

CHICKEN RUN

DOMINIKANER

at

ALBERT HOUWER'S

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Europe

Visiting chicken breeders is never dull, as there is always something new or interesting to discover and admire. Today - a calm, dark day in November, inevitably reminding us that winter will soon arrive - we visited Albert Houwer in the Frisian village of Oosterwolde; the only place in Holland where Dominikaner are kept and bred.

Albert Houwer

Some 16 years ago, after the Houwer Family took up residence in their rural farmhouse, they decided to find some animals to keep on the lawns and meadow, as 4000 square metres is too much for just gardening. Sheep and goats were easily found but after they were housed, there was still plenty of room left. So Albert set his mind on chickens. They had to be large fowl that would stay within the fences, however he didn't know anyone who had large chickens. He discussed the dilemma with work colleagues (he is now retired, but back then was technician team leader in a care centre) and one of them happened to have a neighbour who kept large chickens. So the following Sunday Albert and his wife visited the neighbour's address, but the man was not very pleasant – they could have a look at the chickens, but there was nothing for sale. In spite of the cold reception they said that they would be glad to come again later in the year. To their great surprise they got a message a week later that they could come and purchase some chickens after all. This is how Albert got his first chickens – Brahma and Jersey Giants – and how he met a special friend, for over the years the contact with this man, Van Vondel, grew to a strong bond. Van Vondel was a rather lonely man who bought chickens from Germany and



spoke and wrote fluent German. He subscribed to the German poultry magazine *Geflügel Börse* and donated prizes at German exhibitions.

Left: A Dominikaner cock and hen at Albert's. The light colour in the cock's neck is due to light fall.

He was always looking for interesting or rare poultry and when he spotted something to his liking, he would ask Henk van Dijk – a breeder living close by – to go and get them for him. Money was no object and when the novelty wore off, Albert would take them and

Van Vondel would purchase something different.

Van Vondel never went to an exhibition with his birds, but he was very interested to know how Albert's chickens – being the offspring of HIS birds – were judged at the show. So Albert joined the local club 'Oosterwolde & Omstreken' and got serious about his new hobby.

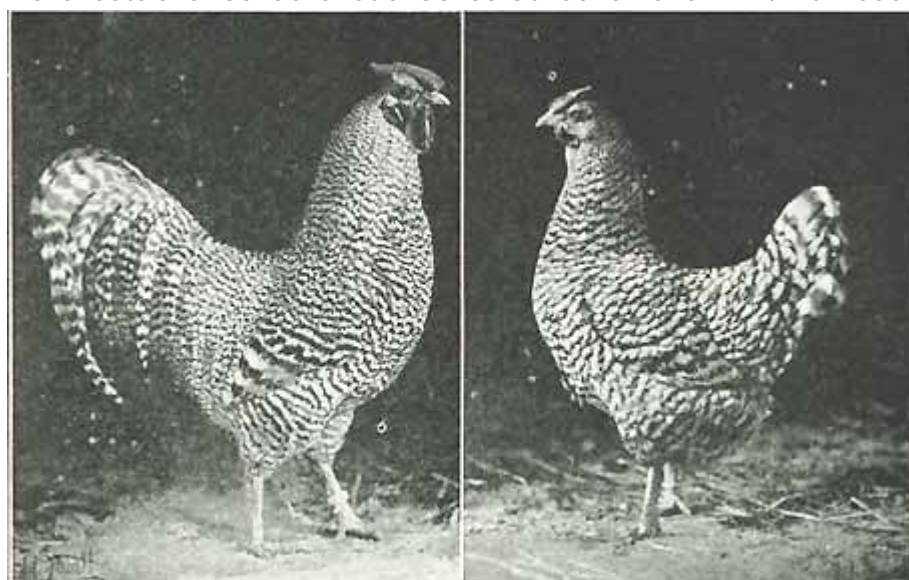
The Dominikaner is the last breed that Albert took from him.

History of the Dominique / Dominikaner

The Dominikaner is the German version of the old American breed the Dominique. The origin of the breed and its name has been lost in time. As early as 1750 these cuckoo coloured chickens were known in North America, perhaps introduced by the first settlers, or maybe they arrived there even much earlier. In those days the settlers kept poultry for meat and eggs, but also used the feathers in bedding and pillows.

The word '*dominique*' was used for 'barred' and 'cuckoo' in various breeds; for instance in Dominique Leghorn (later that was: Barred Leghorn). But the origin of this term itself is in doubt. There seems to have been a small cuckoo coloured game bird in the Dominican Republic, but this bird had nothing to do with the American Dominique. Still it is most likely that the name was given due to the marking. However the name was derived, after years of selecting for type and other qualities they were established as a cuckoo coloured chicken with a rose comb.

**Right:
Drawing by
Franklane Sewell
of the A. Q. Carter
Dominiques that
won at the
January 1913
Boston Exposition.
From this drawing
Schilling produced
the version for the
Standard of
Perfection in 1914.**



In 1849, at the first American Poultry Exhibition in Boston, there were a number of Dominiques to admire. Early 1874 the birds had come to possess such a fair degree of uniformity that a breed description could be drafted and they were recognised under the name of 'Dominique' in the first Poultry Standard. In 1913 A. Q. Carter from Maine showed such a perfect Dominique cock and hen, that these birds were immortalized as standard drawing for the American Standard of Perfection from 1915. These drawing by Arthur Schilling served as the ideal until the publication of the 1983 Standard.

American Dominique were shipped to Germany around 1900. The breed gained enormous popularity there and was sought after by many poultry farms for the splendid laying capacity of the hens. However, from the arrival of the breed the Germans aimed for a somewhat leaner and longer type, different from the compact and heavier American bird and this was accomplished by crossing with Sumatra and other breeds.

The German breeders also tried to improve the cuckoo markings as in the Plymouth Rock, but this almost spelt the end of the breed.

In 1931 it was agreed to define the original cuckoo colour and marking in the Standard description.



Right: The Dominikaner at Albert's are the 'German' type, as you can see in this photo.

It developed into a breed quite different from the American Dominique and thus is it became wise to rename them as Dominikaner. With the advent of hybrid layers, the Dominikaner vanished as a utility breed, and was only kept by fanciers. Today, in Germany there is a specialty club for the Dominikaner, and since 2006 have been recognised in the Dutch Poultry Standard. Albert Hower keeps the 'German' Dominikaner.



General Characteristics

The Dominikaner is a vigorous, mid-sized breed. The body is long with a full breast carried high and a downward sloping back. The wings are folded neatly up to the body, with a well developed tail, carried rather low with long well formed sickles and saddle feathers. Overall, the feathering is rather tight. The head is very small – almost as in Asiatic Game fowl – with a rose comb, not broad and high but rather small and fine with a straight spike. The beak colour is yellow, eyes orange to red and the earlobes are red. They have yellow legs. The females are somewhat deeper in body with full

abdomen. The tail is well developed with nice spread and no 'fluffiness' around the base of the tail.

The breed is only recognised in the cuckoo variety.

Cuckoo coloured chickens show multiple transverse (diagonal) bands of a very light blue-grey on a dark grey to blackish feather, this pattern resulting from a sex-linked 'barring gene'. Due to the fact that males carry two 'barring genes' and females carry only one, the light bands on a homozygote cock are twice as wide as that of a hen. The Dominikaner cock has light and dark bands of equal width. The hen carries light to dark bands in 1:2 ratio, thus the hens always appear 'darker' than the males.

These bands should be irregular and diffuse, different from the sharply defined barring and colouration of the Plymouth Rock, and which do not carry into the down.

However in the Dominikaner, slightly barred down is tolerated.



The overall colour in the Dominikaner is good and clear, without the bars seeming too even or almost parallel.

The Dominikaner cock weighs 2 to 2.5 kilograms, thus being 800 grams lighter than the American Dominique. The hen weighs 1.75 to 2.25 kilograms. The ring size is 20 mm for the male and 18 mm for the female. The egg colour is slightly tinted.

Albert on his animals

Albert doesn't have many sheep anymore; in fact there is only one, a Zwartbles. The Nubian goats are in the another meadow. He enjoys the goats and plans to concentrate on breeding them, along with the chickens of course. Over the years he has kept many different chicken breeds. He started with the Brahmas – from Van Vondel and later purchased a few from another breeder. The Brahmas are still around;



he thinks they are a magnificent and very beautiful breed, and he always enjoys



the competition at the shows. They are very good quality, which was not always so with the other breed that he had. His Bielenfelder for instance, had narrow wing feathers, which became worse each year and with no 'fresh blood' available he had no choice but to get rid of them. The Jersey Giants did not last long either.

Left: The Nubian goats.

But the Dominikaners are much more to his liking. Van Vondel purchased them from chairman of the German Dominikaner Breeders' Club, Erich Kowert in Melle, Germany. The Kowert Family has bred the Dominikaner since 1919 and most likely

helped originate the breed. They also created the Dominikaner bantam and had it recognised in Germany. Van Vondel purchased two cockerels and four pullets; these being the original Dominikaner in the Netherlands. The next year he bred them and from that, Albert got a cockerel and four pullets. Since then, Albert bred many Dominikaner and had the breed recognised in the Netherlands. A breeding pen of Dominikaner is now housed at the Care Farm in Oosterwolde, where the convenor, E. de Boer, intends to begin a serious breeding program. It is important that more breeders take on this breed, in order to maintain strong bloodlines – and a bit of extra competition at show time is an added attraction.



Left: White black columbia Brahma.

Breeding and keeping

At the moment Albert has two breeding pens of both Brahma and Dominikaner, each with one cock and five hens.

Although the Dominikaner breed was once prized for its laying capacity, he finds them to be just average layers, and especially poor through winter. Thus in January he starts with lengthening the days by turning lights on for a few hours in the evening. This stimulates laying and increases fertility in the cocks. He hopes to have chicks by the end of March, this being a good time for

large fowl, as the chicks profit from the sunshine and fresh greens all spring and summer long. This is very important for the Brahma, as such large birds need some time to grow out to maximum size. However, it doesn't always work out as planned – this year he set down three batches in his incubator, each with 35 to 40 eggs, but only got a total of 16 chicks. Many eggs were infertile, and a lot of

chicks died in the shell on the 18th day. He doesn't know the reason as in other years the incubation has gone without problems.

The chickens are fed with Garvo Fancy Chicken grower pellets, which contain carotene; a welcome extra for yellow-legged birds, and the chicks get Garvo Starter minipellets.

The Dominikaner is an auto-sexing breed, which means the sex of the chicks is apparent at hatching; the male chicks having some cream or whitish spots at the top of the head and the female chicks are darker coloured and have darker legs. This method isn't 100% trustworthy though.



"Dominikaner are beautiful and elegant birds but they are very different from the Brahma," Albert says. "When people come to purchase chickens, I tell them honestly... if you are looking for a tame chicken, you had better choose the Brahma. The Dominikaner can fly very well, so you must have a fence at least two metres high. Moreover the cocks can be a bit too fiery. I personally don't mind that as they are only protecting their hens and I like a bit of pith in a cock."



Showing

Normally, Albert only exhibits his chickens at the local club show in Oosterwolde and at the open show in Jubbega, a neighbouring village. The first year he had Dominikaner, he entered them at the Jubbega Show, not aware of the fact that the breed was not recognised in the Netherlands. Judge Howing knew the breed from Germany and filled in the judging report as is normally done here, except the birds didn't get 'points' but the

remark: Not Recognised. Thus there was enough information for Albert to know his birds were good quality.

As the breed was already recognised in Germany, it was not too hard to have it recognised in Holland. It happened the following year. He had to enter a number of birds at an 'open' show, were they would be judged by two judges and if given a positive recommendation, they could be entered at the next Noordshow (the National Show of the Dutch Poultry Union).



Left: His Brahma often win prizes at the Shows, no wonder, for as you can see in this photo, this is a beautiful hen with the characteristic 'Brahma head'.



Above right and left: All chickens have spacious coops, but they also can go outside if they want to. The Brahma and Dominikaner have separate outdoor areas to range.



So in October 2005, Albert entered the required number of four Dominikaner, being a cock, a cockerel, a hen and a pullet, all with Dutch leg rings. The average score was 'very good' and at the following Noordshow of January 2006 the Dominikaner were recognised in the Dutch Poultry Standard. Recently, Albert entered his birds at the Oosterwolde Show, where poultry photographer Klaas v.d. Hoek photographed a cock and a pullet for this magazine.

Photos taken at the 2008 Show of Oosterwolde & Omstr. By Klaas v.d. Hoek.



Finally...

Just before we left, Albert showed us a photo of Mr Van Vondel. He said: "He passed away two years ago and was a remarkable man; wise, although his points of view were very black-and-white. Still I am glad to have known him and I always respected him. We used to take him for Sunday rides through the countryside, which he liked very much.

"The Dominikaner I keep in his memory as I promised him that I would take care of them and spread them about in the Netherlands.

"Together with Henk van Dijk we arranged to get 'new blood' in Germany. I would like it very much if other fanciers would give this breed a go."



Left: The photo of Van Vondel.

If you are interested in breeding the Dominikaner please contact the editor at redactie@aviculture-europe.nl

The German Dominikaner Breeders' Club has no website, but you can use this contact: Erich Kowert, Chairman SV der Dominikanerzüchter, Westhoyeler Str. 54, 49328 Melle, Germany.

Email Erich.Kowert@t-online.de