

THE ROUEN



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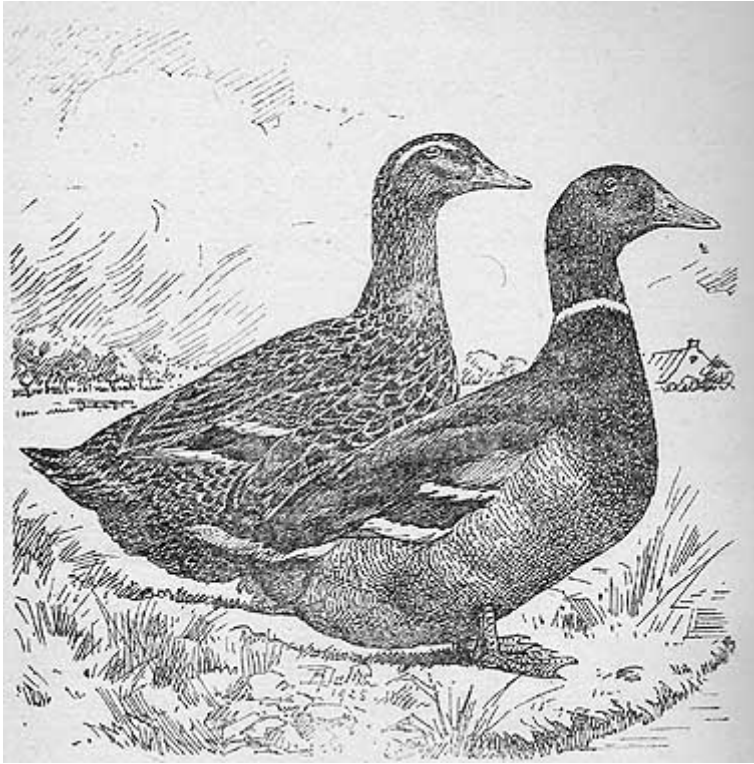
A bit of history

Without any doubt the Rouen is one of the oldest commercial table ducks, with a very colourful plumage that stayed unchanged for a long time: a dark and a clair variety of the mallard colour. The breed originated in Normandy, in the area of Rouen, Normandy.

As early as in 1555, the French biologist Pierre Belon mentioned in his book *L'Histoire de la nature des Oiseaux* 'heavy ducks in a mixture of colours that lived on the French riverbanks'. In France, these heavy ducks were called Rhône ducks or Normandy ducks.

Later, the English named this duck 'Rouen duck' because they were transported thousands at a time from the French harbour city of Rouen to England, where they were sold at the numerous markets. This utility duck had three purposes: the fat was used in the wool industry; the meat for consumption and it was a good producer of down feathers. Apart from that, it was also a good layer of quite large eggs. As the original breed developed from the mallard, it is no wonder that the Rouen has the same moult pattern; the Rouen also has the 'eclipse moult'.





If you decide to eat the Rouen, I can assure you that the meat still has an exquisite 'wild' flavour.

Left: Rouen. Picture by R. Delin, 1925.

Panegyric on the Rouen, *Le Canard de Rouen* (1918). Taken from Henri Blin, Lauréat de l'Académie d'Agriculture de France.

Our duck from Rouen is most of all a big, fat, abundant and massive duck. One criticises its walks, saying that it walks like it had drunk six or more pints of cider. However, one forgets that its real element is the water, the puddle or the river, where it will

show all its elegance, especially when bathing its velvet head, at the same time pointing its tail to heaven.

It is the most beautiful of our ducks: lively and delicate colours, hood of green with velvet shine, chestnut breast and white necklace, belly pearl-grey, ash grey wings ending in beautiful green and blue mirrors, fine laced with white. This plumage is very beautiful indeed, but in spite of the admirable abundance of tones and nuances of this feather dress, the finest colour of the Rouen is the dress of gold that it borrows from the fire of the kitchen stove....

In fact two different breeds

It is known that in the past they were not always consistent with the typical breed qualities. In France, utility was the highest requirement. So after all it was the English that perfected its size, shape and colouring to such an extent that it was distinguished from the commercial French ducks by referring to it as the Rouen foncé (dark Rouen) or even 'English Rouen' and finally turned it into a highly prized exhibition bird. The Germans also helped with that.



Left: Rouen, French type.

The French type still looks a lot like the old type of the breed, as we can see in the old pictures and paintings. In fact The French and the English Rouen became

two totally different breeds, with the close ancestry to the wild mallard as the only resemblance. Also the colour is different. Compared to the mallard the English Rouen is of a deeper and darker tone, while the French Rouen is of a

much lighter colour than the mallard. This is a good example of how a breed can totally change by purposeful selection.

Rouen clair or French Rouen

From time immemorial this duck was bred in the area of Rouen; in fact it is the *Canard Col-vert* (= the mallard), upgraded to get a heavier and bulkier bird. One finally succeeded in breeding ducks of 3,5 kilo. This improvement took place in the last thirty years of the 19th century.

Right: Rouen clair, drake



Then about 1910, the duck was again surpassed in weight by other breeds. By account of the French history, a breeder named Rene Garry decided to improve the bird's weight again. By crossing further bloodlines, involving the *Canard col-vert* and other mallard-like breeds, he succeeded in upgrading the Rouen to a weight of 4.5 kilo. So Garry can be said to be the creator of the Rouen clair, as it was first standardized in France in 1923. According to the French, the Rouen clair is one of the best French table ducks with very tasty meat. The duck's eggs weigh minimum 80 grams with a very bright coloured shell.

Shape and carriage of the French Rouen (Rouen Clair)

Rather more upright carriage than the English Rouen and with a very long body, with good width. Yet more smooth breasted than the Rouen; no keel and the belly should not touch the ground. Legs of medium length, set slightly back. The head has a slight rise in the skull, the long and broad bill is yellowish to olive green in the drake and orange-brown in the duck, both having a dark spot, the so-called bill bean.



Left: English Rouen, drake

Rouen foncé (dark) or English Rouen

Starting with the French type, the English developed the Dark Rouen. The difference is mostly in the type, the dark Rouen being less elegant, but also in colour. They are relatively quiet and have a slightly lazy air about them; also the fertility is often poor. They don't lay as well as the Rouen Clair, the eggs weigh 80 grams, egg

shells are greenish with lighter or bluish tones.



Left: English Rouen, duck

Shape and carriage of the English Rouen

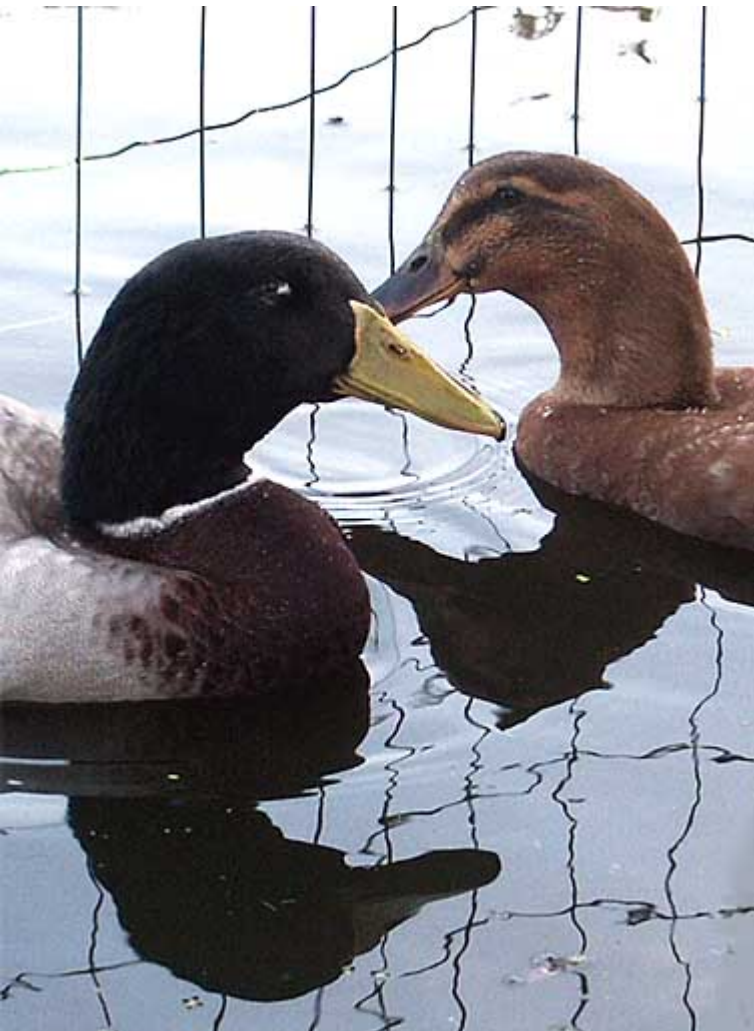
Quite a plump, imposing bird and obviously not able to fly. The broad and deep breast and deep keel are most striking. When moving around, the keel (horizontal belly-line) should not touch the ground. Broad in shoulders and a slightly curved back.

The drake's bill is longer than the duck's. Sometimes there will be light-yellowish flecks in the bright olive-green bill of the drake or the orange bill of the duck; you should not pay much attention to this, as the birds can be a bit pigment-sensitive.

Right: A close-up of the bill with the black bean.



Below: the bill of the drake is longer than the duck's. (Even better visible in the bill's shadow!)



Weight of the Rouen Clair

Dutch Standard: Drake 3.5 – 4.0 kg.
 Duck 3.0 – 3.5 kg.
 English Standard: Drake 3.4 - 4.1 kg (7,5 - 9 lb)
 Duck 3 - 3.4 kg (6,5 - 7,5 lb)
 French Standard: Drake and Duck both 3.5 kg.
 German Standard: Drake 3.5 kg. Duck 3 kg.

Weight of the English Rouen

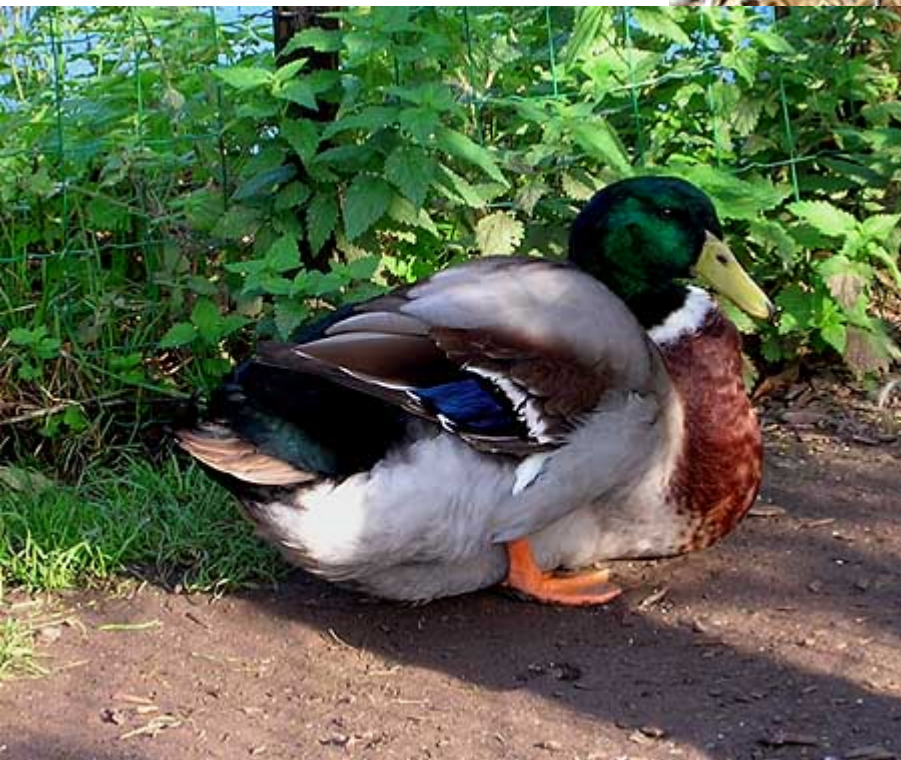
Dutch Standard: Drake 3.5 — 4.5 kg.
 Duck 3.0 — 4.0 kg.
 English Standard: Drake 4.5 – 5.4 kg. (10-12 lb)
 Duck 4.1-5 kg. (9 - 11 lb).
 French Standard: Drake 3.5 kg. Duck 3.0 kg.
 German Standard: Drake 3.5 kg. Duck 3.0 kg.

Leg ring size

In the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany both types are ringed with an 18 mm ring. In France the Rouen Clair is ringed with the 16 mm ring and the Dark Rouen with an 18 mm ring.

Colour

We will not trouble you with a detailed description of the colour; you can read the precise colour and markings in the Standard of Perfection and even on the internet. Very appealing in the drake is its black head with green lustre to within about 2.5 cm (1 inch) of the shoulders where the ring appears. This neck ring is open at the back side of the neck. The breast is rich claret and the light coloured flanks are stippled with a pearl-grey pencilling. The blue speculum must be tipped with a white lacing.



Above: Rouen clair, drake and left: English Rouen. The difference in type can be clearly seen.

In the duck we see a rich golden or chestnut brown, every feather distinctly pencilled from breast to flank and stern. This marking shows best on the back; large feathers ideally show double or triple pencilling. Head, neck and secondaries show no marking.

This marking is the same in both English and French type, only the colour intensity is very different.

In the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, France and England, different terms are used to name this colour.

In France and Belgium the colour of the English Rouen is called Rouen foncé (= dark) and the colour of the French type is called Rouen clair (= light).

In Germany the English type is called *wildfarbig* (= dark wild-colour) and they don't have a name for the colour of the French type, which is just called Rouen clair.

In England the 'English' Rouen is wild-colour and the Rouen French type is Wild-colour with light phase instead of dark phase.

In the Netherlands the English type is *roodwildkleurig* (= a reddish wild-colour) and the colour of the French type is called '*forel*' (light wild-colour; the Dutch word '*forel*' means 'trout', so it is referring to the colour of the trout).

In the meantime the English Rouen is recognised in Germany in the blue-wild-colour. In this colour variety the brown/black colours are diluted to blue and the shiny green parts are dull blue. In the duck, the diluting factor makes all brown parts lighter, this giving a much more unicoloured overview. The colour of the eyes, bill and legs is the same as in the wild colour.



Left: Rouen English type, duck, wild-colour.
Above: Rouen French type, duck, wild-colour light phased. Except from the difference in colour, the difference in type can be clearly seen

Distribution

Early in the nineteenth century the Rouen was already known in England, where they were kept on Victorian farms. It was one of the first duck breeds standardized in Great Britain in the original Standards of 1865. The Rouen Clair was only standardised in 1982.

Around 1860 the Rouen arrived in Germany. At the time they were already heavy ducks, although in a great variety of colours. In about 1900 the breeding of Rouen ducks was thriving, not only as utility duck but also for fanciers. At a certain time there were over 300 Rouen fanciers in Germany! The Rouen Clair was not imported until the end of the eighties of last century and was recognised in 1992.

In the Netherlands there never was much interest in Rouen. Keeping ducks for meat never became popular over here, although Holland always has been a good representative in keeping hundreds of thousands of ducks for the egg industry.

Already in 1874 the Rouen was standardised in America. There are also two 'distinct' populations; the smaller French type Rouen duck that is used for meat production and the larger English type Rouen, which is a highly prized exhibition bird.



Above: In the front a pair of blue-wild-coloured Rouen

Showing

Although the Rouen clair is standardised in several countries apart from France, it is mostly the English Rouen that is kept and bred. The last years the Dutch fanciers also became more and more interested in breeding and showing the English Rouen. Still many Rouen fanciers prefer to keep their birds at home, especially the French type. We can understand that, for how useful can it be for a duck keeper to read the remarks of the judge, saying that his bird is missing a tip of the nail, or that the white tipping on the speculum could be more pronounced. No, such judgements are useless. There are also more and more fanciers that do object to taking these heavy birds out of the cage for judging. Colour and type can very well be judged from outside the cage; it will do just taking the one or two birds out that are selected Champion of the Show.

Some tips on caring

It is often thought that these ducks, by means of their thick plumage, are impervious to temperatures below zero and don't need a night shelter or hiding place. However, due to its heavy weight, it is certainly recommended to put the Rouen in a night shelter when it is freezing.





You would not be the first to find your Rouen in the morning, frozen to the ground, with all painful consequences!

When spring arrives, you must see to it that your ducks are not too fat, or else this will result in fertilisation problems with

the duck and egg binding in the duck.

Clean swimming water is a 'must'. Because of their extensive plumage, the Rouen are constantly busy preening their feathers by means of the oil gland.

Green feed such as vegetables, chopped carrots or even better, fresh duckweed are indispensable and build up resistance.

To prevent stress and fright, always manage these ducks quietly and calmly. They are vulnerable as they cannot flee or fly, and therefore they will easily be stressed.



A Rouen is a very affectionate duck. If you have enough room at your disposal you will certainly derive much pleasure from keeping this breed. Especially the drake in its courting plumage late winter and spring, is a feast for the eye. What a power, calmness and blaze of colours these ducks emanate!

The photos of the free roaming ducks are taken at Martin Straver's.