

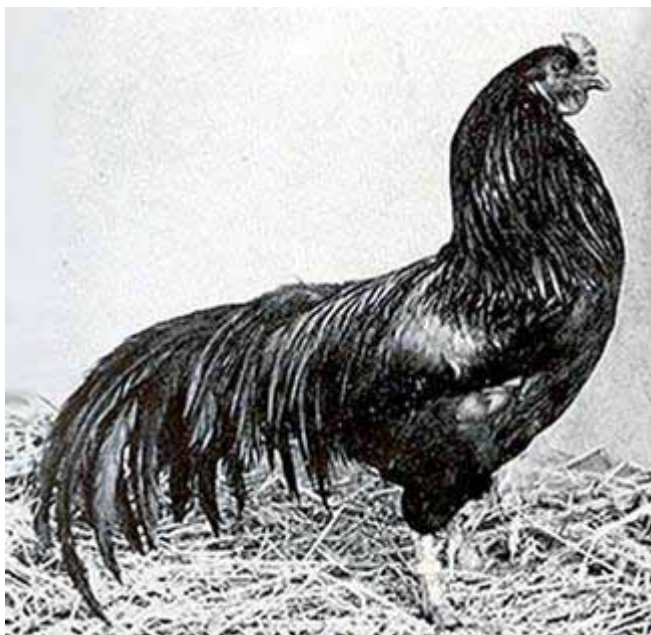
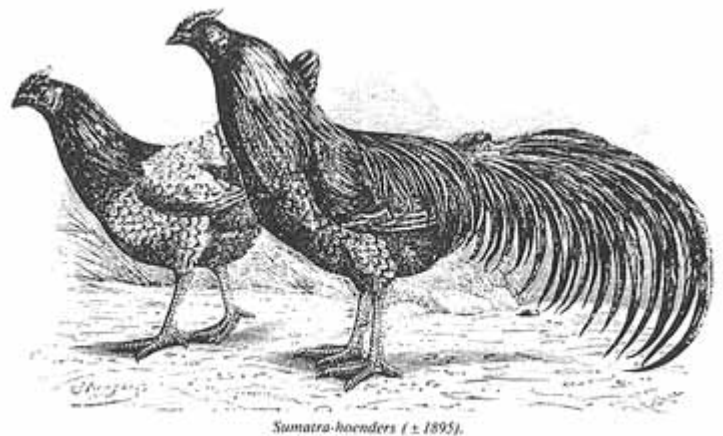


THE SUMATRA

By Wanda Zwart

Origin

Sumatra fowl (Ayam Gallak) originally come from the Island of Sumatra (part of the Indonesian Sunda Islands). The Sumatra is one of the oldest fighting gamefowl breeds and their genetic influence in other gamefowl breeds is noticeable. There are however speculations about the exact origin of the breed. The Sumatras at present day and the birds used in the past for cockfighting have nothing to do with each other (Prof. G. Kooy 1995).



Above: Drawing from ± 1895. Artist unknown. Left: Male Sumatra bred by Captain E. Duckworth (United Kingdom) in 1906. Photo: Asian Gamefowl Society (SAV)

The bantam version of the black Sumatra was created in Holland. In England white Sumatras have been created by crossing them with white Yokohamas. A lot of work is still needed to improve the quality of these whites.



Male (upper left) and female (right) from the United States. This photo very clearly shows the very intense green glossy plumage at the male and female. Photo: R. Schock (USA).

The first birds were imported in 1847 into the United States. Due to their glossy green plumage and elegant appearance they became very popular. In 1883 the Sumatra was adopted into the Standard of Perfection. Around the same time they were imported into Germany and in 1900 into the United Kingdom. In Indonesia the Sumatra is still used under its local name Ayam Sumatra for cockfighting purposes. In Western countries the Sumatra is mainly bred for exhibition purposes. From e-sources I know that in France Sumatras are again bred for cockfighting purposes.

Breed Features

Sumatras are medium-sized fowl with a pheasant-like appearance. They are of medium station. The back is of medium length, the saddle feathers are abundant. The tail is long and very rich feathered. The sickle feathers curve at two-thirds of their length and droop downwards. It is preferred that the sickles don't drag on the soil. The females have relatively long tail feathers too. But only the ends of the upper main tail feathers show some curve.



Left: a glossy green rich feathered saddle of a male Sumatra. Below: a rich-feathered but tight plumage. Photos: Wanda Zwart.





For gamefowl Sumatras have a very rich (not fluffy) but adjoining plumage. The shafts of the feathers are rigid and hard.

Left: the females also have relative long tails. The upper main tail feathers curve slightly at the end. Photo: Wanda Zwart.

They have a small head (so called snakehead) with a small triple pea comb. The colour of the comb is variable, ranging from red to purple.

The eye colour should be as dark as possible. But the iris and the pupil should be visible.

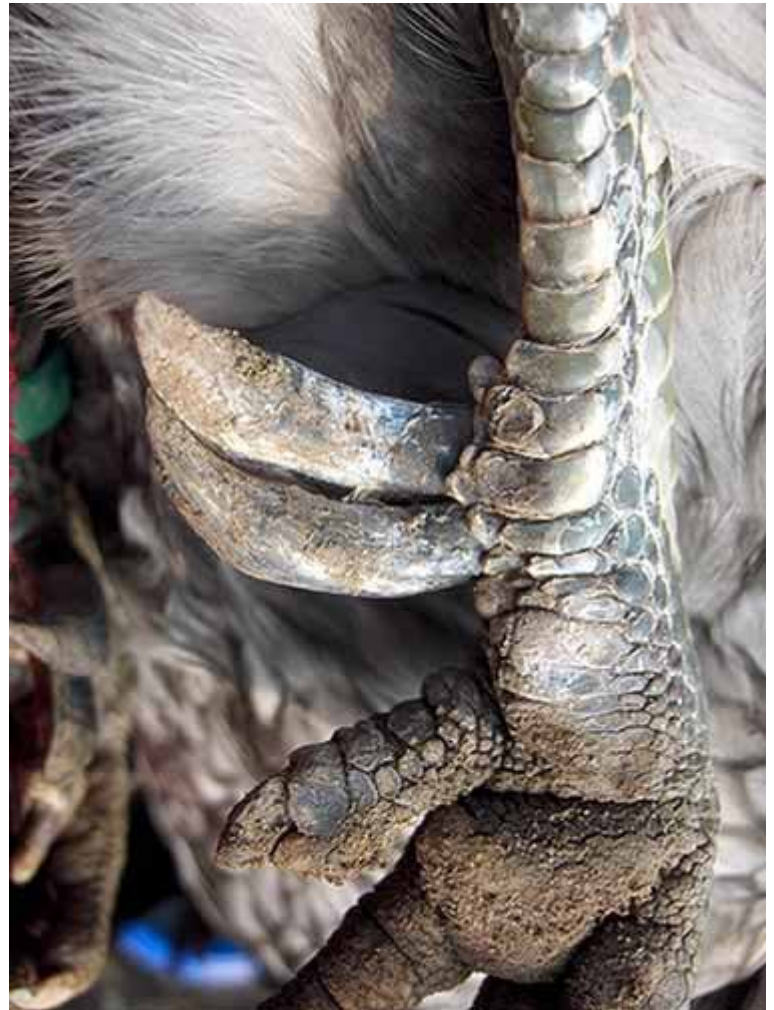
This is shown in the pictures. The first two pictures are from birds with a red and a purple comb. The head below is from a young female. All pictures are taken by Wanda Zwart who is also the owner of these birds.



The shanks are dark-coloured and the sole of the feet should be yellow. White soles are also seen but in Holland such birds are disqualified. In the United States white soles are not considered as a problem and accepted. Some bloodlines show multiple spurs but there are also bloodlines that only show a rudimentary growth of multiple spurs. The weight of the male is 2 to 2.5 Kg (4.4 to 5.5 Lbs). The female is 1.8 to 2.3 Kg (3.9 to 5 Lbs). The size of the tag ring is 18 Mm (1.4 Inch). A Sumatra is fully developed at an age of two years. This is an important aspect to be considered if you want to exhibit Sumatras on a poultry show.



Left: Clear yellow soles.
Photo: Wanda Zwart.



Right: Double spur
Photo: Willem van Ballekom.

Colours

In Holland only the black glossy green colour is standardized. A red or purple gloss is also seen but is considered a fault in the Dutch poultry standard. However more colours exist. In Scandinavia also blue-coloured Sumatras exist. In Holland a few breeders of blue Sumatras can be found. In Germany (including former East Germany) there are some red-blacks and partridge coloured ones. In the UK and United States some white coloured Sumatras exist but these are at present day not standardized yet. On a Belgian poultry exhibition several Sumatras with red hackles were shown, but these are also not standardized.



Left: Old black male.
Photo: Willem van Ballekom.

Behaviour

Sumatras in their behaviour clearly show that they are still close to their original ancestors. They really like to roam freely and they also are very alert. If they feel in danger then they can take off in a flash, vertically, passing high fences easily. If they have to choose between indoor housing and a branch of tree the Sumatra most of the time will choose the last option. Due to their behaviour Sumatras need large spacious coops and high mounted roosts. They also need this to keep their plumage and overall condition (muscles)

in good shape. Sumatras don't need any special poultry feed. Sometimes an extra amount of protein is advised to stimulate feather growth.

Sumatras are strong birds with a high resistance against some poultry diseases (for example Marek). You should watch for CRD or Chronic Respiratory Disease which can be inherited. Do not breed from birds that transmit this disease. To keep them in optimal health it is advised to give them dry and windproof housing for the night.



**Right: A splash stag.
Photo: Wanda Zwart.**

Despite the fact that Sumatras are gamefowl they are fairly tolerant against each other. Young males can grow up together after the hierarchy within the group has been cleared. But they need space just in case they need to walk away from trouble. Birds kept in coops show less temperament than birds that roam freely outdoors. A breeder taking daily care of his birds and especially young chicks, can expect trust and even affection. The hand-fed youngsters will follow every step of the breeder. Birds growing up with cats and dogs will accept these, but will warn for other animals intruding their territory.

Below: A mother with baby-chicks. Photo: Wanda Zwart.



Due to their pheasant-like appearance Sumatras will look like true jewels in your garden or pasture. The ladies are prolific producers of white eggs laying a fair number of eggs each year. The broody hens are good sitters and they take great care of their chicks. If magpies or other "predator" birds try to catch a baby-chick, the mother will perform the most athletic actions to re-claim their baby back from the predator. I have seen this myself, with a successful outcome several times. You really will notice the happiness of the birds after a group of Sumatras kept indoors for a long time (due to bird flu regulations) are set free again. They rumble and stumble and even perform "show-fights".



Left: Blue hen – not standardized in Holland. Photo: Wanda Zwart.

The crow of a Sumatra may sound a little bit different if you hear it for the first time. But like other chickens the males crow like any other cock.

Sumatras are exotic, elegant and mysterious birds. They really earn some credit!

Appearance

In Holland Sumatras are more or less rare, despite the fact that there are sufficient bloodlines and breeding material available.

Measured on a worldwide level the status of the breed is "sensitive". Due to this status (vaccinated)

Sumatras are protected against mandatory disposal by agricultural taskforces. The reason for this is the conservation of the Sumatra as a cultural heritage.

The Asian Gamefowl Society (*Speciaalclub Aziatische Vechthoenders*) with members worldwide has been founded in Holland. Additional information can be found at their website <http://agsglobal.tripod.com/holland/>). The Sumatra is also covered by them. The original Sumatra breed features, type, behaviour and character should be preserved. See also the AGS Sumatra website <http://agsglobal.tripod.com/sumatra/index.htm>

A new initiative covering longtailed and longcrower breeds has also been founded. See <http://agsglobal.tripod.com/langstaartkraai/intro/intro.htm>

In 2006 a Bantam Sumatra Breeders Group has been founded by Mr. G. van Tulder. This group does also support the above mentioned longtailed and longcrower breeds initiative. More information can be found at the above mentioned website were this bantam Sumatra group found its own place at the forum.



Right: Mother hen with baby chicks in France at Claude Callot. Photo: Nico van Bente.