

CHICKEN BREEDS IN GREECE

Text and photos: Elly Vogelaar



We have always assumed that there were no 'Greek' chicken breeds. However, according to the SAFE Foundation, recent monitoring by the *Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe* has shown that there are indeed several Greek poultry breeds. One more reason for me to always have my camera at hand during my holiday to Greece this spring.

It was about 600 B.C. when various types of chickens arrived in Greece, via West Asia, Persia and Egypt. Then since the beginning of the Christian era they have been spread as common fowl from Greece all over Europe.

Left: In the Museum of Delphi you can see this proto-corinthian statue of a chicken, dated 600 B.C. In every respect it is very much like our nowadays chickens, although not recognisable as a specific 'breed'.

Right: Chickens on Alonissos Island, 2007

Aristotle (a Greek philosopher & zoologist \pm 380 B.C.) described a number of these domesticated chickens. Same as customary today, the names referred to Greek (or Persian) regions or islands:

- Lydian chicken, with a comb like a poppy and white spots at the end of the tail feathers.
- Tanagra Chicken, game fowl, much like the Lidysche chicken but of a raven black colour.
- Rhodos Chicken (Game fowl from Rhodos Island)
- Chalkidiki Chicken (Game fowl from Chalkidiki)
- Median Chickens (from Media and Persia; no further description).
- Alexandrian Chickens, no further description.
- Longobardian Chicken, long legged and with golden/yellow feathers, also called Patavinians or Pharao's chickens. This breed also existed in a hooded variety.



- Thessalonian Chicken, a 'mute' variety.
- Chickens from the Empire of Mangi, white coloured and with hair like cats. Smaller than the Barn Owl.
- Hadrian hens, everyday layers that kill their offspring.

Further more Aristotle mentioned 'common fowl' having nice, long red wattles.



Left: Turkeys and chickens on Alonissos Island, 2007.

Another historian, Columella, gave a more detailed description of the various Greek chickens in his book *De Re Rustica*. (2 B.C.) In this book we can read that the Greek - and in special the inhabitants of Delos - were very skilled breeders and in particular known for their knowledge on breeding Game Fowl. The Game birds from Rhodos and Tanagra were the largest in size and the bravest. They preferably had red or brown feathers with black wings. White fowl was not in favour; it was supposed to be too delicate and an easily visible target for the birds of prey. Laying hens should preferably be of a ruddy colour, with a broad breast and a cubic body, a large head with a small comb and white ears. The matching cocks had to be beautiful to look at, but most of all sturdy, strong, proud, vivacious, always ready to crow and not easily startled. All these qualities were needed because they had to be able

to protect their harem by killing snakes i.e.!

From this piece of old history appears that poultry farming in Ancient Greek was blooming. That is why it is so strange that since then there hasn't been any further mention about the Greek poultry.

Right: Crested chicken (hen) on Alonissos Island.

Recently the *Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe* has published the results of a research on the genetic sources of autochthonous Greek livestock breeds, concluding that there were hardly any references available to literature, studies or publications about poultry in Greece. There IS some information though, which has been registered for further investigation in the *Breed Atlas*. The following 'breeds' were mentioned:

- Alonissos island Chicken
- Chios Fighting Chicken or *Nysiriotiko*
- Curly Chicken Mutation
- Follidotes Chicken
- Hooded (Crested) Greek Chicken or *Katsouliara*



- Kalamata Chicken
- Karditsa Palama village Chicken
- Komotini Black Chicken
- Komotini Long Crow Chicken
- Lesvos Dwarf Naked Necked Chicken
- Lesvos Fillianes Chicken
- Milos Island Chicken
- Pomak Fighting Chicken or *Hilliano*
- Short Legged Greek Chicken
- Trikala Chicken



**Above: Naked neck hen.
Left: A 'ruddy' and a black hen.**

As said, these are only 'bits of information'; up to now no poultry specialists could be found. The subject should be promoted in Greece amongst a much wider public. The people who might be interested should be stimulated to meet, for instance at the University of Athens. The first attempts to organise things like this were without success so far. According to SAVE, this situation deserves full attention in the times to come.

The existence of this list of 'possibly' Greek chicken breeds made the usual 'holiday-chicken-picturing' once again extra interesting! On Alonissos Island nothing could have happened better, as on this Island almost everybody keeps some chickens.



Unfortunately the friendly inhabitants hardly speak any language except Greek, especially when it comes to chickens... And then you realise that names as Hooded, Curly, Long Crower, Game or Naked Neck have not much to go by, without any

further description of colour and markings i.e. The only 'Hooded' (Crested) hen that I saw, was much like our Dutch Polish and the Naked Necks were NO dwarfs for certain... Still they were striking, for most of the times they were a real hotchpotch of backyard poultry, although there was one kind that I saw more often; ruddy or red/brown layers with black wings, like Columella's description of the Chickens from Rhodos and Tanagra. Still I must admit that most of all they resembled the well-known hybrids...



Another more regular kind of chicken was the white-black columbian, both cocks and hens, often having 5 toes and foot feathering. (Photo right)



Then again it always made me smile when I saw the food of the chicks; soaked 'Greek' bread, olives, onions, peppers, tomatoes... Of course this is the only proper way to grow up for a real Greek chicken! Don't get me wrong; they all looked very vital and healthy as you can see for yourself in the left picture!

As you can understand, I had a great time, although my pictures won't contribute to the monitoring. Still I hope that before long some real Greek chicken breeds can be added to the European Breed Atlas!

Sources:

- Houwink, Hoenderrassen in hunne vormen en kleuren, 1909.
- SAVE Foundation; Monitoring Institute for Rare Breeds and Seeds in Europe
- http://www.save-foundation.net/deutsch/PDF/GR_Schlussreport_06.pdf

The amazing world off crossing pigeons

Text and photos: Nico van Benten

During the last Avicorni National pigeon exhibition in Leiden (the Netherlands), the well-known pigeon fancier, judge and illustrator Jan de Jong became fascinated by the impressive shield marking of a Black Laced Moravian (Mährische) Strasser and decided to buy a couple.

The Belgium owner and exhibitor of the Moravian Strasser was able to sell him a couple from that breed, but unfortunately they later turned out to be both two males (a large and a small one . . .).

Jan was not successful in obtaining any females but He did happen to have a spare female Franconian Shield, so he decided to follow the difficult path of 'Making his own' Moravian Strasser, namely by crossing, inbreeding and selection from this unlikely matched pair: the Moravian Strasser male with this Franconian Velvet Shield female.



Above left: This is the Moravian Strasser male, mated to a red Franconian Shield (with a second nest).

Above right: Youngsters of the second breeding round, of course very vital and vigorous. The miscoloured beaks of this 1st Generation cross can already clearly be seen.

Right: The Franconian Velvet Shield Pigeons in different colours at the loft of Jan de Jong.



Jan's attraction to this particular colour and marking of Moravian Strasser was because this breed has a lot of similarity in colour and marking with the Oriental Frill, which he kept in his loft for almost all his life.

The first youngsters that were born seemed to have 'a bit of everything'; a true intermediate inheritance, with traits from both parents. But unfortunately they were both females, such things can happen, also two males in one nest, although in most cases it is a male and a female.

If we consider the genetic pattern of both parents, we can explain the black colour of the two female youngsters, because the black of the Moravian father is in this case recessive with regard to the dominant red of the Franconian shield mother. Now perhaps you wonder, is it possible that such an intensive red colour of a colour pigeon is a dominant red? Yes, at least the behaviour is as dominant, because the Franconian shield has the (dominant) ash red gene together with the recessive red colour. So this gives a sex-linked inheritance; the black youngsters can only be females (presuming the Franconian shield is homozygote).

Here follows an explanation on the differences at the first youngsters

Left: Almost the design of the Franconian Velvet Shield, but the colour and the spots on the head and neck are from the Moravian Strasser (father).

Below: The other youngster from this first breeding.



Left: Different nail colours, light and dark, respectively from the mother and the father.

The differentials are shown in everything. The first youngsters have different coloured eyes, dark on the left (from the Franconian Shield) and coloured on the right (from the Moravian Strasser). Not only the nail colour differs, but also the colour of the beak shows dark and light spots. The Moravian father brought dominant opal and the spread factor. What we see is apparently white and black, while the recessive red from the Franconian Shield seems to have disappeared. These youngsters show a complete mix of all the genetic factors from both parents and that is exactly what we need, as from now on, the aim is to select the desired factors, from which all the factors from the original material have to re-appear.

For this experiment to continue, Jan will however need two youngster of each sex, because together they have to produce the next generation, which 'according the books' will directly give a separation in chromosomes; the F2 (second) generation will theoretically produce offspring as follows: 25% Moravian Strasser, 25% Franconian shields and 50% crossings.

In the meantime Jan has bred some more youngsters from the Moravian Strasser and the Franconian shield. And indeed, as explained above, the black ones are all females and the Strawberry's (reds) are males. He now has two males and two females, and this will be sufficient to continue the experiment.

**Right: One of the strawberry (red) youngsters.
Photo: Jan de Jong.**



The second generation will be born next year, or maybe already this year. Jan is looking forward to the results, and after that he will continue the experiment with the combination of father x daughter and mother x son, to bring back the dominant opal and the recessive red. You must have courage and luck. We will keep you informed.

FAUNA FALSIFICATION . . .



. . . can go fast!

By: Dirk de Jong

Monday 23 April 2007 I met this family when I was out for a ride on my bike around my village IJsselstein (NL); a pair of Egyptian Geese with 12 ducklings. Both father and mother are protecting their offspring.

The Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiacus*) originates in Africa, south of the Sahara and along the river Nile and also there they are often said to be a real nuisance.

They belong to the Anatidae family (Swans, Geese and Ducks), the Tadorninae sub-family.

According to ornithologists they belong to the Ducks, but due to their appearance and forage behaviour they are often named Geese.



The ancient Egyptians considered the Egyptian Goose as a sacred bird and its image is often found in various forms of fine art. Already in the hoary antiquity these birds were kept as ornamental waterfowl. In The Netherlands they were portrayed in paintings of i.e. Melchiord'Hondecoeter (1636-1695).

The breeding season of the Egyptian Goose is long and sometimes the first ducklings are already seen as early as February. The incubation period is 28 to 30 days and the number of eggs is said to be 5 to 8. But as you see in the above picture, this couple succeeded in producing 12 ducklings in one breeding round!



As a nesting place the Egyptian Geese prefer natural hollows or nests, built by other birds. They can simply be on the ground, but also in a nest house for i.e. the Peregrine Falcon, 50 m high!

According to my books there is no

difference in colour between the male and the female goose. They are about 65 to 70 cm, the male being somewhat larger. At this male I noticed a dark coloured stripe at the lower breast, which was missing at the female.

The birds are easy recognisable. Head, breast and belly are a light grey to brown grey colour. They have a red-brown spot around the eyes and a red-brown ring around the neck. There should be a red-brown spot at the lower breast but these geese didn't have that! Some of them have grey-brown upper parts; others are red-brown and in flight their distinctive white wing-coverts are revealed. Their bills, legs and feet are pink.

Egyptian Geese mature in their second year. During their first year the birds stay together all summer as a group. The late-hatched birds are recognisable by the lack of the red-brown spot on the breast, which will not occur before autumn.

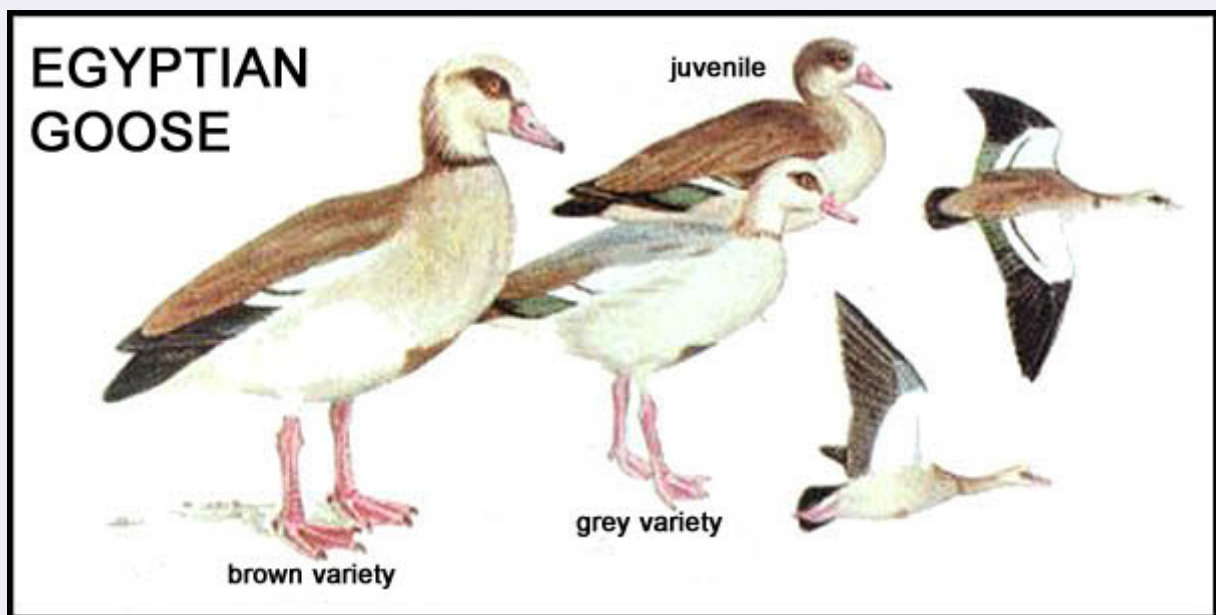
Up to some ten years ago the Egyptian Goose was a very expensive bird which could not be bought for less than 2000 Dutch guilders. Nowadays you can see these geese everywhere in the wild, but it is an aggressive bird which will oust all other birds - even their own kind - from their natural breeding territory.



They seem to have adapted themselves completely to the environment in The Netherlands and Belgium, probably due to the mild winters that we've had lately.

As said, the Egyptian Geese that we see in the wild in The Netherlands and Belgium are birds escaped from aviaries. However, evil tongues claim that they are set free intentionally, in an attempt to keep the prices high.

Regardless of the true reason of their appearance in the wild, this is a plea to pinioning non-indigenous species in order to prevent flight and make the birds that do escape easier to catch.



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An advertisement for Diane Jacky Gift Shop. It features a woman holding a sign with the name 'Jacky' and a rooster. The text reads: 'Diane Jacky Gift Shop', 'Rooster & Hen Art Products', 'Fancy & Racing Pigeon / Dove Art', and 'Over 35 Years of Bird Art by Diane Jacky'.