

ERMINE RONQUIÈRES VERSUS CRÖLLWITZER



Text: Boudewijn Goddeeris, Belgium.

Photo: Jan Willem Hondelink

Introduction

In both Belgium and Germany there is breed of turkey which is white with black lacing. In Belgium it is one of the colours of the Ronquières Turkey, known as speckled or ermine. In Germany it is known as an own- breed called Cröllwitzer Turkey. On a meeting of judges in 1994 at Jezus-Eik (B) the suggestion was made to judge the Cröllwitzer Turkey as ermine Ronquières. This point of view was taken over by the Belgian standard commission and the Belgium Poultry Association on the 27th of November, 1994. So in Belgium Cröllwitzer are no longer judged. You may doubt whether it was a correct decision. One could have pointed out all differences between both breeds and have them both judged. What gave the Belgians the right to say that Cröllwitzer Turkeys are Ronquières?

Right: head study of a Partridge Ronquières turkey.

Photo: Dirk de Jong.

Judging both breeds has given so many difficulties that could not be overcome. The differences in the standards were so minimal that one could hardly tell the differences between both breeds. This made judging very hard to do. Today there is a very detailed standard of Ronquières. The first draft was published in 1996 in *'De Filosoof van Ronquières'*, the magazine of the club with the same name, dealing with turkeys and guinea fowl.





Left: At this ermine Tom, the black marking could be more refined and without peppering in the white feather parts.

The new standard seemed an ideal opportunity to accentuate the differences so that the problem would be solved. For different things, one could say what is good for Cröllwitzer is wrong for ermine Ronquières and

the other way round. This also involves changes in the German standard on Cröllwitzer! This should not go too far. One could change too much and drift away from the original breed. The Ronquières turkey is one of the oldest original turkeys of Europe. One might discourage breeders by demanding too much in the standard. Breeding turkeys is hard enough! The problem lies much deeper; there is no system to clearly separate the two breeds.

Right: Back and sides could show some more white.
Photo: Wanda Zwart.

Differences between the two standards

Each breed comes with a certain type. The shape of the Ronquières is of medium height, a rather heavy turkey; the same goes for the Cröllwitzer. One could have the Cröllwitzer evolve to a higher standing type, as it is usual with German turkeys. But would the Germans approve changing something essential like that? For the time being, the Cröllwitzer is certainly not a high standing turkey. Anyway, the German specialist F. Hilger did not accept the



change to a higher typed bird: "Tendencies to breed a higher standing and more elegant type of Cröllwitzer turkey are there in the last few years, as birds on the shows show us, but this is not what is meant by the standard.; it should remain a bird of medium height" (translation from Geflügel-Börse 1979, 14: 2).

About the weight of the Ronquières the original standard of 1907 says 8 till 14 kg for a male and 5 to 8 kg for a female bird.; the German standard of the Cröllwitzer speaks about 7 till 8 kg for a male and 4-5 kg for a female (the weights mentioned refer to adult birds).

Right: Some more black marking in the neck is wished. Photo: Dirk de Jong.

These figures of the Ronquières do not correspond with reality. Not today and not in the old days. What is true is that in the old days one wanted everything as big as possible. But the Ronquières have never been that heavy: a very good partridge male from 1908 was said to weigh 8 kg, and a pale Ronquières 9 kg, the latter being the heaviest bird and getting an extra prize. The new standard of the Ronquières respects the original weight of the Ronquières with 8 till 9 kg for the male and about 4,5 kg for a female. To make a difference based on the weight is also not an option because originally the Cröllwitzer was created to be a heavy, light-coloured turkey.

Right: Tom and Hen, yellow-shouldered Ronquières. Photo: Dirk de Jong.

Ronquières and Cröllwitzer have about the same weight. A special demand in the standard of the Ronquières is the blue skin on the head, and the base of the white beak being blue too. In the male, the skin of the head will change from blue to red and white with red and white caruncles. In the female

the head will be even bluer and also the snood can be completely blue. The wattles and caruncles usually show red. According the German standard, in all breeds of turkeys the skin of the head should be blue in both sexes. This should not be taken too literally. Even in Germany, turkeys without red on the head do not exist and Cröllwitzer hens with a blue snood also do not exist. One could demand in the standard of the Ronquières completely blue heads and snood in the female and forbid all other birds. In the males this seems impossible. Depending on the mood the birds are in, the skin will turn more or less red. In Cröllwitzer males one cannot demand that the face stay free of any blue colour. In the females of the Ronquières there will also be a problem, because in the hens the head and the base of the beak only get a blue colour in older birds. This way one has to show young females as Cröllwitzer and older birds as Ronquières. That would be ridiculous!

Caruncles

The next problem would be the caruncles. In Ronquières only poorly developed, and not even mentioned in the German standard. To point out the differences





would not make sense. A female turkey with strongly developed caruncles does not look good at all. The most beautiful heads of female Ronquière have a few red caruncles that together with the bright red wattles look beautiful on a deep blue head.

Left: Fine head of an ermine Ronquière tom. Photo: Jan Willem Hondelink.

Leg colour

In leg colour we have the same problem, even though not very obvious. In the Ronquière the legs and toes are wanted white till light pink; in Cröllwitzer flesh-colour till red. It is correct that Ronquière with red legs are penalized, but not taken out of the competition. In the picture of a Cröllwitzer male in the book *'Puten, Perlhühner, Gänse, Enten'* by Horst Schmidt (1989) we immediately see what in Germany is meant by flesh-colour: it is the ideal leg-colour of the Ronquière. Any breeder knows that the leg colour gets closer to red when birds are getting older. Does that mean the bird

changes the breed by just aging?

Differences in colour

One could also try to find the differences between the two standards (the Ronquière and the Cröllwitzer) in the differences in colour. In ermine Ronquière lacing is wanted in the neck, although very thin. No lacing in the neck at all is a fault in the male. A Ronquière hen without lacing in the neck is only slightly penalized. In a female this lacing is much more difficult to achieve. In Cröllwitzer the neck should be white. Little lacing in older males is allowed (this used to be a major fault). Here we see great differences between the two standards. At a practical level, things are different. Getting a fully laced neck is very hard to get, especially in the females. Forbidding lacing in the neck of a Ronquière would be so discouraging for the breeder, that he might stop breeding at all.

Right: Outstanding trio in ermine colour. Photo: Jan Willem Hondelink.



The only thing one could do is enter the less laced birds as Cröllwitzer, with the result that of two brothers one can be champion in the Ronquière and the other one can be champion in the Cröllwitzer. Speaking of differences in breeds! This would be the end of the Ronquière because the demands in the standard of the Ronquière are much stronger than those of the Cröllwitzer standard.

Even more differences

The other way round the standard could be very hard on the Cröllwitzer too, by excluding all birds without a black bar in the tail feathers. The very hard to get second bar in the tail, as the Germans want, is a demand in the standard for Cröllwitzer, while in Ronquières it is a wish, but it is not a demand. Germans think the second bar is a characteristic, but many prizewinning Cröllwitzers on the main German shows do not show the second bar in the tail at all.

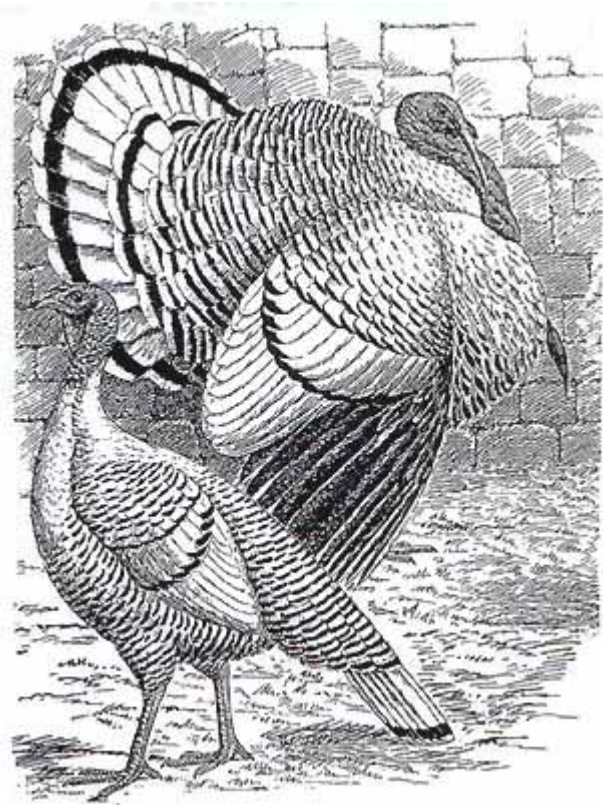
Apparently there are no differences.

From what is written above it seems clear that there is no way to judge both breeds different. Starting with one flock, a breeder could easily show birds in both breeds. Even successfully. Poor Ronquières are good Cröllwitzers and the other way round it is the same. The age of the bird could be deciding under what name one puts it on a show. The conclusion is clear; judging both breeds differently cannot be done, in spite of the small differences in the standards.

The history of both breeds

If it is so difficult to judge both breeds apart, why should the Cröllwitzer give way to the Ronquières and not the other way round? Being a Belgian breed is enough for an answer to any Belgian breeder. But there are more arguments to support this way of thinking. Therefore one should look into the history of both breeds. The Ronquières is a very old and original breed that has existed since the mid 1600's in the southern part of Holland, which nowadays is Belgium. The start of the Cröllwitzer was in the early 1900's. It is known that in developing the breed in Germany the main contribution came from the Ronquières. The colour of the Cröllwitzer is not something that was created in Germany, but had its roots in Belgium!

Right: Old picture, clearly showing the wished second 'wheel' of black bars in the tail of the cock; in practice this marking is never found so perfect.



Left: Ronquières can be kept together with chickens. Photo: Wanda Zwart.



Not all existing colours were recognized

The ermine Ronquières is not mentioned in the standard of 1907; only two colours are mentioned. The partridge (*Brune* = Brown) and the pale coloured one (*Rousse*). That does not mean the ermine variety did not exist. Louis Vander Snickt sr., the promoter of the Belgian breeds, protested firmly that not all existing colours were recognized. In his classification of the colours in the Ronquières he always mentioned the white turkey with the black lacing. Louis

Vander Snickt had seen them in 1899; the time where he started to follow the breed. "In the autumn of that year we saw at the station of Haacht a flock of eight white turkeys from which each feather was laced in black colour. It was

beautiful to see" (translation *Chasse et Pêche* 1899-1900, 18 : 479). Top quality ermine Ronquières existed in those days in Belgium, before the Cröllwitzer was even known.

Right: Ronquières turkey in partridge colour.

Below: Partridge Tom and ermine Hen.

Photos at this page: Dirk de Jong.



The first Cröllwitzer turkeys were bred around 1906 by a man called Alfred Beeck, director of the poultry station at Halle-Cröllwitz in Saxon. A. Beeck was strongly interested in poultry breeds with great economical value. On his poultry station he made the Cröllwitzer chicken for meat and brooding and the heavy Cröllwitzer geese. For breeding the Cröllwitzer turkey he started with a Ronquières male he got from Louis van der Snickt. He crossed this bird with copper-coloured females, looking very much like the



French-Belgian red Ardennes. From this crossing 1908 A. Beeck had a Cröllwitzer male of 12,5 kg. A. Beeck was clearly interested in heavy birds with a lot of meat. That they looked beautiful was an extra. He himself called the Ronquières turkey "one of the most beautiful breeds of turkeys strongly looking like the black and white turkeys" (translation from Baldamus-Beeck, 1908: 506). This shows that the Ronquières male he started with was of high quality. It must have been a light, or a yellow-shouldered Ronquières. (The yellow-shouldered is a very old colour in Ronquières: a yellow-

shouldered male was painted by Joachim Beuckelaer from Antwerp in 1566!) Yellow-shouldered strongly look like ermine Ronquières; only the white shoulder, the wings and the abdomen show yellow. From a flock of yellow-shouldered one can breed very good ermine Ronquières. From the details A. Beeck gives of the crossing offspring we can see how strong the typical characteristics of the Ronquières still come through. He mentions the black lacing on the feathers as



sub-terminal. At the end there is a white lacing again (= silver-lacing). He also mentions the typical blue heads of his birds. Both things were characteristic for the Ronquières, and both were lost in creating the Cröllwitzer of today. But the German standard still mentions the silver lacing, following on the black lacing. In the Ronquières

of today the blue head and the silver lacing are still present, although difficult to breed. F. Hilger (l.c.) means that one has to cross with other breeds to re-breed the Cröllwitzer as the standard wants them to look like. In my opinion only the Ronquières can be used for this purpose. A. Beeck did not forget the qualities of the Ronquières, either. As he was asked in 1929 how to recreate the Cröllwitzer his answer was: "Once again using Ronquières blood. Crossing a male of his own to the best and largest female Ronquières, a second line from a Cröllwitzer male with heavy, good signed Ronquières females and a third line with a Ronquières male put to copper-coloured German turkey females" (Translation *Geflügel Welt*, 1929 - in Doll: *Puten aller Welt*, 1986: 62). Now that is all the comment we need!

Right: Chicks of the Ronquières turkey; Left ermine en Right partridge. Photo: Dirk de Jong.

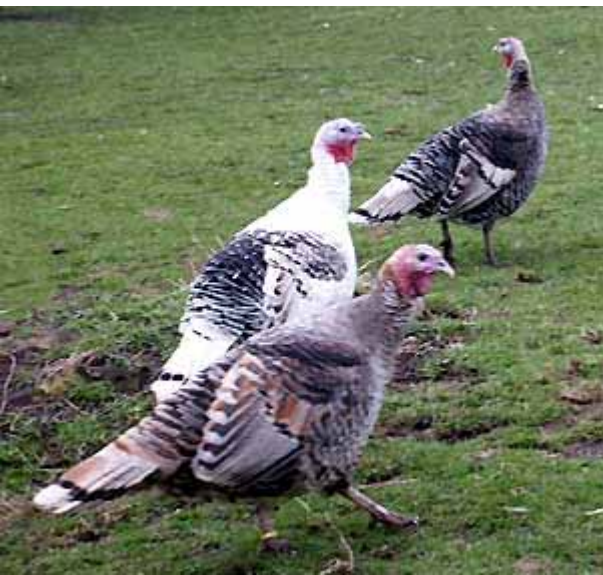


Left: Two displaying partridge Ronquières Toms and an ermine Hen. Photo: Dirk de Jong.

Conclusion

As the arguments above show the Cröllwitzer lacing is not a German creation, but it came from the Belgian Ronquières. Both patterns are genetically the same. The standards of both breeds are so similar that they cannot be judged as two different breeds. This does not implicate that the Cröllwitzer as a breed should no longer exist. In Germany one can still show and judge Cröllwitzer,

because no Ronquières are bred and showed. In the Netherlands the interest in Ronquières is increasing and one has the same motive to judge Cröllwitzer as Ronquières. For ages the Ronquières were spread all over the Netherlands. Also the ermine ones, as it can be seen in many works of Dutch and Flemish painters of the 17th century. Our common national turkey is called Belgian Ronquières, but only because the breed was bred for profit in Belgium till the First World War. The Germans then took the last turkeys (personal recall of Jacques Mauroy; Philomène-Charlotte Druet, his grandmother was in her youth a keeper of turkeys at Ronquières). It was at the village of Ronquières that fanciers started breeding and keeping the national turkey breed, about a hundred years ago (t.t.z. L. Vander Snickt en P. Monseu). If this had happened somewhere else the name of the breed had surely been different. By the way, all pure Ronquières are offspring of an old flock from the Campine district. The famous Dutch judge and



painter C.S.Th. Van Gink knew the original ermine Ronquières in Noord-Holland (a province of the Netherlands); he called them black spotted turkeys (Avicultura, 1919: 787). Because these birds were not of very good quality and he was not aware of the existing of the ermine Ronquières, he accepted the Cröllwitzer as an original German breed. It was Van Gink who introduced the name Cröllwitzer (fig.5), some ten years before the name was used in Germany.

Above: Ronquières hens.
Photo: Dirk de Jong.
Left: Ermine Ronquières in Show Quality. Photo: Comb. De Vries.

To end with

To create new colours in Ronquières is not what is wanted. What is wanted is that all original colours are recognized in the standard. The old lines, without any crossing in from other breeds. The breed is too old and original to have it used as a toy by breeders with fault ambitions. Today the breed is recognized in five colours: self white, ermine, yellow-shouldered, fawn and partridge. This is unique! There is no other breed in turkeys known in more than one colour. Some years ago the Ronquières seemed to die out, but thanks to the Goddeeris brothers the number of the population and the quality of the breed developed positively.



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