

THE AMERICAN BUFF LEGHORN BANTAMS

By: *Arie van Bijsterveldt*



Above: Drawing by Van Gink 1967. Archives Dutch Leghorn Club.

Buff Leghorn bantams from the USA (American type) are extremely beautiful. This colour fits excellently this elegant breed with its yellow legs and nicely red comb.

The Buff Leghorn bantams from the USA are rare in the Netherlands. They have not been seen on shows for a long time, since they were accepted in the Dutch Standard of Perfection in the 1970's.

Buff Leghorn bantams in America

Danne J. Honour, maybe the best known Buff Leghorn breeder in America sent me the following information on the creation of the Buff bantams: "In 1932 J. DeBee started to breed a line of Buff Leghorn bantams by picking a small Standard Buff Leghorn male and mating him with a Brown Leghorn bantam female. It took him over 10 years to improve colour and at the same time cut size. I feel that DeBee was the first to originate the Buff Leghorn bantam and refine them into a good strain.

Right: A label from J.A. DeBee.
Photo: Archives Danne Honour.

Burt Gaude had Buff Leghorns bantams for many years and bred and sold them all over. Burt's line was the leading line and it is still being bred by others today. I recall



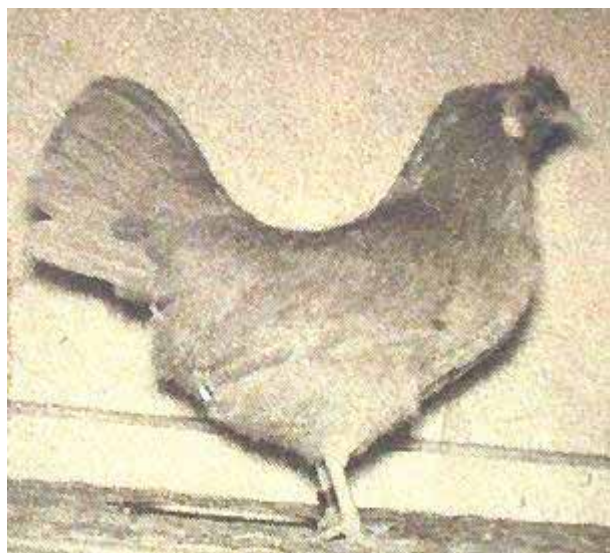


Burt's buffs as being good buff colour, defects in some of his birds were: rough comb texture, loose feather, short legs and some green legs. They ran a bit big, they had wings carried at the same level without hanging past the body in the rear, buff colour was good, earlobe shape and colour good, wide feathers, good tail length and good type.

Left: Certificate of Merit, dated November 1940, from James A. DeBee for his Buff Leghorn bantams.

Photo: Archives Danne Honour.

The birds I bred were from Gaude's line, I added E.L.Marsh White Leghorn bantam to improve them, by adding tighter feathering, longer legs and smooth comb texture. I bred out the green legs and within a few generations I had the buff colour back along with longer legs and tight feather. I dislike short legged Leghorns as they just do not look right. In bantams I dislike long and low carried wings and over sized combs, they just look out of proportion, and not balanced. I recall Henry Ahlf (who had White Leghorn bantams) looking over my Buff Leghorn bantams saying my Leghorn bantams were a bit too big too. Henry got his Whites smaller; with a few more years' effort, I got the Buffs smaller too. I wrote Burt Gaude many times and he knew the faults in his line and the last years he bred them, they were of very high quality. The Buff Leghorn bantams were Burt's specialty and he deserves much credit for refining them. In the past 30 years some others have worked with these and have had some success, but Burt was a leader and top breeder. For some reason I did not take many pictures of my Buff Leghorn bantams, now I wish I had!"



Above left: Buff Leghorn bantam hen by Burt Gaude in 1967.

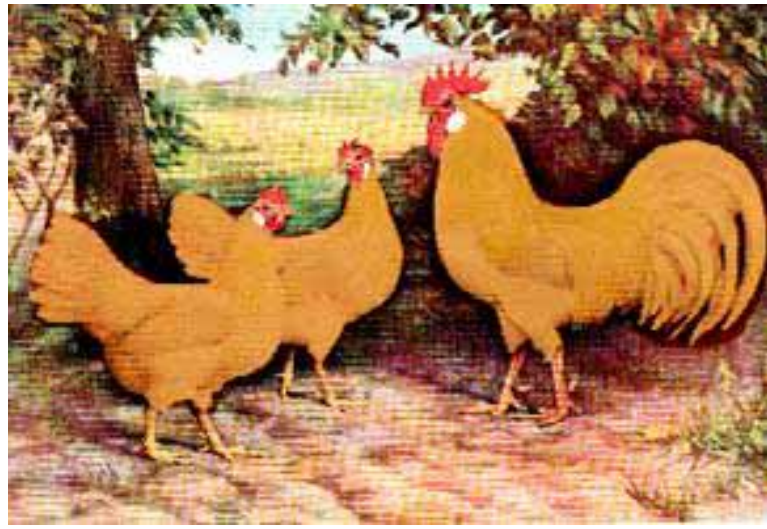
Above right: Buff Leghorn bantams by Danne Honour. Photos: Archives Danne Honour.

Import from America

In the 1960's these bantams were imported into the Netherlands a number of times by Mrs. Banning-Vogelpoel or Mrs. Sterk-Takes. The colour got recognized in the Dutch Standard by Mr IJpma, then living in Tuitjenhorn, and Mr. Otten sr. from Amsterdam, together with Mr. Kuijken from Bentveld. Contrary to the

present rules Mr. IJpma told the Committee for the Standard of Perfection that this colour would apply for recognition at the Ornis Show in Amsterdam. The Buff Leghorn bantams were indeed recognized at that show. However, this colour disappeared quite soon in Holland again, since these bantams laid eggs that were much too small, which made it impossible to breed large numbers of good birds.

Right: A variation on the Schilling drawing.



The type of the American Buff Leghorn bantam

American Leghorn bantams are about as large as the Dutch ones. They just look more elegant. That can be attributed to their richer tail feathers, especially in the cocks. An important feature is that the back - contrary to the Dutch type - is more concave and also the saddle is broader and richer feathered. The comb is relatively smaller, with especially smooth texture and the blade is long. The cocks have the comb straight up and the blade is straight backwards. The hens have a fallen comb at the end. These breed characteristics must be highly valued highly. The eyes are orange-redbrown (the Dutch type has orange-red), the earlobes are white and the legs yellow.



Serious defects are: too much red in the earlobes, too much white in the face (with young birds), too short or too round in the back. That also applies for a too heavy, not rightly or badly serrated comb. Also a fault in the front of the comb and faulted earlobes are considered a mistake.

Cockerels weigh about 700 grams (25 oz) and a cock about 800 grams. Pullets weigh about 600 to 700 gram.

The Buff colour

The colour buff is an evenly warm orange-yellow colour, which is sometimes compared with the colour of an old fashioned shammy, but slightly browner. An important criterion is that the colour should be evenly buff over all feathers. In the ornamental parts (hackle, saddle etc.) the colour is more intensive and shows more sheen. Pale feather shafts and mealy coloured feathers are undesired. Black or white in plumage or down are serious faults.

If you wish to breed this colour you need much space and knowledge of genetics. Buff is a colour which needs a critical view at the down colour, in the breast and the colour in the tail. The best results are achieved when the colour of the sire is a slightly darker buff, and free of any other colour. The colour should be evenly divided. The buff colour will become lighter by each generation if you breed light coloured birds only. The result will be white lacing in the breast and wings.

Right: This cockerel shows some white laced buff feathers in its breast and in the wing bars.



How I got in touch with the breed

We had chickens and rabbits since my earliest childhood. My father could not work due to illness and so he had some relaxation at home. When he passed away in 1985 I took up the plan to breed some genuine poultry breeds. In 1986 my choice fell on Large Buff Leghorns, which at the time I discovered at the father of my neighbours. I bought about 30 eggs and bred them in a self-built incubator. The quality was excellent and I was told that I had something special in my pen. I fell directly in love with these birds and I became a member of the Dutch Leghorn Club.



I moved in 1988 and since I had less space I had to change to bantams. Buff Leghorns bantams were hardly available in Holland, so together with another fancier I went to look for them in Germany. We purchased some nice birds over there, but they were very vulnerable for diseases. Also the feather structure needed some improvement and the colour was somewhat reddish. I tried crossing

these bantams with some buff Leghorn bantams that I got from another Dutch fancier, Mr. Tesselaar, but the vitality strangely enough deteriorated further. Using other Dutch birds was no alternative, since they were all related. There was only one solution left: imports from the USA!

Right: Burt Gaude with one of his American Buff Leghorn bantam cocks in 1993. Note the (too) yellow colour. Photo: Danne Honour.



In 1994, together with Mr. Damen and Mr. de Graaf, I imported some eggs from America. Through Mr. Dröge I came in contact with the

late Mrs. Banning Vogelpoel. She had a complete archive with American breeders, among whom also a breeder of Buff bantam Leghorns. Hans L. Schippers organised the imports. With the first pilot transport we got 8 eggs on April 30, 1994 and a few weeks later we received another 30 eggs. In total 38 eggs of which 16 eggs hatched. We were very happy with the results since we realised that the hatching is very low when eggs are transported by air. It quite often happens during air transport that the air chambers of the eggs bust and the eggs can not be used anymore. I reared the chickens at home and had a separated room for them, disinfected and newly painted. I had put concrete on the floor and the birds could not get in contact with my other poultry because I was afraid of contamination. The chicks grew up without any problems, and after rearing them they were divided among 3 breeders. Unfortunately the other two breeders stopped, with no birds left.



The bantams were very light coloured, with rather short tails and visible white feathering. I was warned in advance that buff coloured birds are preferred very light in the USA and consequently some white in the tails is tolerated. However, this is not accepted in the Netherlands and it was a hell of a job to breed tails without the white. Also over here we require a somewhat darker buff colour, so this meant a strict selection process with selection on the basis of colour.

The birds came from one breeder who had two strains of more than 30 years old. As far as I know the birds came from Richard L. Stauder from Indianola-Illinois (Chicago) and as I learned later, he had his buff bantams from Danne Honour. Also in America Buff Leghorn Bantams are rare and since the breeders live far apart they have their own strains.

Anyway, we had new bloodlines and we could revitalize our birds. Since it took us so much pain to get these American strains we kept these strains pure also. A friend of mine kept on going in improving the Dutch type and I went on with the American type.

Right: This bantam cockerel achieved an Excellent result at a 1997 Show.

I made some combinations with American type and Dutch type birds. I got some good birds which were useful for both the American type and the Dutch type. I even did a pilot cross between a Dutch type Buff Leghorn bantam and



an American type white Leghorn bantam. From some of these eggs I got one pullet with Buff colour in parts of the feathers. I crossed this one to a purely bred Buff Leghorn cock, American type. Also the purely bred American strains had been crossed, so we united both American strains to build a new one. From this new strain we got some nice offspring with long tails and richer saddles. In the course of the years we improved the American Leghorn bantams and even achieved an Excellent result with a cockerel at a show.

Fatal Development

Due to a shortness of space I got cannibalism in the strain and I can assure you that it is hard to get rid of. When the chicks got to about three weeks old they started pecking and eating each other. This problem could only be solved by selection. Space and diversion were part of the solution. Unfortunately I could not provide both and for several years I suffered great losses. Even the chickens which made it were damaged and could not be exhibited. In the end I stopped and sold all birds.

I bought a couple of Black and Buff Wyandottes, but I kept thinking of Buff Leghorn bantams. In 2005 I went looking for my old strain, but in vain. I could only start all over again by crossing large Dutch type Buff Leghorn and Dutch type Buff Leghorn bantams.

Since there were hardly any breeders that had pure buff bantam cocks, we needed to cross with large ones.

Right: F2 offspring from the combination Large Fowl x Bantam.

Below: This white American Leghorn bantam cockerel was mated to Buff Dutch type Leghorn bantam hens.



Two years later I got a white American type Leghorn bantam cock from Mr. Aalt van de Streek, which I crossed with a Dutch type Buff Leghorn bantam hen from Mr. Vlaardingerbroek.

The offspring from the first cross was very promising with nice yellow legs, excellent vitality and very good laying capabilities.

Right: F2 from White American type cockerel x Buff Dutch type hen.

Below and right: F1 cockerel and pullets from White x Buff.



Below: In August 2006 I happened to find, in my neighbourhood, some purely bred descendants from my American type Buff Leghorn bantams of my previous imports from America!



In August 2006 I happened to find, in my neighbourhood, some purely bred descendants from my American type Buff Leghorn bantams of my previous imports from America! These were 6 years old bantams! I bought them all. Right away in September 2006 I crossed one of those cocks, which had strikingly long sickles and long saddle feathers, with one of the Dutch type Leghorn bantam hens. Also the F2 Buff x White was mated to the pure American cock.

Right: Cockerel from 2007. Danne said: "This male is really nice. I love his top line, his comb, his colour and his tail. He has a bit of white in wing bar, but a top quality Leghorn bantam"

Now, after a few years, I have birds which look quite nice. The colour of the sickles needs some improvement, and the tails could be more spread. The combs need to be improved, with the blade off the head-not following neck. The hens need a fallen comb.



Above: Pullets from 2008, F4 from the cross white x buff.

I got in touch with some American breeders through a site on the Internet [The Classroom @ The Coop](#) . American breeders have a lot of experience with American type Buff Leghorn bantams. Recently I got in contact with the best known American breeder Mr. Danne J. Honour. For years he has been active with

Buff Leghorns and he has a whole collection of illustrations. Also he wrote a number of books; among them a booklet '2008 booklet Buff Coloration', which deals completely with the colour Buff, with f.e. on page 71 an article from 1946 by J.A. Debee and on page 210 an article from 1948 by Burt Gaude. This book can be downloaded from <http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/Buff-Coloration.pdf>

I sent pictures by e-mail and he gives his opinion and he helps me with advice based on his own experience. Unfortunately my English is poor, but sometimes I get help from my friends from the poultry world.

Dan Honour about the Buff Leghorn bantams in the following pictures:

"These Dutch Buff Leghorn bantams are definitely American type with concave backs and well-spread main tails and sickle length. Very nice birds to be working with. It is interesting to note similar colour faults and also similar results with crossing dominant white. I have tried it in both large fowl and bantam buff Leghorns. I agree; I think you already have all the needed genes to make a good coloured flock. If in doubt, make another line using as good coloured buff male as you can find regardless of breed; and cross it to your best buff coloured buff Leghorn female, and keep selecting only the best buff colour in this line. Most of the time the off-coloured birds are lacking a gene, or may only have one dose of the needed genes that make up the needed group of genes that comprise a good buff phenotype. By breeding a good number you allow a percentage to come with most or all the buff genes in homozygous form. In general, for mating I like to select for evenness or one shade throughout. Those with more pigmentation (richer/deeper colour) in undercolour and quill colour in the wing and tail. If I have black or white in the tail, I want the bird's mate to be solid buff coloured in the tail. If all birds have off colour, a gradual reduction of off colour, by selection, over several generations. Light coloured hackles and saddles maybe the dilute gene; white laced buff feathers in the wing bars is an indication of Columbian; dark red in shoulders/wingbows may be mahogany, and white in the tail may be dominant white. My 2008 booklet 'Buff Coloration' might be of good reading for you."



Above, left to right: Cockerel (Am. Type) 2007 - Cock (Am. Type) 2001 - F3 Wit x Buff hen (Am. Type) 2007.

Below: Pullet (Am. Type) 2007 - Pullet (Dutch Type) 2004 - Cockerel (Am. Type) 2007.



Unfortunately we can not import or export birds or eggs. Danne and a few other breeders would be very interested to breed with my strain. But when they realized I live in Holland, Europe they had to give up this dream.



Finally

I got some advice for the next breeding season from Danne J. Honour, but this cannot be achieved all by myself. It is impossible to rescue the Buff American type Leghorn bantam for Holland and maybe Europe on my own since I have not enough space. This enterprise requires more fanciers willing to breed this beautiful breed. Even breeders with only a small backyard are welcome to raise only a few chickens, so that we can fall back on the existing strain.

Hopefully this article leads to more interest.

Left: Every now and then one of my hens goes broody. Here I could even keep the cock in the same coop, but that doesn't always have a happy ending!

I wish to thank everybody who made this article possible. Special thanks go to Geri Glastra, Danne J. Honour and Elly Vogelaar.

Copyright ©2008 Aviculture-Europe. All rights reserved by VBC.

