

CHICKEN RUN

DUTCH BANTAMS
AT
JO OTTEN'S

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Photos: Aviculture Europe

The salmon colour is an ancient variety of Dutch Bantams, although you don't see them at the shows as often as the partridge varieties. Maybe one of the reasons is that for many poultry judges the salmon Dutch Bantam is a pain in the neck –they all look different – making the judges feel insecure when trying to pick the best. So the other day I decided to visit Jo Otten in Gemert (NL), Chairman of the Dutch Bantam Club in the Netherlands to find out just what 'proper' salmon should be.

**Above: Jo Otten with a salmon coloured Dutch Bantam.
Right: A black cock crowing.**

Jo Otten

Jo has kept Dutch Bantams for over 30 years. How he came to choose them when starting out is very simple... his young son always nagged for some chickens, so one day he scanned the newspaper advertisements and found a trio of silver Dutch Bantams for sale... and that is how the Dutch bantams came into the Otten household. It could have well been any breed but the little birds soon pricked Jo's interest, probably even more than his son's. He joined the local club in Gemert and stimulated by other club members he entered his trio at the large National Show in Den Bosch. The cock was



awarded 'Good', the one hen also 'Good' and the second hen 'Moderate'. That was not good enough for Jo, so right then he began studying the judge reports of the better birds. He also talked to more experienced fanciers about breeding this silver variety. Jo joined the Dutch Bantam Breeders Club and immersed himself



in the breeding of these gentle and quaint little birds. He carefully chose new birds to improve the offspring of his first trio. One short year later – at the same place and show – he won Best in Show with one of his cockerels!

Today Jo is chairman of the HKC. After all these years it's still Dutch Bantams and nothing else for Jo. He explains, "I once raised some Sebrights, but that was an 'aberration'. When I am at an exhibition and wander along the rows of chickens, I often find myself thinking that no other breed compares to the simplicity, the proud and confident nature and the lively and intriguing personality of the Dutch."

Left: A pair of Cuckoo Partridge (Crele) Dutch Bantams.

Right: Several black hens.

The Dutch Bantam

In the Netherlands, the Dutch Bantam is recognised in 25 colour varieties with more to come. They may be seen as a simple breed but these short legged, very tiny bantams with their colourful and abundant plumage are popular in many countries. Moreover the hens of these vigorous, jaunty bantams lay a large number of eggs of a surprisingly good size, being such tiny birds. They are good sitters and excellent mothers.

Typical breed characteristics are the downward angle of wing carriage, the long and beautifully curved tail sickles of the cock and the wide spread of the hen's tail. The head is small, with a single upright comb, white earlobes and orange to brown-red eyes. The body is short with good depth and width; broad across the shoulders. The carriage is upright, with the breast carried high, full and well forward. At the cock shoulders and front are well concealed by flowing hackles. The back is short and gracefully curves where the tail joins the back; with abundant saddle hackle and tail coverts. The legs are short and blue, except for the cuckoo varieties, which have rose-white legs.

Jo keeps 11 colour varieties, the black and cuckoo being his favourite since long times, but today he also applies himself to rare varieties like Cuckoo Partridge (Crele) and Salmon.





Some facts on the 'Salmon' colour

In the Salmon variety, the hens and cocks are completely different in colour. The most known salmon coloured chicken is the French breed Faverolles, although today we also have salmon Wyandotte bantams in Holland. In these two breeds the salmon colour is as follows: The male is black in breast, thighs, tail and underfluff. The neck hackle and saddle are cream to straw coloured with some black striping. Back, shoulders and wing bow are silvery white with some light red tones. The wing bay is also white. The hen's breast, thighs and underfluff are cream. The head and neck hackles are a soft salmon rose; the hackles having a light wheaten lacing and shaft and some grey to black at the tips. The remaining plumage is salmon, each feather with a cream shaft and cream lacing.

There is also the German Faverolles, called '*Lachshuhn*', with a slightly different salmon colour – the male has ivory to cream hackles and saddle, with a dark red-brown fleck in the middle of the hackle feathers each side of the neck. The back, shoulders and wing coverts are red-brown, covered with a cherry and whitish-yellow 'hammering'. The hen's back, shoulders and saddle are an even salmon-red, each feather with a cream shaft and cream lacing; the head and neck hackles with a slightly richer red colour than the back. The breast and thighs are creamy-white; the belly and hind parts a meal-white colour.

This is how the two Salmon colours are described in the European (continent) Poultry Standard, where also two different types of Faverolles are recognised; the French Faverolles and the German '*Lachshuhn*'.

In the United Kingdom and United States of America, the salmon colour of the Faverolles is described differently.

Right: Dutch Bantam hens in salmon colour.

Now to make things even more complicated, the Salmon Dutch Bantam is different again from the two varieties mentioned above..

Yes, I am beginning to regret that I brought this subject up! But in for a penny, in for a pound.





**Left: Salmon pullet in 2002.
Photo: Archives HKC.**

History of the salmon variety of Dutch Bantam

Why should fanciers cling to a colour that causes so much misunderstanding and angst? Well, this is one of the most ancient colours of the breed, so let's delve back into history. In 1910 the Dutch only came in partridge and silver neck, later followed by black and white. Then according to the records, at the 1925 Avicultura Exhibition, Dutch bantams in 14 colours were shown including salmon; light salmon and dark salmon. Later at the 1939 Jubilee Show of the NHC (the Club of our National (Dutch) Poultry Breeds), there were 10 varieties of Dutch Bantams, including salmon. In 1946 the HKC (Dutch Bantam

Breeders' Club) was founded and in that year at the Ornithophilia Show 11 colours were entered, without salmon. For decades, there were no records of salmon Dutch Bantams at any of the large exhibitions, then in the 1980s Mr. Schendstok, a well-known breeder of Dutch Bantams, surprised everyone with some salmon birds. They were warmly received, even though they were slightly different from the 'old' standard description. As no one had ever seen salmon birds 'in the flesh' it was generally agreed that they were the right colour.

Before too long however, these salmon birds began to cause some confusion among breeders and judges alike. At first sight the cocks looked a lot like the red shouldered silver partridge variety (*the colour resulting from a gold/silver cross*). The colour of the hens resembled silver wheaten. This came as no surprise, as according to old papers from Mr. van Gink (Dutch poultry geneticist and illustrator), this colour originated from crossing Dutch Bantams and wheaten Old English Game bantams. The 'original' standard description never once used the word 'salmon' but referred to light and dark wheaten. Genetically it would appear that these two colours are closely related, however some people are convinced that the Salmon Dutch bantams have nothing to do with 'wheaten' but are the reddest possible autosomal red silver.

To give better guidance, the standard was adjusted. The cock's neck hackle and saddle were now required to be silver with a dark stripe. The wing bay was also silver. The hen's neck hackle was to be silver with blackish markings. The breast was no longer cream but salmon and the salmon feathers on the back were to have blackish peppering.

Sources: Aviculture archives and HKC magazine.



Modern-day salmon

In spite of all this attention, this was not the colour that fanciers associated with 'salmon'. In 2000, the Dutch Bantam Breeders Club decided that the colour description in the standard should once again be adjusted. Eventually the Poultry Union agreed and in 2006 the standard was changed. Since then, the cock's neck and saddle hackle are cream instead of silver, with blackish striping. The wing bay is cream with fine brown lacing. Breast, thighs, underfluff, and tail are black; the tail coverts being white laced.



Left:

The feathers at the back, shoulders and wing coverts must have a colour range from black (close to the body) to orange-red in the midth and cream at the feather tips.

In the hens, the head and neck are cream with a lighter white shaft, and the lower hackle feathers have dark brown striping. The remaining plumage is light salmon, each feather with a cream shaft and a cream lacing, going to a softer tone at the lower breast and belly. Tail feathers are black with a salmon lacing. Peppering on the back is no longer desirable.

It was believed that these changes would alleviate any confusion in breeding and judging the salmon coloured Dutch Bantam.

To my surprise, Jo told me that once again, some breeders are not satisfied. There is serious talk about appointing TWO salmon varieties of Dutch Bantam... one as the 'old' salmon, which would be called 'Dutch salmon' and one resembling the 'French' salmon... and so it goes on...





Above and right: White black columbia.



Above left: Homozygote cuckoo. Left: Buff coloured Dutch Bantams.

Breeding and keeping

There are 25 separate runs, all 'furnished' with tree trunks and some bushes, and a pen to shelter, lay eggs and spend the night. The top of the runs are open but covered with netting. These are the colours that Jo breeds today: black, cuckoo, white black columbia, buff, crele, wheaten, lavender cuckoo, blue gold partridge, porcelain and two salmon varieties. Over the years he divided his quality strains of silver and partridge among Club members.

When I asked him why he had chosen these particular colours, Jo said: "Today my first aim is to maintain the rare or difficult-to-breed colour varieties. Second comes improving that colours and last but not least: hoping for exhibition quality birds!"



Left: A cuckoo partridge (crele) cock, hetero zygote for the cuckoo factor, so rather poorly barred in its primaries.

Above: The breast has far too much brown. According to Jo this is mostly due to the bird's age: over 4 years! (See its leg ring below.)

As our visit was in early March, it was about time to choose the breeding pens; he always starts breeding end of March and in 6 to 8 weeks it is over, resulting in 200 to 250 chicks.

He mates 1 to 1 or 1 to 2, and often 3 or 4 years old birds are used in the breeding pens. I even noticed several chickens were 5 and even 6 years old, according to the colour of the leg band. Jo: "Surplus cockerels and pullets go to other breeders, but those were used in the breeding pens for several





years, so why not let them stay till they die. Older birds are important in the breeding lines; sometimes even indispensable”.

Caring for so many chickens does take a lot of time, so since 15 years he has somebody to help him feed the birds. But choosing the birds for the breeding pen is something he does himself, same as ringing.

Left: Some hens in the experimental colour: Isabel salmon.

Except from the mentioned ones, Jo also has some ‘experimental’ colours, for instance ‘isabel salmon’; a combination of lavender and salmon, although he didn’t breed them the last two years, as he has his hands full with the other colours. Creating new colours is always a long way to go, but very satisfying when such a colour is stable and ready to be recognised.

Jo’s other pride: the doves

The tour around the runs was impressive, but around the corner waited another surprise: The aviaries with doves. In immense aviaries, as high as a house and very spacious, Jo keeps all sorts of beautifully coloured doves, often rare species.

To name a few: Olive Pigeon, Pale-capped Pigeon, Ashy Wood-Pigeon, Emerald Dove, Green winged dove, Crested Pigeon, Wonga Pigeon, Caribbean dove, Luzon Bleeding-heart, Mindanao Bleeding-heart and Yellow-breasted Ground-dove.

These doves are not for exhibition; he just loves to have them and gives them the best hoping they will breed. If they do, this is a proof of good keeping and



thus it gives a lot of satisfaction. The aviaries are decorated with all sorts of trees and bushes, so it is hard to take pictures, but we still managed to make a few shots from inside of the lofts, that will hopefully give you an impression of this lustrous asset.





Above and left: Common Bronzewings
Phaps chalcoptera.
Below right: Various doves.



Above left (front to back) *Columba leucocephala* - *Columba Arquatrix* -
Streptopelia orientalis - *Columba punicea*.

Showing

Jo is a fanatic propagandist of exhibiting chickens. Since 12 years he has been the Chairman of the Dutch Bantam Breeders Club HKC and always promotes and stimulates the collective entering at European Shows and is zealous for Dutch judges to do the job. As long as the Netherlands is the country of origin, the Dutch Standard is confining. He can get quite agitated when for instance a Dutch Bantam cockerel in Germany is awarded 'Excellent-97 points' while being as heavy as 800 grams. The desired weight is 500 to 550 grams, and 650 is really the max. On the other hand, there is also a minimum; a 375 grams cockerel is too light for sure! The Specialty Club looks after size and weight as well.

Along the years Jo has won a lot of prizes, although he does not like to brag about it. In his memory the 'biggest prize' was one of his black bantams awarded 'Excellent' and later the same happened to his crele cockerel.



Left: Head study of a white black columbia pullet. A prize winning bird!

It was not the trophy that was important, but the honour and joy to succeed in gaining the highest possible awarding for the bird. Being occupied with this hobby gives so many pleasure!

Training in a cage is not really necessary; if you pick up the birds from chick's age they get used to humans and to being handled. Washing – yes, also the blacks! - and conditioning is part of the hobby. He is often perplexed when he sees how some fanciers treat their birds at the exhibition, for instance too many birds in a box... words fail to describe that.



the European Show in Wels-Austria in 2000, where 4 coaches with Dutch fanciers had a wonderful weekend, especially enjoying the fanciers evening. After all, said Jo, being together and sharing the positive is the best party of the hobby. I fully agree.

Thank you, Jo, for the 'guided tour' and the hospitality.



To end with

Later, when we sat down for coffee with delicious Limburg Flan (cream and cherries) we revived the trip to