



BLUE IS THE NEW BLACK

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Most of us keep birds that lay different coloured eggs, white/tinted, brown and the seriously dark brown eggs of the Marans, but how many of you have birds that lay blue eggs I wonder.

There aren't many breeds of poultry that lay blue eggs, but the UK does have a couple of them, the one that I bred was the Cream Legbar. I was lucky enough to breed the Cream Legbar for a couple of years but I had to move them on eventually to make way for another, even rarer, auto sexing breed (maybe an article for another issue).

They are lovely little birds, classed as light large fowl, with a lovely little 'top-knot'. They can be a little skittish, like a lot of the light breeds, but if you raise them from chicks and spend time with them, they will be friendly enough and happily eat out of your hand. I did



notice though, with the adult birds I brought in, they were never as friendly as the ones I hatched from home.



Cream Legbars, sometimes referred to as Crested Cream Legbars, are an auto sexing breed, therefore they breed true, but unlike the majority of the auto sexing breeds, they have more than two other breeds in their make-up.

Left and below: Gold Legbars.



They were developed a bit by accident, thanks to a Gold Legbar (another lovely auto sexing breed) and White Leghorns in 1940'ish which produced, eventually, a Cream Legbar, but it laid white eggs and they had no crests. Cream Araucanas were then added to the mix, more just to see what would happen than anything else and eventually, a strain of blue egg laying Cream Legbars hatched. The Araucana gave the Cream Legbar an added advantage of a crest, therefore making it easier to tell the difference between them and the Gold/Silver Legbars.

Below: (Crested) Cream Legbars; cockerel and pullets.



I know that some breeds can get a reputation for having nasty boys but I kept Cream Legbars both in a run and free ranging and although the boys are protective over their ladies I never had any trouble with them at all. My 'run kept' birds had a 6ft x 4ft house with external nest boxes and an



8ft x 6 ft run. I kept one boy in there with 3 beautiful young ladies and they seemed to thrive.

The grass quickly disappeared so I used copious amounts of wood chippings, around 6 inch deep, and simply topped it up periodically with an annual empty out into a composter. The boys do have large combs so during winter do have some Vaseline to hand, ready to smear on, as you will see from the picture of my adult male, his combs suffered from a bit of frost damage and that was in the UK.

Left: Adult male.

My free ranging Cream Legbars were in about an acre field with other auto sexing breeds and some hybrids; they did tend to stick together as I find most breeds do, even when raised separately, but they got along fine with all the other breeds so no need to worry about mixing and matching.

Below: The perch that they all used in the stable in the free range field which has 3-

4 Cream Legbars on it. (As long as you can pick them out from the rest of the breeds)



Now, a little bit about auto sexing and what it is. Most of you will know about sex-linkage; a gold/silver cross that gives a sex distinction on hatch – Rhode Island Red to Light Sussex being a good example – the disadvantage of this is that both breeds need to be kept and it only works on the first cross, the off-spring of the first cross will not give reliable sex-linked chicks, however with an auto sexing breed mums to sons, fathers to daughters, any cross will work because they are pure breeds and you will always be able to sex the chicks on hatch. Apart from the Cream

Legbar, the majority of the 'bar' breeds are made of Barred Plymouth Rocks with the other parent being the beginning of the name of the breed ie. Rhodebar = Rhode Island Red, Cambar = Campine, Welbar = Welsummer. Another general advantage of the auto sexing breeds is that if you keep more than one breed, put the cockerel of one breed onto the hen of another, you can produce a very good hybrid that can be sexed on hatch.

Right: Cream Legbar boy, one day old.

Below: Cream Legbar girl, one day old.



Below right: Cream Legbar boy, 5 weeks old.

Below: Cream Legbar girl, 5 weeks old.



If you were looking for a blue egg layer, that is also very pretty, then I really would recommend them. They are good layers, rarely go broody and do very well in a free-range environment. I only have one word of caution before you start trying to track them down, please do make sure the birds you buy lay a pure blue egg and that they really are Cream Legbars – a couple of hybrids have been produced, along with some very misleading advertising, on blue egg layers, the name of one of them is even similar giving the impression of being an auto sexing breed, which it isn't – so do check the parentage of any hatching eggs or stock. As they



have become very popular in recent years in the UK this has also bought about quite a few people breeding what they think are Cream Legbars, whereas in fact they aren't, they have hybrid blood in them, so be warned! If you are buying from a genuine seller then they should be more than happy to show you pictures of the parent stock to confirm they really are Cream Legbars. The next time you are wondering what to put under your broody hen or in the incubator, think of a different colour – think blue!

Here is the standard for the Cream Legbar, taken from the British Poultry Standards, sixth edition.

Male Plumage: Neck hackles cream, sparsely barred. Saddle hackles cream barred with dark grey tipped with cream. Back and shoulders cream with dark grey barring, some chestnut permissible. Wings, primaries dark grey, faintly barred, some white permissible; secondaries dark grey more clearly marked; coverts grey barred, tips cream, some chestnut smudges permissible. Breast evenly barred dark grey, well defined outline. Tail evenly barred grey, sickles being paler, some white feathers permissible. Crest cream and grey, some chestnut permissible.

Female plumage:

Neck hackles cream, softly barred grey. Breast salmon, well defined in outline.

Body silver-grey, with rather indistinct broad soft barring.

Wings, primaries grey peppered; secondaries very faintly barred; coverts silver-grey.

Tail silver-grey, faintly barred.

Crest cream and grey, some chestnut permissible.



In both sexes:

Beak yellow. Eyes orange or red. Comb, face and wattles red. Ear-lobes pure opaque, white or cream, slight pink markings not unduly to handicap an otherwise good male. Legs and feet yellow.

Weights

Male 2.70-3.40kg (6 - 7 ½ lb)

Female 2-2.70kg (4 ½ - 6lb)

Right: Our old goat
Pumpkin; she and her
sister lived in the field with
the chickens and they all
got along fine.

