

A visit at René Bruns in Laren Gelderland.

Text and photos: Nico van Benten



René is joiner by profession, and working with wood he could not have chosen a better place to live, here at the old road in Laren, surrounded by woods and nature. We had a hearty welcome at René's place. Beside the house there is the carpenter's workshop, several barns, a hay barn and even a pond. All in harmony with nature and an ideal place to live and work all together with the children and the many animals and pets. Of course our main interest concerned the fancy pigeons. Rene chose flying breeds, but unfortunately he cannot let his pigeons fly free anymore, due to the many birds of prey in this region.

Left:
A real piece of Art, this mailbox crafted by René Bruns.

Right: One of the masterpieces of joinery, crafted by René: the figurehead of the Soeverein, a replica of a 17th age sailboat.

René was born and raised in 1962 in Oldenzaal. His father had homing pigeons, so he knows the pigeon fancy from his early years. His first breeds were Oriental Rollers, Old Dutch Owls and Dutch Highflyers, but as he most of all prefers to see a pigeon fly, he was always looking for a breed with what he could compete at the shows, but would give him pleasure as well in the loft during the rest of the year. His fellow citizen Lammert Lindenberg, who was also a pigeon fancier, introduced him to two of the Spanish Cropper breeds, that suited his idea of the perfect show bird and flying pigeon: the Gaditano Cropper and Colillano Cropper.

Gaditano Cropper

Lammert Lindenberg probably was one of the first Dutchman to have the Gaditano Cropper in his lofts. They came from a Spanish fancier called Clemente, who was living in Helmond (NL). Later, in the nineties, when the Dutch Specialty Club of the Iberian Fancy Pigeon Breeds 'the SIS' was founded, many contacts were made with the Spanish and French fanciers of Spanish pigeon breeds and the Gaditano Cropper became real popular in the Netherlands. However, due to great demand and probably also due to failing knowledge of the standard description, breeding was done in a loose and misguided way, giving the breed a bad reputation and finally it almost disappeared.





Left: Black mottle Gaditano Cropper from Martin Lindner (Germany)

The Gaditano Cropper is very confiding and probably the tamest fancy pigeon breed. This Cropper is related to the Marchenero Cropper, having both the same ancestor, being the late Colitejo Cropper. The relation between the Marchenero and the Gaditano can easily be seen in the flying style, with the typical tail and back action. While landing, both breeds tend to bend the tail broad under the body; the Gaditano not as evident as the Marchenero, but still the relationship shows. They fly with a full, round crop, and especially the Gaditano is a skilled flyer. Some say there is a third breed that is

closely related to the Gaditano Cropper, and that is the Jerezano Cropper.

The casual relation of this is because of the Spanish pride, with each region or city wanting to have its own pigeon breed, named after that city or region. For Cádiz that is the Gaditano Cropper and for the region Jerez de la Frontera, only 35 km from Cádiz, that is the Jerezano. However, these two breeds were so much alike, that at many Spanish Exhibitions the birds were named Gaditano-Jerezano and when time passed by the latter name was 'forgotten'. For the fanciers from Jerez de la Frontera this was the motive to enlarge their Cropper breed, so it would distinguish itself more clearly from the Gaditano. They managed to breed the Jerezano some 10 cm larger. Although, with the Dutch fanciers this only caused more confusion, because both breeds were showed as Gaditano Cropper and finally they also started crossing the two breeds.



Right: The standard drawing of the Gaditano – Jerezano Cropper, which was seen as one breed in those days, depicted by José Antonin in 1991 Barcelona (Spain).

Main breed characteristics of the Gaditano Cropper:

A temperamental breed of average size and a somewhat upright posture. With a round crop and a rich plumage. The head is small, rounded and wedge shaped, from the point of the beak until the back of the head. a continuously rounded outline. The eye colour is in accordance with the feather colour, from orange red to red and at the Brown some pearl colouring is permitted. And at the white feathered birds, the eye colour is dark. The eye ceres are small and pale white. The beak is medium length and strong, the beak colour is in accordance with the feathering. Wattles are fine in structure and triangular of form. The balloon is round and especially forward blowing, covering the wing butts. Wings are large with broad flights and broad wing shields. Flight tips reach nearly to tail end and rest there without crossing. The tail is well closed, short, and flat. Legs are of medium length and unfeathered. The plumage is loose and rich, giving a spongy impression. Order of importance is: Type and stand, action, balloon shape and blowing, head, back and tail, legs, colour and marking. Ring size: 8 mm.

BUCHON GADITANO-JEREZANO



Colillano Cropper

This is the second breed that René has purchased from Lammert Lindenberg. He got two pairs in black self and black chequered. Earlier these birds had belonged to Huub Vermeulen, the President of the Dutch Specialty Club of the Iberian Fancy Pigeon Breeds SIS, who brought them from Spain. Other Colillano Croppers were once brought to Holland by Paco Ibanez; these were black mottled head. And in the eighties Martin Lindner, the president of the German Specialty Club for the Marchenero Cropper, brought some from Spain to Germany.

Left: A couple of blue black barred Colillano Croppers at the loft at Martin Lindner's (Germany).

It was only much later that the Colillano Cropper was recognised in the Netherlands and strangely the breed never got very popular here, despite of its popularity in Spain. In Andalusia, and especially in the city of Seville, the Colillano is kept as a real flying Cropper (thief Pouter) almost in the same way as in The Hague, they are excellent to lure away pigeons from other fanciers.



Right: The standard for the Colillano Cropper was drafted by José Antonin in 1991 Barcelona (Spain).

BUCHON COLILLANO DE SEVILLA

In this case the name Colillano is not the name of a city or region, but refers to the fact that the bird flies with a 'flat' tail. Besides that this breed has a broad, not-blown crop. This is a striking breed character, mainly in the males. The head shape is a little stretched, with a descending front forming one line with the beak. The head shape and erected stance are much like in the Murciano Cropper

Left: Blue black barred Colillano Cropper. Photo: José Antonin, Barcelona (Spain)



Main characteristics of the Colillano Cropper:

A medium sized bird with a broad breast, fairly low stance and with somewhat upright posture. The neck is of medium length, broad and slightly curved backwards, with a large hanging not blowing balloon skin, without a fold. The head has a broad top skull and has been stretched and ellipse forming rounded off. Descending frontline of the head with the beak in the same line. The eye colour is in accordance with the feather colour, from orange red to red and in the Brown some pearl colouring is permitted. In the Whites the eye colour is dark. The eye ceres are small and pale white in colour. Beak is medium length, with a colour in accordance with the feathering. Wattles are small and fine of structure. The neck is of middle length and carried a little backwards. The balloon skin is rich and hanging down (not touching the ground), pear shaped and covering the wing butts. The breast is large. The wings have broad flights and rest at the tail without crossing. The tail is broad with large tail feathers and carried somewhat open. During the flight the tail is flat. Surprisingly soft and rich plumage. Order of importance is: Type and stand, action, head and neck station, head and wattle, feathering, colour and marking. Ring size 8 mm.

The Dutch breeders of Gaditano and Colillano Croppers are joined in the following Club:

Speciaalclub voor Iberische Sierduivenrassen

Secretary: M. Fehling, Blois van Treslongstraat 77, 2581 VH Den Haag, The Netherlands

<http://www.de-sis.nl/>



Gelderse Slenk

The third breed that has René's serious attention is the Gelderse Slenk; another breed appealing because of its performance, although not recognised as an exhibition breed. Several dedicated breeders – amongst them René and Dick Hamer – now drafted the

standard with the characteristics of this ancient breed, so that it can be safeguarded. The breed is closely related to the Groninger Slenk, which is recognised for exhibition. The breed was created long time ago by crossings with other breeds, for the special flying characteristics called 'Trek and Drijf', which was a real popular sport in the cities of Arnhem and Nijmegen.

Left: Gelderse Slenk red.

With 'Trek & Drijf' we mean a special way of flying: Clapping their wings while getting higher up in the sky: 'TREK' and further downwards in an open wings slide: 'DRIJF'.

A bit like what we see at the Steller Cropper and several other German flying pigeons breeds. The colours of the Gelderse Slenk are much the same as in the Groninger Slenk, with also some pied marking. Most seen are the White, Red and Yellow. Next there are Red pale and Yellow

pale (for red barred and yellow barred) and finally the red- and yellow spar; these two unique varieties could be based red- and yellow faded.

The Gelderse Slenk is an active but pleasant pigeon to keep. They are friendly and can be easily kept together with other breeds or other couples. After mating the Gelderse Slenk can be a bit fanatic in defining its territory, but when this is sorted out they will be again the friendly birds who will even leave alone the other youngsters that walk on the ground. They are good parents that raise their young without problems.

The Gelderse Slenk is part of the Dutch Rare Pouter Club. If you are interested to learn more about this breed please contact the Club:

Specialty club for the Rare Pouter breeds

Secretary: M. Timmerman, Oudepolderdijk 1, 4301 PA Zierikzee, The Netherlands.

<http://www.zeldzame-kropperrassen.nl/>





Left: Some of the lofts and aviaries of René, with in the right the Gelderse Slenk; in the middle the aviary of the foster pigeons and in the left the Colillano Croppers. These are roomy lofts, dry and draft-free, but enough open construction to offer adequate ventilation, which will benefit the birds as well as the fancier! Out on the grass you can see some of his Dutch Bantams.

foster pigeons every now and then, because these two cropper breeds are known to sometimes get crop problems when they feed their young. Because of these may-be problems, René provides the food all the time and unlimited, which will make the pigeons adapt and only eat the needed food at a time. According to René this is the best way to feed Cropper breeds; it works better than giving the pigeons small measured portions like homing pigeon fanciers usually do – and will prevent frustrations and over-eating. He feeds his pigeons a quality Garvo pigeon mixture, mixed with some common feed. The Gaditanos that rear their own young will have a less firm crop in the next year. The crop cannot properly be blown and will look more like a hanging crop.

Right: A barn with the hay barn, making an idyllic picture.



Left: Also goats are kept, such as the Toggenburger goat, the Veluwe goat and the Dutch milk goat. Purely for pleasure, not for the milk.

Right: Colillano Cropper, black mottled head. A bird with an outstanding characteristic head form and with the neck slightly arched towards the back; the typical posture of a Colillano Cropper.



Left: Colillano Cropper female, in a not recognised colour. The head is a bit less characteristic.

According to the information from the Wikipedia, the Gelderse Slenk is a very rare breed. At the moment the number of pigeons is thought to be approximately 200, divided among some 20 fanciers. A larger part of the pigeons is now under the wings of the nature conservancy organisation [Stichting Geldersch Landschap](#) and a breeding programme has been started. Recent DNA tests by the Animal Science Group of [Wageningen Universiteit en Researchcentrum](#) showed that a great deal of genetic diversity has been maintained because the animal has always been bred to maintain the different colour varieties. Using these data, a recommendation was made on how the population can best be managed.

Left: A number of Gelderse Slenk in the aviary at René Bruns. They come in 7 colour varieties: White, Red, Yellow, Red spar, Yellow spar, Red pale and Yellow pale. The colours are similar to the Groninger Slenk, but also come with a crescent marking, probably inherited via crossings with the Norwich Cropper and Holle Cropper. The Gelderse Slenk is probably as old as the 17th century and in 2001 René Zanderink had it apply for rare pigeon breed under a scheme of the FAO research for biodiversity. The breed is not recognised by the Dutch National Pigeon Union NBS and thus has no written breed standard.

Nature conservancy organisation "Het Geldersch Landschap" now sees to safeguarding this breed and started a breeding programme together with several fanciers.



Right: Gelderse Slenk in various colours. Left is a yellow, behind in the middle looks like a brown barred with crescent and would not be a standard colour.

However, if we would accept the crescent marking because that is brought in by the Norwich Cropper, then we also should accept the brown colour that comes with the crescent. The bird in the right is a red spar, the bars could be better though.

The Gelderse Slenk is a Half Cropper and a bit more robust than the related Gelderse Slenk. The larger size makes it a better flying pigeon. The Groninger Slenk is a recognised breed at the NBS and classified as a Tumbler breed, however it should better be classified as with the Belgian Smijter, Speelderke and Ringbeater in a group 'playpigeons'. Same holds for the Gelderse Slenk. A group Play Pigeons was used in the Entente Européenne but never within the Dutch Pigeon Union NBS.



Links: Left: When we go outside, the dog follows Rene everywhere, without being tiresome or obtrusive. The dog is a breed called South African Boerboel, wanted for their strong watch and guard-dog instincts, which we willingly believe. In the picture René is standing in front of his Gaditano Cropper aviaries.

The door of the loft is decorated with many plaquettes won at the diverse Shows, i.e. the Avicorni Show. These plaquettes are very popular in France and today they are also highly valued in Holland.

Below: A Gaditano Cropper on the fly board, but it will stay closed. Last year René lost half of his pigeon population to the birds of prey. According to René a pigeon doesn't stand a chance against the sparrow-hawk, of which a lot were awaiting for the free flying pigeons.

Once he succeeded to rescue a pigeon that was plucked out of the air by a sparrow-hawk and was totally stiffened with fear lying on the ground with the sparrow-hawk on top, ready to give it the death-blow. René was just in time to grab it and the pigeon regained life again in a few moments. To the birds, the presence of the Hawk was really



traumatic and they didn't want to free fly anymore and stayed inside the loft.



Left: The Gaditano Croppers in their breeding compartments. At René's they are allowed to rear their own young, which they do without any problems. The only drawback is that it is bad for the crop form. Most Gaditano's that have been feeding their young with pigeon milk, lack the optimal crop blowing in the next year. The pretty round crop is no longer there, it looks more like a hanging crop.

Right: When the wings of such a pied coloured Gaditano Cropper are opened this way, it always provides a beautiful picture.



Above: In accordance with the same colour at the English Longfaced tumbler, we now called this colour also a Qualmond. The story tells us that this colour is named by a breeder from the English Longfaced Tumbler called 'Quinn' who succeeded to replace the red from almond in black.



Left- and right below: Gaditano Croppers with some vague (indeterminate) colours, but if you like the breed, this is not important.



Right: A couple of Gaditano Croppers in Black mottle, for a moment diverted from their breeding job, but as it looks the breeding will soon be continued.



Left: Gaditano Cropper with a perfect ellipse headline. This colour looks like a blue grizzle, but probably had some faded with black on them. This colour comes from brown birds and is called 'disciplinado' by the Spanish breeders. But in practice they give this name to 'all the any other colours'.

From the introduction of this breed in the Netherlands in 1990 it was soon noticed that the offspring showed all sorts of colours. These colours were totally new and unpredictable. The reason lies in the fact that the Spanish fanciers thought that they could prevent inbreeding by crossing within the breed but with the most divergent colours and markings. Of course that is true, but unwillingly the most unexpected colour varieties came up, from which nobody could tell what the genetic code was, whether they are dominant or recessive and how they would behave in further mating.

Right: A Gaditano Cropper, brown mottle grizzle chequer. Simply put down on the hand, and every breeder should be able to do that. In Spain, the judges use to put the birds at the top of the cage, and if they would fly away, all they have to do is call him and the bird will come back. Name me another breed that does that!



To René the best part of the Show is the breeder's talk between the cages. He never participates if a show doesn't offer enough sociability. He is a member of the local Club Pels en Pluim in Laren, the Specialty club for Iberian Fancy Pigeons SIS and the Rare Cropper Breeds Club and is a supporter of the South Holland Fancy Pigeon Club EZHSV. At each Club show he enters several of his pigeons, and besides that he participates in the ONETO Show in Enschede and the National Union Show of the NBS, held at the AVICORNI Show in Utrecht.