

CHICKEN RUN

AMROCK BANTAM

at the
VOSTERS' FAMILY



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Photo's: Aviculture Europe

Introduction

Every now and then our readers inquire about the Amrock bantam. In Holland, only a few registered fanciers keep them, although we think there are more around than we know of, because the Amrock bantam is a lovely breed to keep.

We visited the Vosters family in Vessem, as we were told they keep Amrock bantams, among others.....

Left: Sjaan Vosters with one of her Amrock bantam cocks.

Harrie, Sjaan and John Vosters

Although we went to see the Amrock Bantams, there is a lot more to admire at the Vosters family. The parents of Mrs. Sjaan Vosters had a chicken farm with utility breeds including American Leghorn, Rhode Island Reds and Barnevelders... no hybrids in those days. During the first years of their marriage, Sjaan and Harrie kept some animals around the house including homing pigeons. Due to the lack of a fanciers' club in their village they decided to found one. They gathered people with the same interest and in 1988 started the 'KV Vessem en Omstreken', which now has 79 members, including 69 who are active breeders. Today Harry is club chairman and Sjaan undertakes the leg band administration.





The Vosters keep a range of different breeds. Their son, John, still lives at home and is as dedicated as his parents. The Vorwerk bantams are 'his', although there is no strict separation as they all take part in caring. When showing the animals, Harry enters rabbits, doves and pigeons while the chickens, pheasants and ducks are entered by Sjaan (and the Vorwerk by John).

Left: Gumbinnen Whitehead



Touring the pens was lovely; we admired Gumbinnen white heads in the 'former' homing pigeon loft and the pied Dutch Dwarf rabbits, Thrianta and Rex. **(Photo right)**

The aviaries contain Vienna Long-faced tumblers, Coburg larks, Figurita owls, Spotted doves, Barbary (Ringneck) doves, Californian quails and golden pheasants. There are also Black East Indian ducks, Call ducks and Hawaiian ducks.

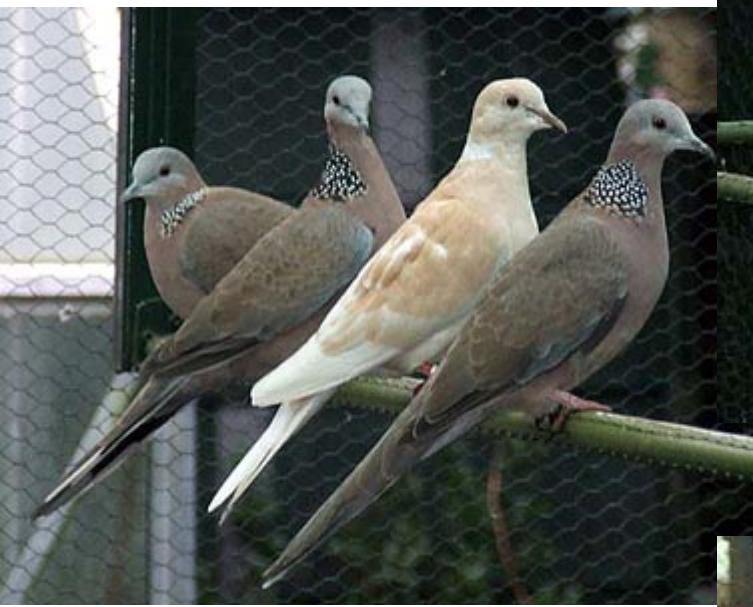
Then finally we explored the chicken pens with Vorwerk, Bielefelder, Lakenfelder, Wyandotte and Ko Shamo bantams and of course, Sjaan's pride and joy, the Amrock bantams.

Below: Vienna MF Tumbler in red, black, yellow and blue black barred



Rightt: Coburg Lark.

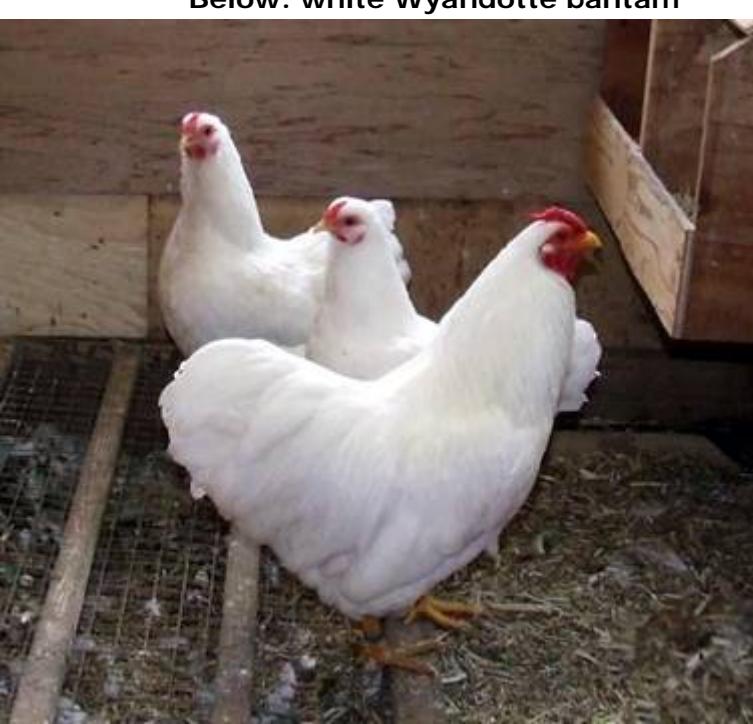
Left below: 3 Spotted doves, the second is a Barbary (Ringneck)dove.



Right below: Golden pheasant
Left below: Wigeon



Right below: Ko Shamo



Below: white Wyandotte bantam



Left: Bielefelder bantam
Right below: Vorwerk bantam



Left: Lakenvelder bantam
below: Amrock bantam



The Amrock bantam

This breed is a German creation, made by crossing Amrock large fowl with Plymouth Rock bantams along with several other breeds. In East Germany (the former DDR) the Amrock bantam was standardised in 1972, although it took much longer to get the breed recognised in West Germany. The breed was rejected in 1964 and again in 1974, the reason being that it was 'only' a utility breed, not known outside of Germany and – in spite of the name Amrock, meaning American Rock –

even not known in the USA. (Source: Handbuch der Zwerghuhnrasse, Rüdiger Wandelt und Josef Wolters). One could wonder why the Amrock large fowl did pass the selection being recognised in 1958. Finally in 1983 the breed got the green light and by 1995 there were 300 bantams entered at a special show for Amrock bantams, with the breed enjoying huge popularity.

The Amrock large fowl is related to the Plymouth Rock and we can take for granted the Amrock bantam resembles the Plymouth Rock bantam. The most obvious distinction between Amrock and Plymouth Rock bantams is type. The back line of the Amrock bantam sweeps upwards towards the tail with regard to the under line. This gives the breed a typical bell-shape when viewed from the side, particularly the hen. In contrast, Plymouth Rock bantams appear longer than Amrock bantams, having a rather long, broad, straight back, rising only very gradually in a slight incline to the tail.

As the breed is not found in the American and British poultry standards, we give you a short description:

Breed Characteristics of the cock

Head: moderately large. Comb: rather small, single, straight, upright and evenly serrated. Ear lobes: red. Eyes: full, prominent, red. Beak: yellow. Neck: Rather long, having abundant hackle flowing well over shoulders. Body: rather long, broad, deep, full. Breast: Broad, full, well rounded. Belly: full and broad. Back: Rather long, broad its entire length, nearly horizontal with a concave sweep to tail; saddle feathers filling well in front of tail. Tail: Medium length, broad and well spread. Sickles and tail-coverts: well curved, and sufficiently abundant to almost hide the stiff feathers of the tail when viewed from front or side. Legs: yellow, of medium length, stout, set well apart. Plumage is tightly feathered.

Breed characteristics of the hen

Giving an impression of being a bit more 'rounded' than the cock, a well built belly and deep breasted bird, the outlines





forming a bell-shape when viewed from the side.

Left: Feathers of a cock. The barring at the large one should be sharper and the top should be black.

The Amrock (and bantam) is a dual purpose fowl; a fowl that excels in egg production and meat qualities and is also valued as a fancy fowl. They grow rapidly, are very hardy and easy to rear. Although not frequent sitters, they do make excellent mothers.

The Amrock (and bantam) come in the barred variety only. The cocks have black and pale grey bars of the same width, while the black bars in the hens are twice as broad as the light bars. This marking is not as refined as that of the Plymouth Rock, but also not as coarse as cuckoo barring. The whole feather, including the down, is barred which should be rather sharply defined. The tip of the feather is black.



Above: The hen in front has broader white stripes.

Breeding and keeping

Apart from the aviaries the Vosters have 10 pens for their various chicken breeds, each having a small run outside in the garden. The pens were sound-proofed after one neighbour complained about the crowing cocks. When the breeding season starts, Sjaan selects four breeding pens of Amrock bantams, but she keeps only two males; one cock and one cockerel, which she rotates between pens. The pullets are mated with the cock and the hens to the cockerel. Sjaan has introduced 'new blood' into their existing stock only once, mainly to improve the brightness of the colour. From the approximately 25 Amrock bantam chicks hatched each year, some six to eight will be 'show quality' or worthy for

breeding. They are slowly improving each year. The breed is very popular as backyard poultry because of their quiet nature and utility qualities so the excess birds are easily sold.

They always use an incubator, as 'broodies' take up too much room. The Amrock

is an auto-sexing breed, meaning the sex of the chicks can be identified at hatching by the larger white spot on the male's head. Sometimes this is difficult to distinguish, especially in the bantams and even more difficult with only one bantam chick (like Sjaan and Harry had in their first batch) with nothing to 'compare'.



The chick is three weeks old now and the feathering is rather dark, so Sjaan thinks it is a female, but Harrie points at the rather large white spot at the head, which is still visible, and thinks it is a male.

Here in the province of Brabant, local clubs are able to make arrangements with some agricultural providers to deliver special food mixes. The club orders a mix that helps promote extra yellow legs in the



chickens. The feed is purchased in 100kg lots and each club member can purchase a share.

The waterers are connected using water-pipes; a home-made system and very convenient. When the weather freezes, the pipe is shut down and the waterers are filled by hand.

Left: Harrie points out that the white barring at the hens is smaller.



To guard against red mites they use 'Solfac', a Belgian-made chemical. Fortunately lice are seldom seen, but to make sure, they use a drop of 'Frontline'. According to Sjaan old hens are never bothered with lice. Several years ago the family lost all their young chickens due to Marek disease. Since that 'black year', every new-born chick is vaccinated. This can only be done on the day of hatching, so for the Vosters this means five or six times per breeding season. Fortunately the vaccination can be shared among four other

members of the club to ease the high cost. This means however, that their breeding times must always be coordinated.



Above: Some of the prizes.

Showing

Of course Harrie and Sjaan show their birds and rabbits at their own local club show, at neighbouring open shows and the Noordshow (Poultry Union Show). According to the Vosters, showing is the best thing about their hobby. Some of the breeds they keep are rather rare and they believe it is important to show those to the public. Unfortunately, with so few bloodlines it is difficult to improve their stock to higher standards.

The Amrock bantams are conditioned for show by carefully removing any wrong-coloured feathers, which benefit the all-over look of the barring. The legs are cleaned and face, combs and legs are rubbed with a little oil which intensifies the red and yellow colouring. Sjaan expects the judge's report to say: Feathering should be broader; barring more sharply defined; hens should carry their wings higher and tighter. Still Sjaan

and Harrie enjoy keeping them, although they realise there is only a slight chance their birds will judged Best in Show. But it does sometimes happen. Sjaan once won Best with a Lakenfelder and this year she won Best





Waterfowl with an Hawaiian duck. Harrie was rewarded with Provincial Champion with his Barbary (Ringneck) dove, winning a beautiful Delftware blue porcelain plate.

Finally...

We received a hearty welcome by the Vosters family and think the 'KV Vessem en Omstreken' is blessed to have such active and enthusiastic people on their board, who are always willing to help and promote our special hobby wherever they can. Next year the club founded by Harrie and Sjaan will celebrate its 20th anniversary Jubilee, with an Open Show! For more news visit the club's website at www.gust.nl/kvv

We wish them lots of success!

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Below: Harrie at the chicken runs.

