



LAKENVELDER

By: Ruud Kreton

Photo above: Henk Meijers

Lately the interest in keeping chickens (both large fowl and bantam) has been rising. There is strong demand for old Dutch breeds in The Netherlands. The Lakenvelder is one of these because of its striking colour pattern, however the future of this breed is uncertain. Despite the never-ending efforts of the Dutch Poultry Club and Lakenvelder Specialty Club, only a few fanciers are attracted to this breed. This is probably due to the fact the Lakenvelder marking is very hard to breed correctly as well as the young birds cannot be valued for their colour and marking until matured.

One step back in history

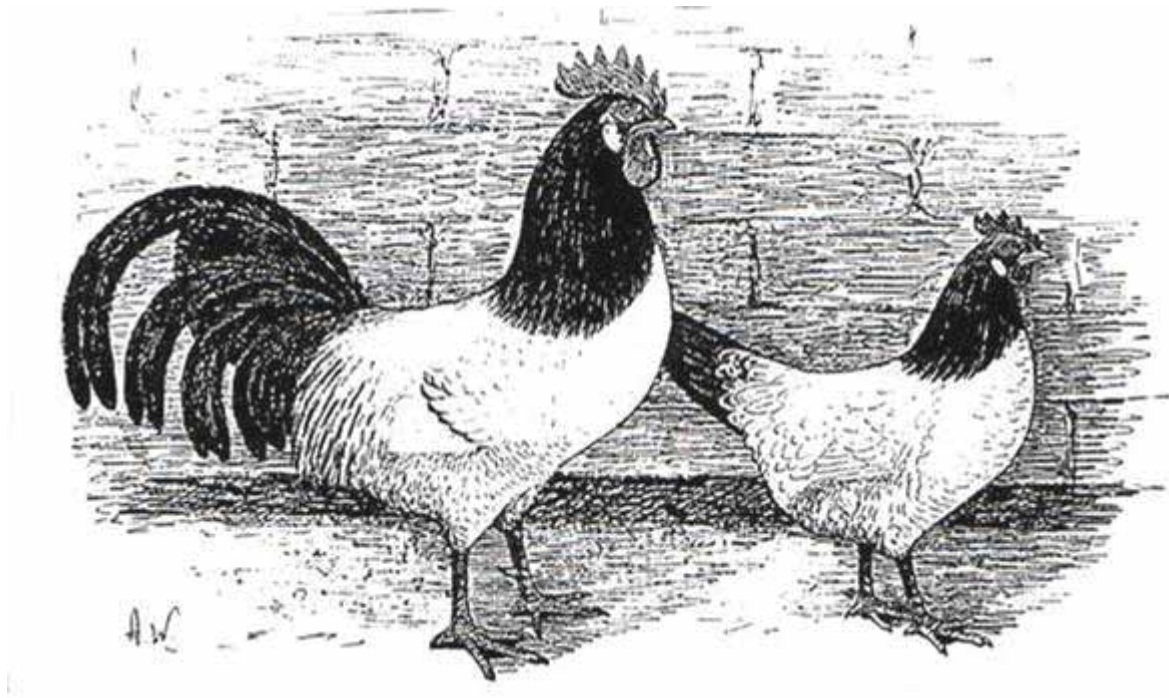
There are two current theories about the origin of this breed. In Germany, it is believed that the Lakenvelder is an original German breed, known since 1835. However, the Dutch also lay claim to the Lakenvelder based on an ancient itinerary from 1727. This story was published in 1925 in the magazine *Het Buitenverblijf*.

Right: A Lakenvelder hen. Owner and photo: Henk Meijers.



First theory: The German version

About 1800 it was noticed in the province Hanover that sometimes white chickens with dark tails and necks were found in the offspring of silver-pencilled chickens that were kept there, known by the name of *Westfaalse Doodleggers*. By 1819 many of these typically marked chickens were around, and they were named *Hannoversche Landhoenders*, after the province of Hanover. Two breeders, who excelled in perfecting and propagation of the breed, were Mr. Bockelmann from Melle and Mr. Meijer from Minden. Finally it was breeder Wirtz from Haldem that exhibited these chickens for the first time in the autumn of 1835. It is presumed that these birds were then presented as 'Lakenvelder'.



Above: A drawing of the German Lakenvelder about 1835. In those days the more common name was Hannoversche Landhoenders. These birds show a white body with a black neck and tail.

The hen lacks the white lacing at the tail coverts. The cock hardly shows any hackle marking, although a small black wing bar is clearly seen. (This being a characteristic feature at pencilled breeds, like Oostfriesche Meeuwen en Groninger Meeuwen).

In Germany the Lakenvelder is also believed to have descended from the silver pencilled *Westfaalse Doodlegger*, because of the pencilled markings that kept appearing as a set-back in the offspring.

From 1835 the Lakenvelder achieved enormous success in this part of the country and was seen on almost every farm. However, their popularity waned as quickly as it had risen when foreign breeds like the Italian Leghorn became known. The Lakenvelder almost completely faded away and by 1875 there were only a few birds left.

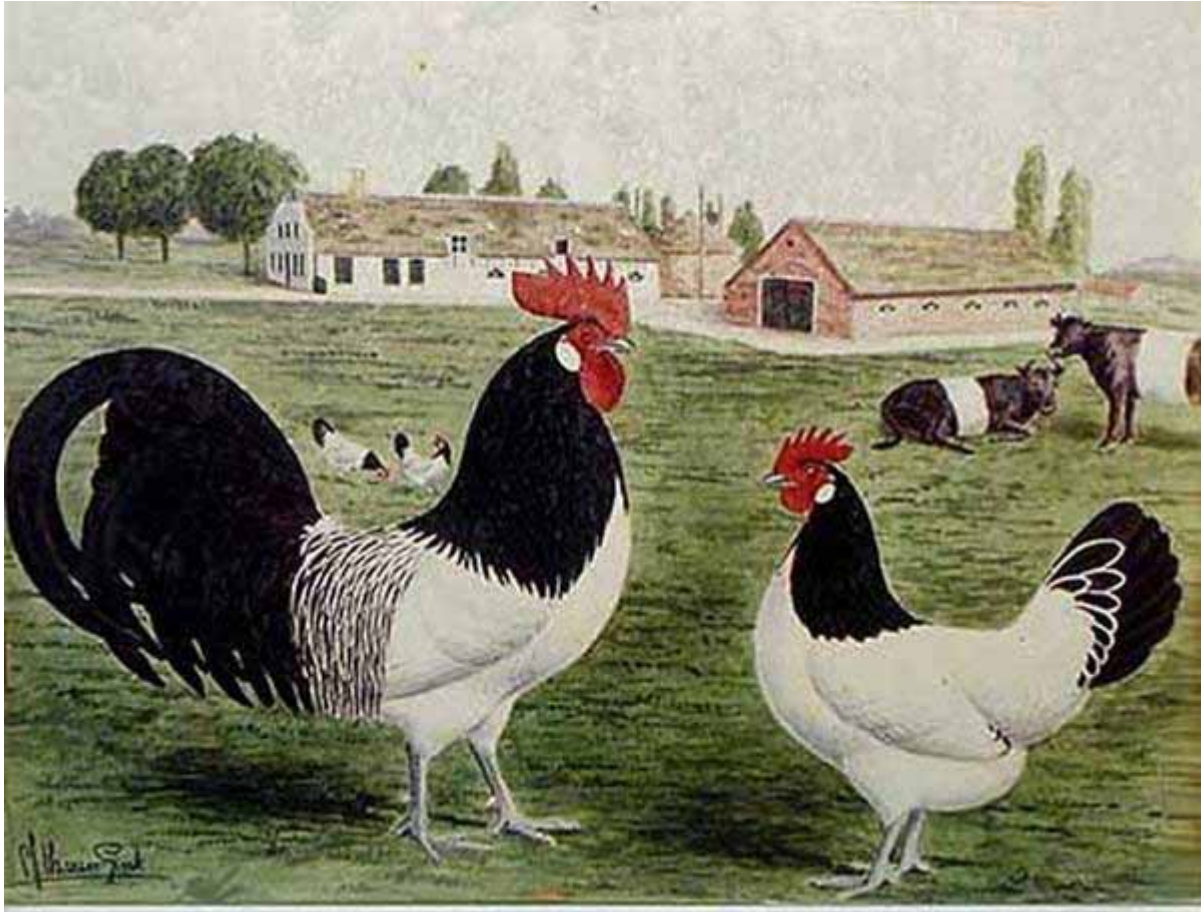


Second theory: The Dutch version

This is based on an ancient document from 1727. This document, being an itinerary, was published in 1925 in the magazine *Het Buitenverblijf*. In the story the 'Lakenveltsche Hoenders' are mentioned. The name of the breed should be taken from the small village Lakerveld, which is situated between Meerkerk and Lexmond.

(Photo left: Dirk de Jong)

In those days, mainly black-and-white marked chickens were kept and bred. The belief that the Lakenvelder is of Dutch origin, is corroborated by the fact that a breed of cattle painted in 1650 by the artist Huisman in the Netherlands, is also known as Lakenvelders. So, the Dutch theory on the origin of the Lakenvelder is more ancient than that from Germany. For this reason maybe we could call the Lakenvelder a Dutch breed.



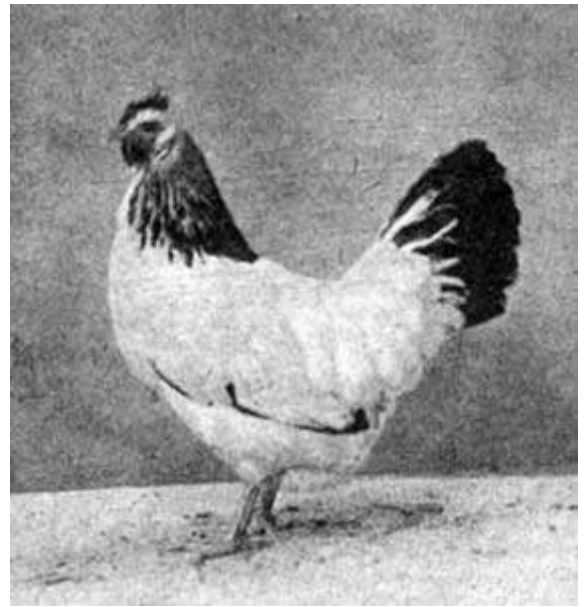
Above: Lakenvelder, drawing from Van Gink. Archives Nederlandse Hoenderclub.

However, there is a third possibility

In the past, there was a solid trade bond between Westfalen and The Netherlands. Due to economic pressure, farm workers travelled from Westfalen to work in our country in the spring, and in the following autumn they travelled the same route back home again. It is quite possible that they brought eggs of the dark coloured chickens to our country and that they took eggs of the Dutch black-and-white marked chickens back to Westfalen.

The street hawkers from those days, mainly selling haberdashery probably sold other things like eggs and chickens.

There is a clear link between the breeds Hannoversche Landhoenders and Lakenvelder (both being marked black-and-white marked) supporting this third theory. Moreover, during the years of this trade (\pm 1835 t/m 1875) the name Lakenvelder was known in both Germany and The Netherlands. So if Hannoversche Landhoenders were in principle Lakenveltsche Hoenders (as their history goes further back than the year 1800), both Germany and The Netherlands can jointly claim origin of the breed.



Above: Lakenvelder at a Dutch Show in 1920. The neck of the hen shows too much white markings, however, the markings at the nicely spread, broad tail are

perfect. Also notice the well developed belly! The neck hackle of the cock is deep black, but lacking a great number of tail coverts make it show a lot of white down at the tail roots. In those days there was no strict description for the colour of the saddle hackle; one strived for a colour as black as possible. Photos: Avicultura.

Finally... a fourth theory

This theory is based on the fact that the name is derived from the marking pattern, being a white sheet (laken) on a black field (veld). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* of 1772, cattle with a white band around the body had



been originated in Holland. Further investigations show this colour marking was described in the 12th century

Chronica Bohemarium, as being a broad white band on a black cattle breed; the well known Lakenvelder cow.

Possibly the chickens were also named 'Lakenveltsche' in the past because of the resemblance to these cows.

Left: Lakenvelder cows. Photo Aviculture Europe

None of these are final

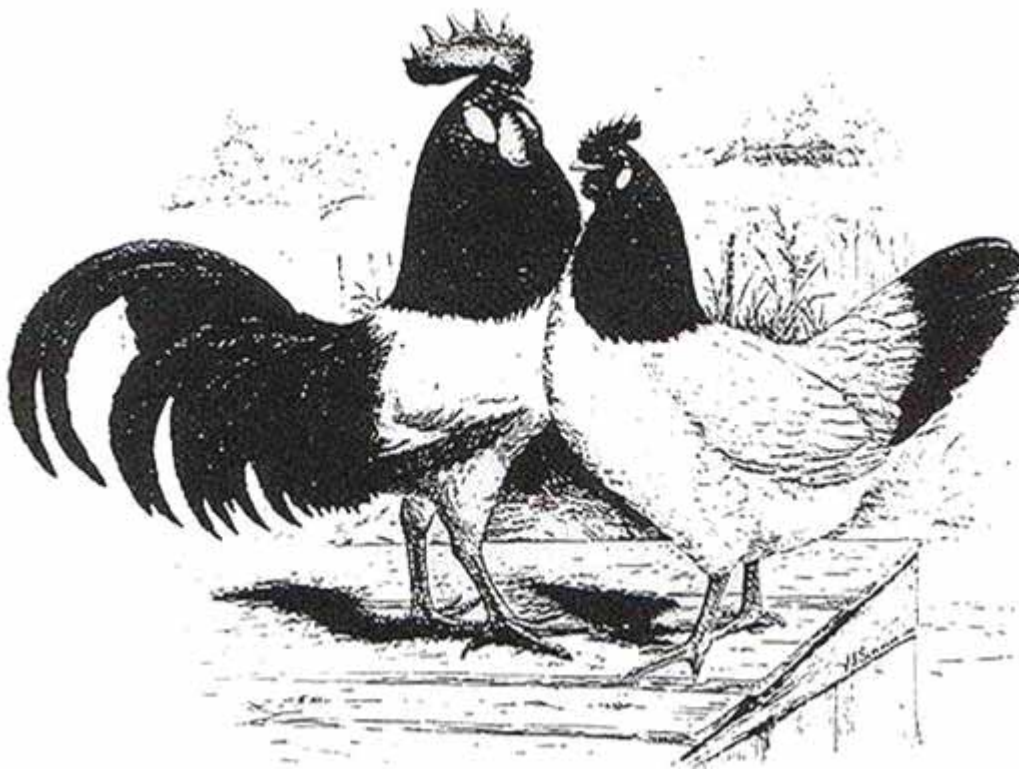
So neither the origin of the breed nor the origin of the name 'Lakenvelder' can be definitively determined. It is quite possible that one day more theories may be added to this list. The journey back in history has not brought us any closer in solving the mystery. One thing is known for certain: the Lakenvelder bantam is purely a Dutch creation, which began around 1939.

Lakenvelder in England

At some stage between 1800-1900 the "Lakenveltsche hoenders" were imported into England. This import was mostly via The Netherlands. In his *Illustrated Book of Poultry*, Lewis Wright stated a difference between the Dutch and the German import. The Dutch cocks had dark saddle hackles while the German had a light coloured saddle. Furthermore, he noticed that the hens showed dark greyish necks and tails, instead of the required black. The English breeders tried to follow the Dutch colour markings as much as possible, but gradually they created their own pattern, being a bird with a lot of black.

Eventually the cocks were bred in such a way that the cocks showed a completely black back. Fortunately this extreme colour pattern did not gain favour and was not pursued. Today the English Lakenvelder is bred more to conform to the Dutch standard.

The colour of the modern Dutch Lakenvelder is somewhere in-between the German and the English varieties.



Above: Drawing of the English Lakenvelder round 1900. Again the hen is missing the white lacing in the tail coverts. The cock doesn't have the small black bar at the wing; still it shows a plain black saddle and black primaries.

Concise description of the breed

The Lakenvelder is a medium-sized, lightly-built chicken; a farmyard type of fowl with a rather long, deep body. The tail should not be carried too high. The comb is single; lobes are white and the eye-colour red-brown to deep orange. The legs are slate blue. They are only recognised in the 'Lakenvelder marking' which is more or less the same in the cock and the hen. The red comb and white ears contrast beautifully with the velvet black of the head and neck hackle, followed by another striking contrast with the white of the body, and again the intense black of the tail coverts, side hangers and sickles. The saddle hackle of the cock is white with a broad, black stripe. The tail coverts of the hen have white lacing. In the Netherlands the Lakenvelder bantam is also recognised in a blue variety, in which all black parts are replaced with blue.



Left: A box filled with Lakenvelder chicks. Note the typical head marking. Photo: Henk Meijers.

Lakenvelders in the breeding pen

It is difficult to breed the pure white 'sheet' between the deep black neck and tail. Many things can go wrong in the divining of black and white. For instance, if the father has

little to no saddle marking, his daughters will have too much white in their necks. Some white markings in the upper neck feathers of the hens are allowed though.

The markings of the flights also deserve attention; the outer vane has to be white and the inner vane black. Sometimes they are all black, mostly from hens with too much black on their necks. A lack of black is much worse, for this means that the bird has an insufficient 'reserve' of black. Such birds should never be included in the breeding pen.

The colour of the down is preferably a light bluish grey; birds with white down instead of grey, may look quite bright and contrast well, perhaps getting a high score at exhibition, but these are not suitable for the breeding pen, because they won't have enough colour reserve. To ensure the black colour reserve, it is advisable to keep several birds with some black colour in the white parts and use them in the breeding program.



Right: Young Lakenvelder. Photo Henk Meijers.



Of course one or two mis-coloured feathers may be clipped before the show, although if too many are removed the darker down will be seen at the surface, making the remedy worse than the problem.

Hens carrying spurs is a fault that can only be solved by means of strict selection.

Left: A pullet from J. Bosman at the Oneto Show 2006. Photo: Dirk de Jong.



**Left: a pair of Lakenvelder. Owner: J. v.d. Salm.
Photo: Dirk de Jong.**

Breeding Lakenvelder and Lakenvelder bantams is quite challenging. Many chicks must be raised in order to select only a few suitably marked birds. This makes a bigger triumph when showing a champion Lakenvelder.

The breed is also especially suitable for the 'back-yard' fancier. A flock of Lakenvelders foraging on a grassy meadow is a wonderful sight. For beauty, the Lakenvelder can compete with any inland or foreign breed and when properly cared for, they will prosper as well as any other breed.

Right: Lakenvelder bantam cock, blue marked. Photo: Henk Meijers.

To end with

The historical facts above may have provided some insight about the origin of the Lakenvelder breed. Perhaps it doesn't really matter which theory is correct. More importantly, hopefully more fanciers will be encouraged by this article to keep the beautiful and challenging Lakenvelder.

Interested? Please contact the Dutch Specialty Club for this breed:

Nederlandse Lakenvelder en Vorwerk Speciaalclub,
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A special thank you to Henk Meijers for supplying several beautiful Lakenvelder photos. More pictures at his website <http://home.hetnet.nl/~h.meijers/index.html>