

CREATING BLUE MILLE FLEUR IN COCHIN BANTAM

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Blue Mille fleur: ready in 'a minute'

The Mille fleur colour in Cochin bantams isn't really the best Mille fleur variety possible in chickens, so why should anyone bother to make a blue version?

There is more than one way to achieve this, but either way you choose, there aren't many birds in the colours you need for the mix and because of their rarity, their overall quality isn't very good compared with other breeds.

Breeding the 'common' Mille fleur Cochin bantams is rather a masochistic pursuit. So why should a fancier want blue ones as well?

All Cochin bantam breeders struggle with not having enough birds for their breeding pens; not only the fanciers that regularly show their birds on the Club Days, but also those who hardly ever attend poultry exhibitions. However, the more breeders in a certain variety, the more birds raised, therefore the more possibilities for improving quality.

A very persistent breeder of Cochin bantams, experiencing and accepting set-backs, but in spite of everything, persisting in breeding the rare and special colours, is Ria Lubbers (NL). Year after year she continues perfecting the Blue white mottleds, Mille fleurs, Lemon cuckoos, White frizzleds, Blue pencilleds, Silver laceds and more. The birds needed for breeding are purchased in her own country (The Netherlands) but also in Germany and Belgium.

Colour breeding Cochin bantams is a continuous balancing between type, colour, feather quality, comb shape, size etc. You are the only one in many colour varieties or with only a few. If you don't breed in large quantities and cull heavy, or if you don't have more than one breeding line, you can't improve anything. Because she has nothing else to do (huh?), Ria decided Spring 2007 to add Blue mille fleur next to 'ordinary' Mille fleur. It would be a fun pattern on the Cochin bantam as well. With that thought in mind, she was one step

ahead of her fellow Cochin bantam breeder Hans Ringnalda, who decided to do the same, using a Blue mille fleur **Booted** bantam. Ria chose another direction.

Splash partridge (gold pencilled) x Mille fleur

In the rare colour varieties, crossing with other colours is needed from time to time, in order to improve type or size, thus preventing them to become too small due to intensive line breeding or inbreeding. This method is not used by a lot of breeders, as along with the improvements, the standard colour is lost and you never know what else you bring into your birds. Patience and culling is needed to regain the original or new colour, in the meantime keeping what's bred in. That's not difficult if you know what you're doing; it will only cost time and money (raising lots of chicks).

Right: As expected the blue is there. Next step is breeding back to a well patterned Mille fleur hen to get rid of the multiple lacing. Breeding back will also purify mottling, which is now only half present (one dose).

Ria has already noticed the bad lacing on the gold pencilled Cochin bantams. On this breed lacing is far worse as in other multiple laced varieties like Wyandottes.



It's just the lack of breeders and birds. She crossed a splash gold pencilled hen with a well patterned Mille fleur rooster and prepared for no mottling in offspring and blue instead of black. By breeding the offspring to each other next year, the white mottle with a blue band above it would be complete. So Mille fleur of which the black is replaced by blue from the splash (homozygous blue) pencilled. It was expected that the offspring would look like bad blue pencilleds.

Top: One of the Blue Mille fleur F1 cockerels, a bit older. They appear to be very red (which is the Mille fleur ground colour) and the mottles are there, although they seem to shrink while the birds are growing...

Mille fleur on the Cochin bantams consists of mottled or white pearls on the tip of the feather, which should be recessive and thus purely present in order to be visible (2 doses, one from dad and one from mom).

Blue in pencilled dilutes black to blue, but it's incompletely dominant. One dose of blue makes all black blue. Two doses of blue in one chicken make it splash coloured. If you cross a splash with black, all offspring will have blue instead of black.

Thus, when crossing the blue offspring to each other, there are fake 'yellow/gold mottleds' to be expected because all black will be splash which will give a whitish appearance. If you want to keep the blue, you should always breed back to black (ordinary Mille fleur).

Theory and practice

As noticed before in breeding mottled or **Mille fleur**, mottled is also already visible in the first generation from this cross. Also in the Cochin bantams from Ria. Not needing to have patience occasionally is a privilege. The offspring from the first cross (Splash pencilled x Mille fleur) was beautifully mottled thus quite Mille fleur like, and yes, rather Blue Mille fleur.

Especially on the cockerels there were no traces of multiple lacing. This first generation cross is already Blue Mille fleur!

Next to mottling expressing in one dose, lacing should be expected, thus giving visually a mottled badly marked pencilled. In this cross the cockerels don't show lacing at all. In the photographs you see the cockerels in youth feathers with a nice Mille fleur pattern and no heavy lacing.

Ria chose two paths to create Blue Mille fleur:

Mille fleur cock x 'Splash pencilled' hen
and
Mille fleur hen x 'Splash pencilled' cockerel.



In other words 'multiple laced Asiatic gold pencilled hen x Mille fleur cock' and the other way around (reciprocal). The Splashes were the result of breeding Blue pencilleds to each other. The blue gene makes black blue. Two doses of blue makes splash (white with a few coloured feathers).

Note: the combs aren't nice; it's a colour experiment, so the birds were chosen for colour.

NEW PHOTOS: F2 2008



This is the down colour of the newly hatched Blue Mille fleur Cochin bantams. The difference in down colour is caused by being eb or eWh based; this is the same in 'ordinary' Mille fleur Cochin bantams. The blue doesn't show in the down.

This is what a Blue Mille fleur Cochin bantam chick looks like after a few weeks. As well as the yellow chicks, as the ones with chipmunk stripes or the ones with red on the back, will have this colour of youth feathers. The yellow chicks will show more white some time during their development. After the first moult of adult feathers they will all look alike, although chick down and youth feathers differ.

