineral-mixture can be given to the young chicks as well. It is obvious that such birds are not suitable in the breeding pen. A second problem that is also mainly due to the quick growth, is the plumage problem. The tail feathers of the cocks are very quickly damaged. Possible the quick growth of the body takes a big part of the vitamins which are also necessary for development of the feathers.



The breeder's club

Everyone who is interested in the Malines and/or likes to keep them can contact the Belgian Malines Club. Quarterly you receive an illustrated magazine with all kinds of information on the Malines. Every year, the members can have their young animals judged and discussed on the young animal day.

As a stimulant the club also sponsors on several exhibitions and organises a club's championship with extra prizes. If you want to become a member of the club or should want further information, I gladly refer to our website <http://www.mechelsekoekoek.com>

Here a lot of information can be found, as well as many adverts. Of course you may always contact me or other members of the club.

Best regards,
Debruyne Pieter

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References

- Tijdschriftarchief van de speciaalclub
- Bespreking van het Mechels hoen ter keuring door Jacques Rousseau



White hen - Photo Jeroen Debruyne

Turkeyhead hen from Steven Polfliet



Turkeyhead
cock from
Steven Polfliet

Recipe: Roasted Malines

For the completeness of this article concerning the Malines, I could not do without mentioning something about the culinary possibilities of the Malines by means of this delicious recipe.

Ingredients: (4 persons)

- 1 Malines chicken
- salts & pepper
- butter
- 200 gr shallots
- water
- 1 bunch asparagus
- 1/4 litres brown stock or broth
- 1/4 litres cream
- the juice of 1 lemon
- 1 egg yolk.

Roast the chicken to all sides in a roasting pan and bake until tender, about 1/2 hour, in an oven of 300° F. Baste regularly with the juices. After $\frac{3}{4}$ of the baking time, add the cooked and peeled shallots and let them roast. Pay attention nothing burns; the shallots are needed as a garnish. Meanwhile peel the asparagus and cook them in water with salt and sugar. Cut the asparagus in equal parts. Obtain the fried chicken from the oven and divide her in 4 equal parts. Take out the shallots and keep them warm. Degrease the roasting pan, put it back on the stove, add the water and broth and let it boil down to half. Then add the cream and season with pepper and salt. Thicken the sauce with a roux or with cornflour and complete with the lemon juice and egg yolk. Pour the sauce through a fine sieve. Arrange the asparagus and the shallots with the chicken on a plate and pour the sauce. Serve with boiled potatoes with parsley.

