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Photo: Monique de Vrijer

# WELSUMMER

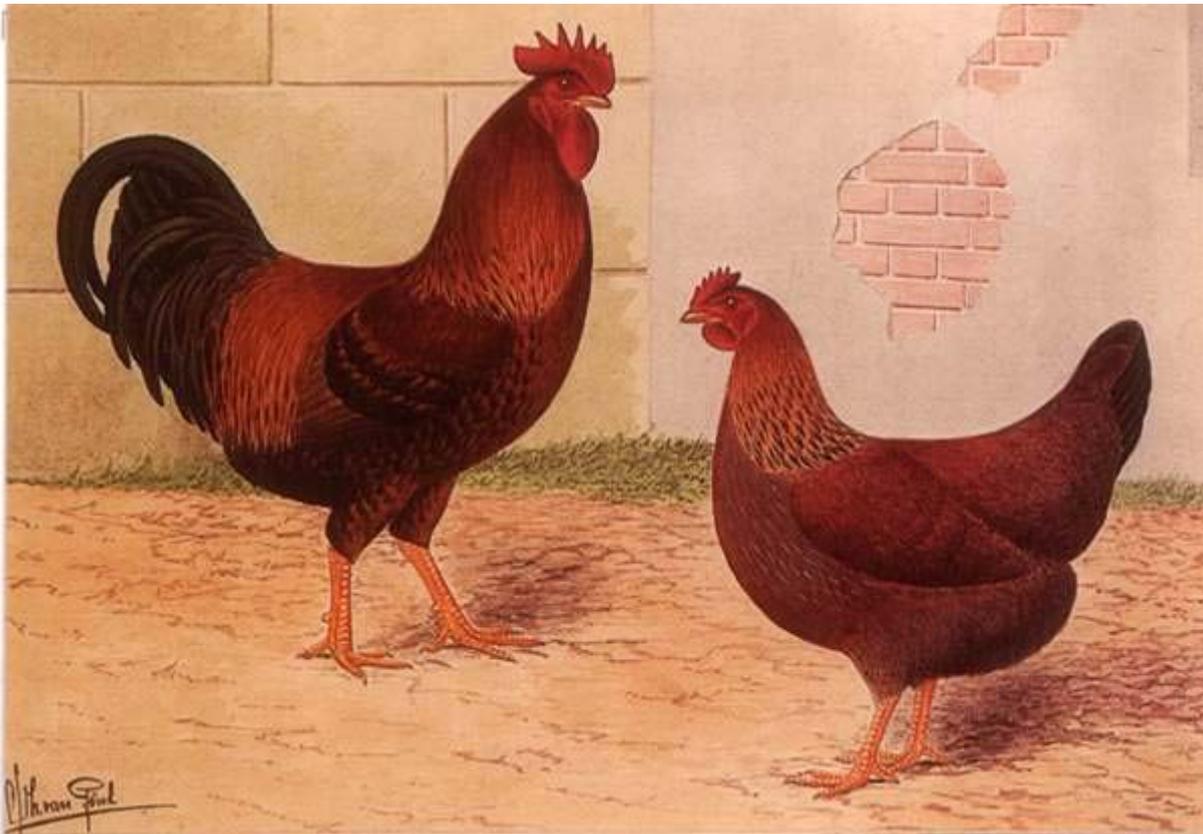


## History of the Welsummer

With a certain pride we may say that the Welsummer is a Dutch breed. It was developed early last century in the village of Welsum and some neighbouring villages along the river IJssel. The breed was famous for its large dark brown eggs that were very wanted in those days. What the exact ancestors are is not really known. The breed came from local breeds crossed with imported foreign breeds. Because the exterior of the chickens was not very important those days, the diversity was very great. There were birds in Malay type, Dorking type and even Brahma type and probably also Faverolles contributed to the breed, because there were many among them with five toes. The original birds called Welsummer showed all kind of colours, just like the other local breeds. There were birds with coloured breasts and lacing like in partridge Cochins and Wyandottes.

Many years later crossings were made with Barnevelder, Rhode Island Red and partridge Leghorn. Of those crossings the birds with Barnevelder blood were the best, because the egg colour stayed dark and the egg production stayed at the original level. Both other crossings gave an egg colour that was too light.

In 1924 an official standard was published. This first standard is nearly the same as the standard we use today according to type, but in the cocks a brown breast was wanted with black marked feathers on the thighs and in the hens wings were wanted deeply red with little and weak pencilling.



**Above: Welsummer, drawing by C.S.Th. van Gink. By courtesy of A.W. van Wulfften Palthe**

In 1925 there was a warning not to breed from the darkest eggs. Apparently they came from the hens that were the worst layers. Old poultry papers show that there were two different lines of Welsummer; one with deep red colour in



hens and one with a lighter red colour. The latest had partridge Leghorn blood in them. These hens laid best, but egg colour was too light. The eggs of the dark grey brown hens had the darkest and best colour. After 1928, when the "Dutch society for improving the Welsummer breed" was founded, one started to pay more attention to type and colour. At first there were different opinions about the right colour of the Welsummer. Finally they chose the red partridge colour; a colour that is not found in any other breed. In "Kleinveewereld" of 1935 C.S.Th. van Gink wrote: the Welsummer is less a show bird. The uniformity in type has made hardly any progress. The Welsummer is unsurpassed in laying dark brown

eggs. A standard picture was developed after discussion between breeders and judges. The type is somewhere in between the best birds available."

After hybrid breeds were developed that produced more eggs, Welsummer became more or less just a breed for fanciers.

### **Welsummer in other countries**

After the first World Poultry Congress and show in 1921 at The Hague, the Welsummer was known abroad and people were attracted by the large dark brown eggs. Many breeders were seduced to sell their best birds for a lot of money.

In 1923 in Germany the first chicks hatched from imported eggs. The offspring were a bit of a disappointment, but the hens, once full-grown, all produced the lovely dark brown eggs. After that breeding stock was imported, in 1928 the breed was recognised in Germany and one year later the German Welsummer Club was founded. In 1937, at the *Junggeflügelchau* at Hanover 54 Welsummer were shown; all in the same shape and colour. Pictures of those days show birds that would even now do well in the show.

In Germany the breed is also recognised in yellow partridge and silver partridge (dark). The type of the German birds is longer as well as the tail being carried rather low.

**On the right: Pullet, very well visible the broken markings in the hackle. Photo: Monique de Vrijer**

In 1928 English breeders imported the Welsummer, which was added to the British standard in 1930. In 1935 Welsummer were awarded "best utility-breed" on the Birmingham show. Also silver duckwing was developed. In the

1930's auto sexing breeds were developed in England by introducing the barred-factor. Through this the fluff on the one-day-old cockerels is lighter than on the pullets. Also the Welsummer was bred auto sexing. This 'Silver Welbar' did not just have the barred-factor, but also the silver-factor in it. The Welbar never really got very popular and never pushed the original Welsummer out, but the number of Welsummer entered on shows decreased over the years.



### **Description of the breed:**

Welsummer are of lively nature and although looking quite large, they are not heavy-weight birds; a pullet weighs about 2 kg, an old cock some 3 kg. The neck

is carried straight and the head looks rather small. Also the comb and wattles are not very large. The back is of middle length and flat. The hens should have a well developed abdomen. The hen's tail is rather short and tapering. The tail of the male is graceful and well developed. Leg colour is yellow. The only recognised colour is red partridge. The opinion of the members of the Dutch Welsummer Club is that it should remain the only colour of Welsummer.



**On the left: Life at its best, this Welsummer cock on the farm.**

**Photo: Monique de Vrijer**

### **The red partridge colour**

Red partridge is a colour you will only find in a Welsummer. The partridge colour as you find it in this breed has the advantage that one can breed both good pullets and good cockerels from one and the same flock. This is not always so in other breeds in partridge colour.

One does not have to keep a separate flock for breeding pullets and one for breeding cockerels. The main difference to 'normal' partridge

can be found in the colour of the male birds. On the red partridge cock all golden parts are more red and neck- and saddle hackle should hardly show any markings. Beside that, the black colour of the breast, abdomen and thighs shows some brown. Also the hackle of the hens hardly shows any marking, just like in the cock's neck and saddle. The neck feathers are not intensely black marked and the ground colour comes through the markings. The hens have subtle blackish pencilling on a reddish-coffee brown ground colour. Also the salmon colour of the breast is more red than in 'normal' partridge.



**Left: Welsummer cock, Germany.**

The Germans interpret the red partridge colour somewhat differently than the Dutch. The main differences are the shafty back and wings of the hens (this is wanted in Germany, but the Dutch do not want that at all), and the other colour in the breast of the cocks; under colour grey, then a brown part and a black ending of the feather (spangle). In Germany the ground colour is of a much darker red colour, especially in bantams. The red is so much darker that the black pencilling can hardly be seen any more. The attempt is to equalize the differences between Dutch and German birds as much as possible over the coming years.



**On the left: red partridge bantam cock, France. More red than we want them in Holland.  
Photo: Bernard MAGNI**

### **Breeding**

You do not need separate flocks for breeding good pullets as well as good cockerels in this unique colour. The best results are made by the correct balance between black and brown. That is a matter of trying, observing, making a lot of notes and learning from other breeders. What cock you have to

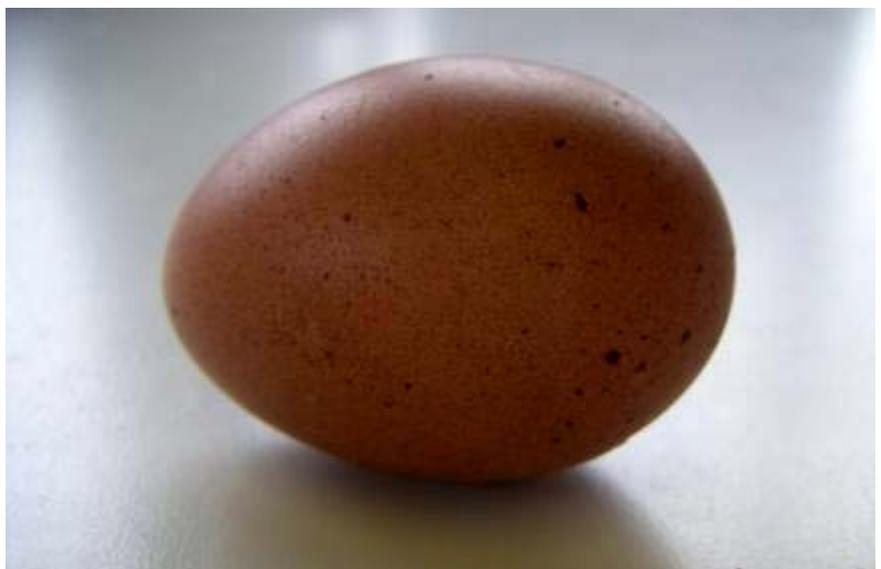
use depends on the hens. If the breeding hens have red feathers on the wing without pencilling, you should use a cock with the blackest breast. His daughters will have correct pencilling on their wings. Sharp markings in neck and saddle are not wanted, also in hens. But we should not just stare at the colour; type, head, comb, correct tails and also yellow legs are things that should not be neglected too. Welsummer seldom get broody, sometimes the bantams do.

### **The egg of the Welsummer**

From the early twenties of the twentieth century Holland is known as one of the biggest egg-exporting countries of Western Europe. So it was no surprise that once the very large dark brown eggs came on the markets, higher prices were paid, especially when many other countries wanted these eggs. From that day on fanciers, mostly for financial reasons, kept those hens laying the big brown eggs for breeding, never minding the type or colour. Type and colour did not bother the normal farmer or fancier in those days. Only the large brown eggs that were paid for were important.

Finally some breeders from the area of Welsum decided to bring more uniformity into the brown-egg laying birds. The till then 'non-bred' birds were bred in a certain direction. Most important in breeding was the large dark brown egg with even more brown spots on them. This undoubtedly is the most valuable quality of the Welsummer. May it stay that way in the future. The eggs of our Welsummer have more brown spots on them than the eggs of the Barnevelder which are solid brown all over. In the egg shows in the past, Welsummer eggs were preferred because of the brown spots and their weight of 65 to 70 grams.

The dark brown colour of the eggs is produced by Porphyrin, a very dark pigment.



This pigment is produced in a gland in the last part of the oviduct where the calcium is put on the egg. The spots are places where the concentration of Porphyrin is higher than elsewhere on the egg. Because this gland cannot keep up with a hen producing many eggs, the egg colour gets lighter after she has laid a certain amount of eggs. Remarkably the spots do keep their intensity and after



a while you will have lighter eggs still with dark brown spots. Because the egg colour gets less intensely brown, the breeder must take great care in picking his breeding eggs. In spring light eggs might be of hens that will never produce any dark eggs, or it may be eggs of hens that started with dark brown eggs and later on produced these light-coloured eggs. The last ones are the most valuable ones. Best is to pick out the birds in

autumn when the pullets start laying.

There are still breeders that only select their birds on the egg colour and not on type and shape. They do not show their birds, but only show eggs. A show of eggs is part of the annual Welsummer club day. Another way to have fun in our hobby.

### **The Welsummer bantam**

The Welsummer bantam was first bred in England from crossings between Old English Game bantam, Rhode Island Red bantam and undersized Welsummer. Later in Germany they were perfected with the help of German bantam, Wyandotte bantam and Rhode Island Red bantam. The present Welsummer bantam stands on a high level. One tries to breed them as small as possible, but with most likeness to the large Welsummer. This is more important than size.

**On the right: Welsummer bantam hen (NL)**

**Photo: Aviculture Europe**



As one can see in the photos in Germany, England and France there are more colours in both Welsummer and Welsummer bantams; red partridge, yellow partridge and silver partridge (dark).

In Holland the only recognised colour is red partridge and the Welsummer Club wants it to stay that way. The difference in type between German and Dutch Welsummer bantams is less conspicuous than between the large Welsummer in both countries.



**On the left: Welsummer bantam cock, yellow partridge, France.**

**On the right: Welsummer bantam cock, silver partridge (dark)**



**Below, Left: Welsummer bantam hen silver partridge (dark) France  
Photos: Bernard MAGNI**



**Below, right: Welsummer bantam female, yellow partridge, France.  
Photo: Bernard MAGNI**



### **The egg of the Welsummer bantam**

The eggs of the Welsummer bantam are also brown, but unfortunately not as dark as of the large Welsummer. The weight is from 40 to 45 grams; a nice egg for use in the kitchen, for children and elderly people who eat fewer eggs. The bantams do lay very well, some 150 to 200 eggs per year.

### **Chickens**

Welsummer chickens are auto sexing. This means you can see the difference between cockerels and pullets on the first day. As soon as the chickens are completely dry from under a broody or from the incubator you will notice that they do not all have the same colour. They all show dark brown striping on a lighter ground colour, but there are chicks with clear markings and a line behind the eye and some that are not that sharply marked and do not have a line behind the eye. The last ones usually have a little brown spot behind the eye. The sharply marked chickens are pullets; the other ones that are a bit lighter are the cockerels. Not all chickens are clearly marked as described, so there is always some doubt.



**On the left: Welsummer chickens.  
Photo Ruud Kreton**

### **The Welsummer Club in Holland**

On Saturday the first of November 1969 during the Gallinova show at Barneveld the Welsummer Club was founded. From that day on the breed made a new start and the club gained more and more members. Both the Welsummer and the Welsummer bantam can be seen in good quality in most shows in the country. For more information: Welsummer Club, secr. P. Bouw, Brinkenweg 26, 6721 ZC Bennekom, Phone: 0031 8389-16789.

French photos: By courtesy of Bernard MAGNI . <http://www.catalogue-fr.com/portail/index.php>  
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