

# CHICKEN RUN

HENK  
KASPERTS'  
DUTCH BANTAMS



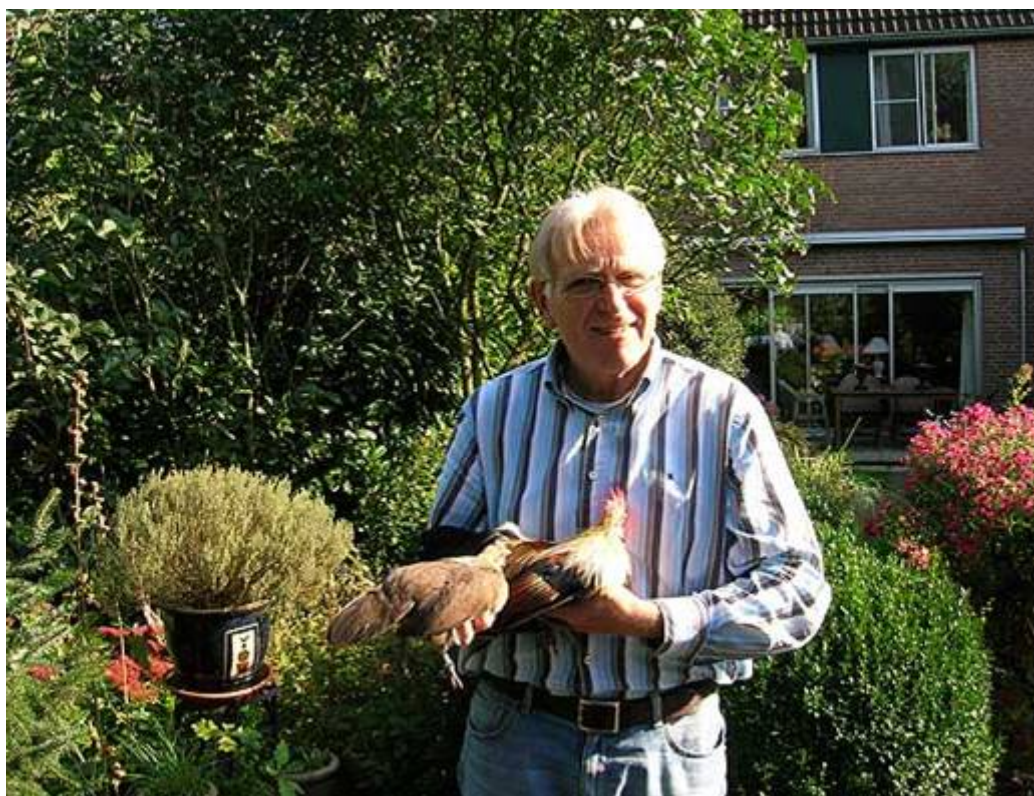
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**Photos: Aviculture Europe**

**"For me it is the Dutch bantam only, and never anything else," Henk Kasperts stated when asked about his chickens. To be more precise, he only breeds the yellow partridge variety, although there are 25 recognised colours of the breed in Holland.**

## **Henk Kasperts**

Recently we visited Henk Kasperts in Amersfoort (NL). He started by telling us the Amersfoort local club is 'his' club, along with its Centrum Show. Henk remembers how his father and grandfather used to take him to that show as a little boy, and how much he looked forward to that day; a real annual event, announced by large billboards and banners all over town. His grandfather kept New Hampshire large fowl and his father had Papillon (Butterfly rabbits) and racing



pigeons. There were often some fancy pigeons that dropped into the loft; Owls, Jacobins, Fantails and such, and if their owner could not be traced, Henk was allowed to keep them in his own little aviary. He kept and bred them just for fun.

In those days almost everybody kept poultry in the backyard. His dream was to live on a little farm one day, keeping and breeding various breeds. However, that dream was never fulfilled. Henk married a true Frisian girl called Jetty, and they moved to Amersfoort. In order to maintain ties with Friesland, they joined the Frisian Poultry Breeders' Club, even though they don't keep any Frisian poultry! Jetty has no objections to Henk's poultry hobby and together they rummage the flea markets and antique shops for old books and knick-knacks about chickens, pigeons and rabbits. They now have quite a collection, stored in the attic.

**Right: Part of the collection of books and knick-knacks**

Henk works as a teacher and each year he takes the opportunity to teach 'his' pupils about chickens. Some chickens are allowed to stay at school for a few days and he supplies them with educational booklets on keeping chickens or colouring books for the younger children.

School children are invited each year to the Centrum Show; an old tradition which is still common abroad, but has disappeared in the Netherlands.

### **The Dutch Bantam**

The Dutch bantam is the smallest and oldest breed of Dutch chickens. It is a true bantam which means there is no large counterpart of this breed. In 1882 chickens that looked like Dutch bantams were already recorded as 'partridge bantams' in the book *'Hand- en Standaardboek'* by R.T. Maitland. Back then they weighed about one kilogram and were not really a breed. In

1906, the breed was recognized by the Dutch Poultry Standards authority. By selectively crossing them with several other small bantam breeds, they became much smaller and lighter and today the standard weight for cocks is 500 to 550 grams and 400 to 450 grams for hens.

**Left: a yellow partridge cockerel**

The Dutch bantam is short bodied and broad across the shoulders, with rather short shanks, and a low stance. The carriage is upright, with breast carried high, full and well forward. The Dutch Bantam cocks have typically rich neck hackles, very short back,



slightly sloping, the short and broad saddle with abundant hackle and tail coverts. The tail is carried upright, full and well spread with well-developed and curved sickles. The tail of the hen is also well spread and not too short. The wings are relatively large and long, carried low but not touching the ground. The head is small with a single upright comb, white earlobe and orange to brown-red eyes. The legs are blue.



**Above and left: a yellow partridge pullet.**



They are vigorous, jaunty bantams that lay a large number of eggs of a surprisingly good size, being such tiny birds. When allowed to free range they are very active and can fly very well. They are not at all shy, although there are differences between the various strains and colour varieties.

They can also be kept comfortably in smaller pens. The Dutch Bantam is recognised in numerous colour varieties and with all these positive qualities, it is no wonder they are popular in many countries.

**Right: a yellow partridge cockerel; tail sickles are not fully grown.**

The most common colour is (gold) partridge, however this article is about the yellow partridge variety. This colour is called *geelpatrijs* in Holland, yellow partridge in Great Britain and in the USA it is mostly called Cream Light Brown (or in short CLB). It is the base body feather colour of the hen that is described by the name yellow partridge; a soft greyish cream feather colour with dark grey to black stippling, as



fine as possible. The breast colour is a softer tone of orange/salmon as in the gold partridge. The neck hackle is yellow instead of orange/gold.

Compared to the gold partridge cock, the yellow partridge has golden hackles instead of orange/red and the wing triangle is cream rather than brown. The back and shoulders are of a lighter colour tone, being orange instead of carmine.

### Henk on his chickens

In 1978 the Kasperts family moved from a flat into a house with a garden and the first chicken house was built. Not too large, it blended well into the garden landscape. The garden is Henk and Jetty's pride and joy, and even in October there is a wealth of greenery and flowers. Henk's first chickens were partridge Dutch Bantams, from a renowned breeder, although they turned out



not to be of show quality. Henk said, "I joined the Dutch Bantam Breeders Club and had good support from judge Jaap Trip, who helped me select bantams for several years, until I learned to do it for myself. Judge Lammers also helped me a lot and even gave me one of his own top birds. You could always ask him questions by letter... yes, that was how it was before we had the internet!"

**Left and above: the cockerels are housed two together.**

In the spring of 1983, a yellow partridge cockerel was born. (The yellow partridge variety was created by the Dutch judge Esra Korte; a phenomenal person in the field of poultry genetics.) Later, Henk got a yellow partridge hen from another line. He liked the colour, so he started concentrating on them, but soon found the offspring exhibiting symptoms of narrow inbreeding. With help from Henny Gankema he got another pair and now after many years, Henk's birds breed truly and he has never crossed them with (gold) partridge.

Being a small-scale breeder, having such good results shows that he cares for his birds extremely well. He feeds them Havens Poultry Feed, firstly 'Start and Grow', then once they mature he changes them onto 'Show and Glow' mixture. Every day Henk supplements their diet with short cut grass and nettles, and apples and sometimes even oranges.

Currently he keeps his cockerels housed in pairs and every night he puts them inside the shed, so that the neighbours are not annoyed by the early crowing. Henk is on very good terms with his neighbours and is able to use a disused chicken house in one of their yards, to keep some extra chickens.



## Breeding and keeping

Henk is a serious breeder and keeps judge's reports of all birds that he has used in his breeding pens. Today this has developed into a complex pedigree, which Henk finds invaluable when selecting new breeding pens each year. He mates the pens immediately after Kleindierenexpo Utrecht (end of January); being the last Show he attends.

As Henk only breeds with two cocks, he has four pens each with two or three hens. The selected cock is rotated from pen to pen every other day. The hens get on

well together, as they all grow up together from hatching. Surplus birds are given away.

**Left above and below: yellow partridge Dutch Bantam pullets**



Henk has no separate pens for breeding cocks and hens, but still manages to breed fairly good birds of both sexes. Type is very important and also the fine stippling on the hens. This stippling is very clear on mature hens, but as the mature cock does not show how well he will pass on this pattern to his offspring, Henk pays particular



attention to the cockerels when they are very young and still have immature plumage. Those chicks that have very coarse peppering are never used in the breeding pen and neither are aggressive cocks or hens that are over-shy. In this way, he is able to maintain good colour as well as character in his bantams.



**Above and right: Dutch bantams are also happy in small chicken houses. In the garden of Henk and Jetty the chicken houses almost hidden in the abundance of green and flowers. (Not 'normal' for October, as it is supposed to be autumn in Holland!)**

By the end of April or early May at the latest, Henk plans to have new chicks, in time to be leg-ringed before he and Jetty go on holidays. Their children, or sometimes the neighbour's wife will take care of the chickens, but Henk believes it would be too much trouble for them to ring them.

"Thirty chicks maximum are hatched, and I can tell the father, mother and even the grandparents of every chick," he said. "It is all kept in my pedigree records. When hatched, I ring them with a tiny canary leg ring, which is later replaced with the normal chicken ring.

"The reproduction rate is excellent. I have my own incubator, but mostly I send the eggs to a professional hatchery in Barneveld. This year I had a 100% result," he added.



Henk's bantams lay very well, although they do tend to go broody. He discourages this until the end of the season when he allows a broody hen to hatch a clutch. He says he simply finds it fascinating to watch, even after all these years, and adds that it is nice for the neighbouring children and his own grandchildren to see.

**Left: a yellow partridge hen feather**

## Showing

Henk believes preparation of birds for showing is very important. He handles them a lot, strokes their feathers and spreads their wings. He finds they don't need much 'conditioning' before the show, so he just cleans the legs and rubs a little baby-oil on the comb. For the most part, Henk says the judge's reports mostly concern the shape of the comb leader, which should be well-rounded, or the colour of the wing-bay, which should be cream coloured. He likes to go to those shows where he can meet other breeders of the yellow partridge variety. "It is all about talking together," he says, "and helping each other by exchanging birds that might fit into your own line. Last year I got a hen from Willy Moulin and a cock from Henk de Ruyter. It all depends if you are willing to participate and the birds are always exchanged without payment."

Henk says the best prize he has ever won was at the Provincial Champion-



ship Show in Driebergen, when one of his pullets was chosen 'Best in Show'. However, the show was held in a large tent which collapsed in a terrible storm during the night. A large number of volunteers were required to save the birds and restore order. "Best of Show really is a great honour, but unfortunately that year the winners never got the honours they deserved," he said.

## To end with

People question whether our poultry hobby still fits in with our busy lives? Henk thinks it does and says a nice part of the hobby lies in the contact with like-minded people. He finds it is very pleasant to be a part of the Dutch Bantam Breeders Club. They meet twice a year with 40 to 50 people attending. "Still, showing is a big part of the hobby because the competition is the main challenge... today you win... tomorrow it's me," he says with a big smile.



Henk and Jetty, thank you for your hospitality. We managed to find two pictures (compliments of Dirk de Jong) of Henk's Dutch bantams at the Centrum Show 2006!

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