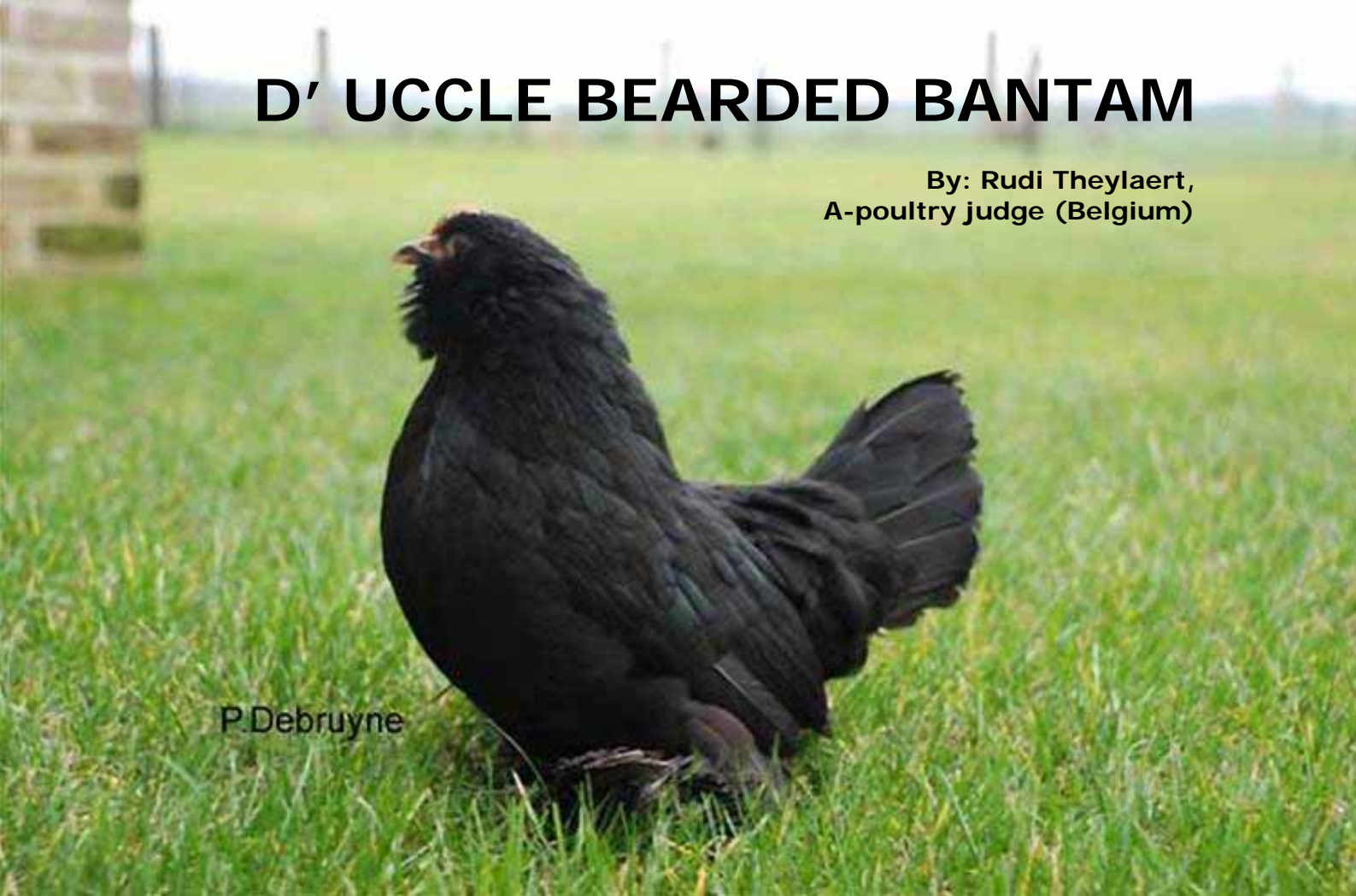


D' UCCLE BEARDED BANTAM

By: Rudi Theylaert,
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P.Debruyne

Photo above: Pieter Debruyne.

History of the little foot feathered chickens

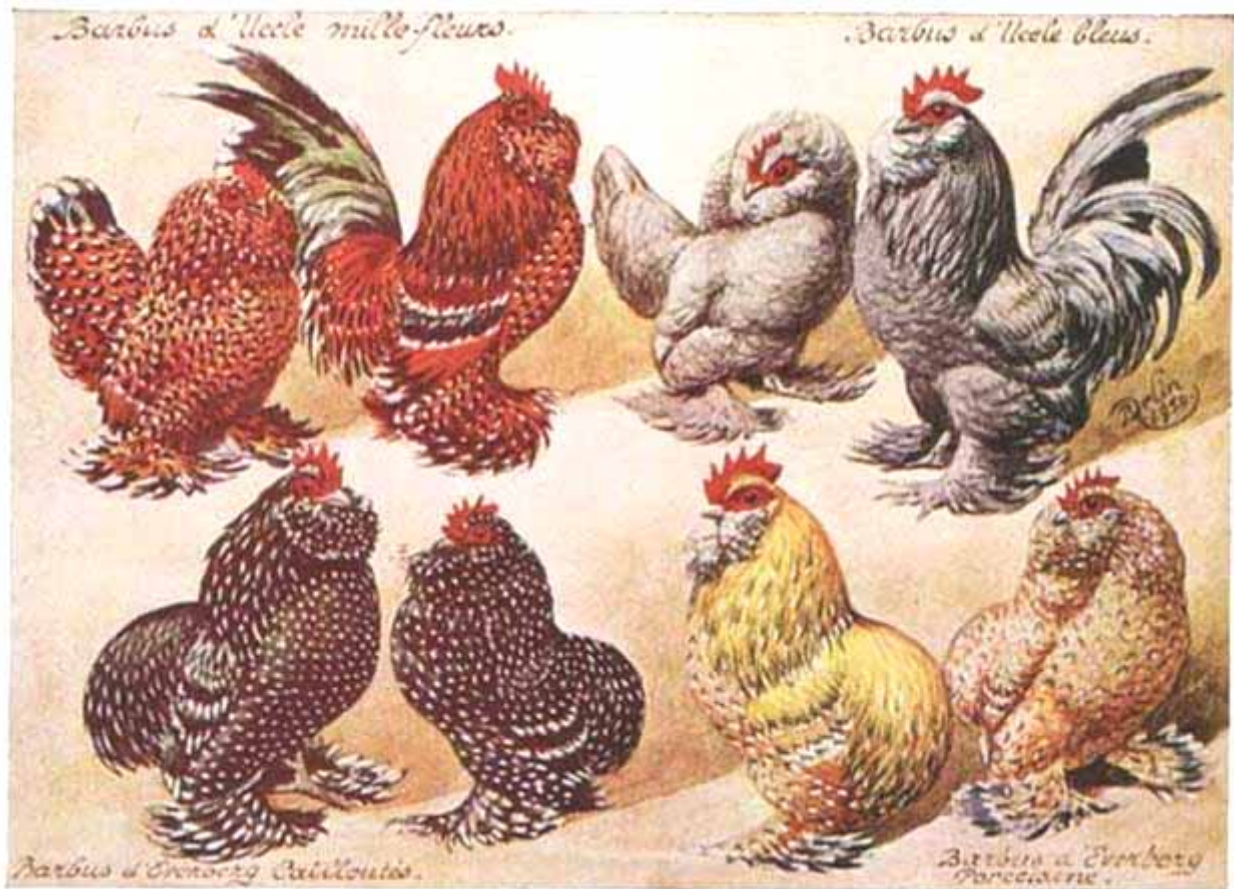
The Uccle Bearded Bantam - also known as Barbu d'Uccle - was created at the beginning of the last century from a selection of very small, foot feathered chickens that had appeared for hundreds of years all over Europe. In fact chickens like that were already described as early as 1600 by Aldrovani in his book 'Ornithologica'. In this description, Aldrovani states that the cock has a brown neck and back, black wings with white spots, a black breast mottled with some white, a black with white tail a small (rose)comb and yellow legs with five toes.

Although the yellow legs and five toes don't fit in the picture, the other characteristics could very well relate to a not-upgraded ancestor of our Uccle Bearded Bantam.



Above: The little foot feathered chickens as described by Aldrovani.

Since that time we have been able to find all sorts of proofs for the existence of Uccle Bearded Bantams "ancestors" ages ago. To mention some: A painting of Albert Cuyt (1620-1691) shows a booted bantam hen. The English painter Albin shows us booted bantams that outline the ones that we know today. There is also a description of very small white chickens with foot feathers in Tegetmeyer's 'Book of the Poultry' from 1866. There is a record of 'white booted bantams' entered at the Crystal palace Show in London in 1833.



Above: D'Uccle and Everberg Bearded Bantams, drawing by Delin in 1950. Archives Rudi Theylaert.

Hugo du Roi, The German poultry expert with the French name, exhibited 5 pairs of 'millefleur' at the first German National Show in 1893. F. Entwistle writes in his book 'Bantams' from 1894 that in England a white booted bantam breed was bred.



Tens of such statements are mentioned in the poultry books; I have only given you a few examples. From the beginning of the 20th century the breeders have started to select these charming birds according to their own national preferences.

Left and in the next page: Mille fleur D'Uccle Bearded bantams in the Netherlands, 1990.

Photo: Archives Aviculture Europe.

Creating the Barbu D'Uccle

By the year 1910 there were five breeds which only differed from each other in a few details.

The Dutch bred their '*Sabelpoot krielen*' which in the beginning had no beard, although in 1910 they imported bearded birds from Belgium and since then the breed was recognised with and without beard.

The Germans created their '*Federfussiges Zwerghuhn*', also in bearded and not bearded and only differing from the Dutch Sabelpoot in minor details.



Another strongly resembling breed, the '*Booted Bantam*' was created by the English.

Americans didn't fall behind either. From England they took the D'Uccle bantams from Belgian origin plus Booted Bantams, and created their '*Millefleur Booted bantam*'; a breed being in between the Sabelpoot and the d'Uccles.



**Left: A pair of Mille fleurs.
Owner and photo:
Kris Vanwesemael (B)**

Michel van Gelder, a rich Dutchman living in Brussels, had another ideal in view. He wanted a thick-set and low legged bantam with a short back and a full beard. In other words, an Antwerp Bearded bantam, but then feather footed and with a single comb. He exhibited this new breed for the first time in 1905.



**Left: Frans Smets (B) started breeding the Yellow Birchen colour variety.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.**

We have to say though that Van Gelder had the possibilities to hatch and raise over 1000 chicks per year and also did; thus he had more than enough birds to select from.

Van Gelder was assisted by Robert Powels and advised by Louis Van der Snickt in his breeding programs, the famous promoter of all things being Belgian, regardless if that concerned dog breeds or poultry breeds. The original idea of Van Gelder was to create a leg-feathered Antwerp Bearded Bantam. He searched everywhere for suitable bantams with



feathered legs, even as far as Rome. He was also lucky to acquire a dozen feather footed and more or less bearded bantams from the collection of the Verstraete Family. The birds were split up between himself and his friend Robert Pauwels.

Left: Head study of a Yellow Birchen d'Uccle Bearded bantam at Frans Smets'.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.

Starting with Antwerp Bearded crossed with feather footed bantams, followed by strict inbreeding, Van Gelder succeeded in creating a sort of Antwerp Bearded with heavy feathered legs and a single comb. Why Van Gelder didn't select on a rose comb puzzled us throughout the years; after all he was aiming to create an Antwerp Bearded with footings. And, IF he had selected for a rosecomb, this would have saved him many unpleasant

discussions. Anyway, the D'Uccle Bearded bantam was realised.

Right: A blue hen in the nest box.
Photo taken at Frans Smets' by Aviculture Europe.

More D'Uccle varieties arise

In 1905 L. van der Snickt and M. van Gelder visited the famous Chrystal Palace Show in London and arranged to buy some white booted bantams from Mr. Entwistle. Some of these were bearded and of Belgian origin; others were not bearded and had been imported from the Netherlands.

With his new asset Van Gelder succeeded to create several new colour varieties in his Uccles in less than 4 years. The first had been 'Millefleurs',

but from on 1906 he also exhibited Whites, Black and Cuckoos.



On the occasion of the International Exposition in Brussels in 1909, C.S. van Gink, the well known Dutch poultry expert and artist accused Van Gelder to have bred the Dutch Sabelpoot with a beard, only to call it a 'Belgian' Breed. Things

like this cast a spur upon the fancy, moreover as it were the Dutch that imported D'Uccles to create their Bearded Sabelpoot.

Bearded D'Uccle flourished but never became as popular as the Bearded Antwerp, maybe because the neighbouring countries had their own similar variety. Nevertheless it was highly appreciated in England. After 1912 it became even more popular than the English Booted Bantam and after the First World War the 'British Belgian Bantam Club' was founded and this Club still exists, showing top D'Uccles at various exhibitions!



After World War II the breed went downhill in Belgium, until in 1969 the 'Club belge du Barbu d'Uccle' was founded, making the breed popular again. At the moment there is another special club 'De Baardjes' (The Bearded) that promotes the three Belgian Bearded breeds including their rumples sub-breeds.

**Left: A Porcelain pullet by Ben Verhoork (NL) at the Avicorni Show 2007.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.**

**Right: Close-up of the porcelain colour and marking. This colour variety is often crossed with the mille fleur, which can have a positive effect on the development of the lavender feathers at the shoulders of the cock. The F1 is mille fleur colour, but carries the lavender gene. The ground colour will be somewhat lighter, so the experienced breeder can easily recognise the birds that carry the lavender gene.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.**



Colour varieties

In Belgium this breed is recognised in more than 20 colour varieties, although they are most often shown in 'mille fleur' – with a more intensive ground colour than in the Sabelpoot - and in porcelain. All other varieties are rather rare.

In 1969 we started breeding the ochre-white porcelain (Golden necks); in fact a mille fleur in which the black colour is replaced by dominant white. This beautiful variety is only bred and shown on a very small scale. We would advise you to

breed this colour together with the mille fleur, as the pure dominant white can affect the red golden ground colour.

We also breed the porcelains with dominant white, resulting in the lavender being pushed aside, with only isabel and white to remain. This colour variety is very vulnerable and doesn't present much interest.



Left: Ochre white porcelain at Ben Verhoork's (NL). Below: Close-up of this colour variety. When the ochre/yellow ground colour becomes too light, Ben crosses with mille-fleur. Photo: Aviculture Europe



Possibly the quail D'Uccles were imported here from England, after all we didn't use to see them here, but DID see them at English Shows. The quail variety is a true enrichment for this Belgian breed, especially because the quail colour originally comes in Belgian breeds only, except for the Dutch Bantams which are also recognised in quail colour.

Below: Quail coloured d'Uccle Bearded bantams at Frans Smets' (Belgium).





**Above: A quail coloured cock.
Left: A blue quail cock.
Both birds were photographed at Frans Smets' in Belgium.
Photos: Aviculture Europe.**

The wanted type

At the start of the 20th Century the D 'Uccles got the romantic pet name '*fleur vivante de nos jardins*' (= living flower of our gardens); a pet name that they surely are worthy.

As mentioned before, the smaller popularity of this – in our eyes – beautiful breed lies in the competition with the Barbu d'Anvers in Belgium and the existence of other similar breeds in the neighbouring countries.

However, the judging - not always consistent - will also be one of the reasons. Without wanting to claim the title of 'wiseacre' we should like to give the following line of action for both breeders and judges, that – concerning the type – this could be rule of the thumb: Imagine a perpendicular dropped right between the legs, seen from aside. With the Sabelpoots you will have a very harmonic and evenly balanced picture, with one half of the bird's body before and the other half behind the perpendicular. This is NOT the case with the D'Uccles: about 60 % is before and 40% is behind the perpendicular. Moreover the Barbu d'Uccle is somewhat smaller and with a lower stance. The three lobed beard is very full and grows backwards to form - together with the curved and arched neck hackle- what we call the '*Boule*'. In the old times one used to call this an 'owl head' (*tête de hibou*).

Right: These drawings show the difference in type. Especially the longer back of the Sabelpoot is obvious. Left is a d'Uccle Bearded, drawn by Delin, and right is a Sabelpoot, drawn by Van Gink.



Sub-breed

There is a rumpless version of the D'Uccle, called the Barbu d'Everberg. This sub-breed should be similar to the d'Uccle in all aspects, but with a complete absence of tail and tail feathers. The breed disappeared shortly after World War II but was re-created in 1970. The interest in the D'Everberg has been very low up to now.

Right: A mille fleur broody with her mille fleur and porcelain chicks.

Below: A pair of Porcelain d'Uccles with their chicks. Although bearded, the cock also shows wattles, meaning it is probably a cross-bred, with some Sabelpoot blood. Owner and photos: Kris Vanwesemael (B)



Below right:

Mottled is the darkest variety of mille fleur.

In the SBHD Info Magazine from March 2003 this drawing of a mille fleur d'Uccle Bearded bantam cock was printed in black-and-white. Thus showing that there is a very close relation between the two colour varieties.



Caring

To end with I would like to say that the Barbu d'Uccle are fairly good layers of 35 grams white coloured eggs. The hens tend to go broody and are good mothers. The breed is not particularly vulnerable, although it is recommended to house them in roofed runs with (preferably dry) sand. The roost has to be minimum 5 cm broad and not placed higher than 25 from the floor, although they are very good flyers.



**Below left:
Mottled pullet at Ben Verhoorck's.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.**

For all further information about the breed characteristics please see the Standard in your own country.

With this article I hope to have caught your interest in this beautiful breed that I have already been breeding for 58 years now.

**Right and below: Mille fleur pullet at Ben Verhoorck's.
Photo: Aviculture Europe.**

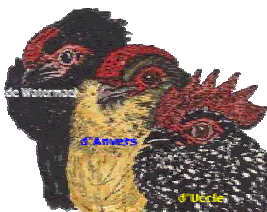


Recommended websites:
Vereniging ter Promotie van Belgische Neerhofdieren
<http://users.telenet.be/jaak.rousseau/>
(also in English)



The British Belgian Bearded Bantam Club
<http://www.jatman.co.uk/belgians/>

The Dutch Rare Belgium Bantam Breeders' Club
<http://www.zobk.nl/> (also in English)



The Belgian bantam Club of Australia
<http://users.tpg.com.au/channan/index.html>