

THE MINORCA



Above: A Minorca pullet.

Photo: Freddy Bettink.

Left: The Castellana negra (Castilian), regarded by many as the progenitor of the Minorca, Black Spanish and Andalusian.

Photo: Aviculture Europe.



Promise is debt; already in the 2008 February issue we promised you a breed special on the Minorca and here it is finally. Minorcas probably descended directly from the Castilian, an ancient Spanish breed. The more improved Minorca came from the Balearic Islands of Menorca.

THE EARLY MINORCAS IN EUROPE

By: Hilbert Pater (NL) 2009

Long before there were breeds, and breed standards, black chickens with white earlobes that laid large white eggs were common in many parts of Spain. The Minorca originated in the Spanish isle Menorca, however, the original birds were a lot smaller than the nowadays Minorcas. They were imported in England by sailors who travelled between the ports of Bristol, Plymouth and Devonport. The oldest known registration is said to date from 1834, when they were mentioned with their present name: Minorca. They were black chickens with rather large white earlobes, laying large white eggs. In that same year, Le Worthy describes the white Minorca, stating they spontaneously came from the Blacks. These chickens were also often called 'Spanish', although that is in fact the name of that other Spanish breed with the very long white earlobes and white face. Today we are almost sure that the latter was created from the Minorca, by selecting on the larger earlobes.

However, from an article in the Nineteen Twenty-Seven Year Book of the International S. C. Black Minorca Club, by Capt. Jens L. Peterson - Chicago Ill. (1927) we learn that the first Minorcas arrived in England as early as in 1783: *"During the year 1781 and before the end of the American Revolutionary War, a British Privateer captured a Spanish Merchantman on the high seas (England being also at war with Spain). The crew of the captured vessel was taken to England as prisoners. After the declaration of peace, these Spaniards decided to settle in England and with other personal goods which they transferred from their native land; they introduced some Single Comb Black Minorcas. In this manner, the first Single Comb Black Minorca emigrant arrived in England in the year 1783"*

These birds were not at all looking like the Minorca of today; it was a more cobby bird with a normal size comb. They were praised for being hardy and very good layers of large white eggs. The fame of the red-faced Spanish soon spread all over England. They already had a long record of service as a barnyard chicken when in 1895 they were exhibited for the first time at a show in Barustaple, where they were introduced as a separate class, apart from the white-faced Spanish.

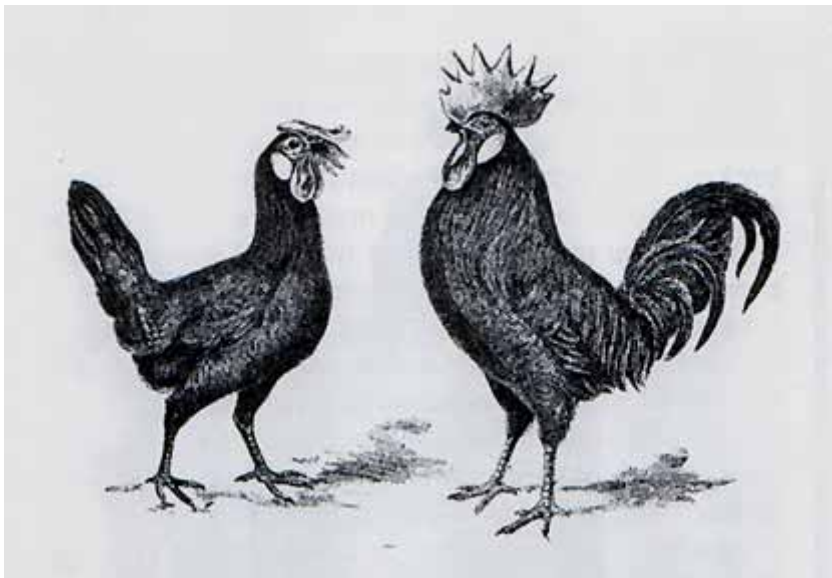
Right: White-faced Black Spanish, drawing by Ludlow 1890.

Peterson: "Sometime after the wealthy land owners of England had commenced to interest themselves in the development of live stock and to encourage such development by competitive exhibition. They developed the breed for size and markings according to arbitrary standards of their own, and wholly neglected the features of economy and production. Thus they evolved the large bird of rough profile and



with over-emphasized comb and earlobes which is the typical English Single Comb Black Minorca of today". (Note: 1927)

Left: Early Minorcas in England, artist unknown. Archives H. Pater.



"Meanwhile the S. C. Black Minorca as evolved in England made its appearance in Germany about the year 1880. The Germans perceived the faults of the English bird, and with their practical minds, immediately set out to modify the large comb and earlobes, and develop more



Schwarze Minorca-Henne

symmetry of body and elegance of stature. To accomplish their purpose, they crossed the breed with the Black Langshan. The resulting strain, which came to be the German type, had a more symmetrical shape, a larger body, more elegant deportment and a smaller comb and earlobe. It had, however, the following faults: Light slate-colored and reddish sheen legs; shorter tails; bronze coloring in the male's feathers; purple and bluish shading in the female's feathers; and a tendency to set. It was also slower to mature, and laid smaller and brown tinted eggs. Incidentally, I may say that modification of this strain were adopted by Denmark and the other Scandinavian Countries as their type of Single Comb Black Minorcas".

Left: Minorca hen in Germany, by Kurt Zander 1920.

magazine *Avicultura* that he was breeding Minorca already in 1889 and that 20 years before they were often crossed with other breeds: "Each crossing gives an extremely hardy layer. Crossings with the Orpington gives a chicken that is the most hardy and productive chicken ever known".

Right: Drawing by Van Gink 1910.

Photo: Archives H. Pater.

Left: A black rose comb Minorca cockerel by J.C. van Nievelt at the 1920 op de Avicultura Show.

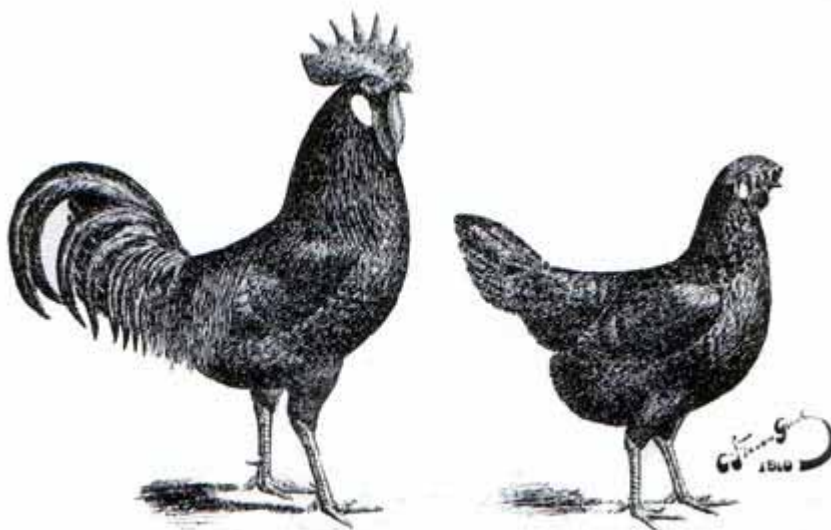


Photo: Archives Avicultura.

Apart from Black and White, they were also bred in Blue, Buff and Cuckoo, which was later changed to Barred. The Buff variety was created in the US, but never became popular in Europe. The Cuckoo originated in Germany and developed a different type. Later this variety was renamed *Deutsche Sperber* (German Cuckoo) and is still a popular breed in Germany.

Round 1920 the Minorca lost its good fame in the Netherlands. Due to the tendency to breed



extremely large combs and earlobes, they had become weak chickens. Moreover the crossings with Langshan had resulted in birds with long legs; a rather disastrous development. Not only the type was completely lost, but also the rather thin legs were hardly able to carry the heavy body. The moving became starchy and the cocks were hardly able to mount the hens. The lesser laying capacities together with the new coming hybrids from the US ended the popularity of the Minorca.

Later one realized that it was the enormous comb that weakened the chickens. With somewhat smaller combs the breed was another ten years popular as an exhibiting breed, but gradually also the fanciers lost interest in the Minorca. We think the demands made on this beautiful breed have always been too high.

Right:
Barred Minorcas in Germany. Artist Kurt Zander, end 1800s.
Foto: Archives H. Pater.



In his 1927 article Mr. Peterson touched briefly on

what European countries were doing along the lines of development:

"In reading recent items of S. C. Black Minorca news in European poultry publications I glean the following: Mr. Fisher of the London S.C.Black Minorca Club finds that during the recent world war the breed was neglected in England, but that in post war years the British have commenced to develop for general utility and egg production features, and bring out the productivity features formerly neglected. Since the dawn of this new interest the membership of the London Club has increased 100 per cent and S. C. Black Minorcas are appearing in force at the Crystal Palace Exhibitions.

In Germany Professor Fels of Muhlhausen expresses himself as being pleased with the German's strain. He admits the faults introduced by the Langshan blood, and advises continual breeding for elimination of those faults.

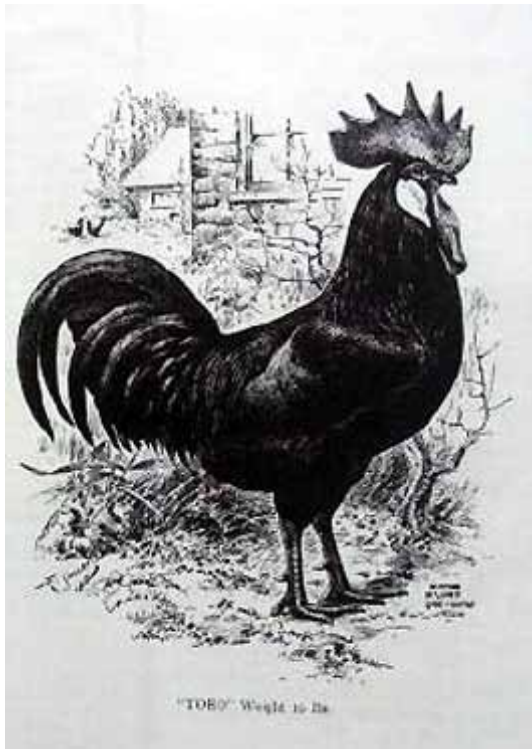
The Danish Breeders believe that by mating the Danish and German types they should get a bird on the order of the American S. C. Black Minorca. They have imported some of the latter and consider them the ideal type".

THE EARLY MINORCAS IN THE UNITED STATES

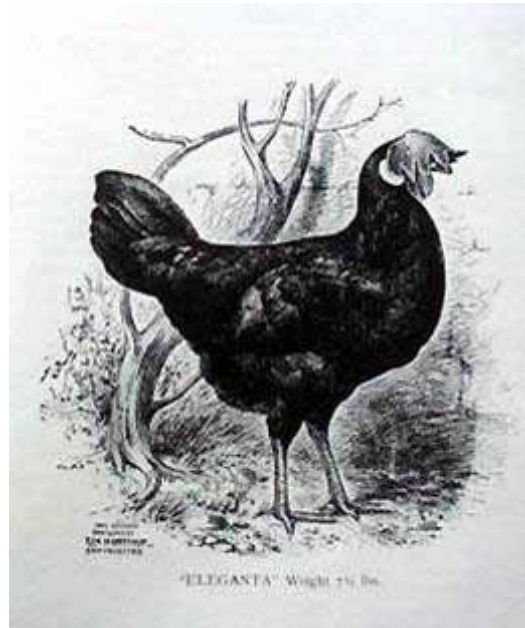
Text and photos: Danne J. Honour (US) 2009

Looking over some old books and articles, the Minorca came to the US in the mid 1880's from England. Prior to this time White Faced Black Spanish were known and common for decades. Black Minorcas were imported direct from England in 1884 by Mr. J.J. Fultz of Mount Vernon, Ohio. White Minorcas were imported in 1885 by Francis A. Mortimer of Pennsylvania.

The Minorcas became popular because they were a larger bird than a Leghorn and laying a larger egg. They had many of the good traits of the Spanish, but with greater vigour and hardiness.



**Left and below:
Minorcas in America, Northup 1898.**



Peterson (1927): "The migration of the S. C. Black Minorca to the U. S. followed two fairly distinct routes: Route one, the southern states remained in closer touch with England and it was therefore natural that the S. C. Black Minorca which appeared in the south should be that already described herein as the English Type. Route two, the northern and New England states having prior to the Civil War established broad contacts with Continental Europe; it was equally natural that the S. C. Black Minorca appearing in these states should be, basically, of the type heretofore described as Germanic. Thus, at the end of the 19th century, the north and south had two distinct types of S. C. Black Minorcas. Now these two types moved westward with the two paralleled tides of human migration, and mingled as did their owners in the Mississippi Basin or Great Middle West. Here commenced the development of the American S.C. Black Minorca. This development is comparatively young, but I may safely say that more has been done along this line in America in the past thirty years than any European Country did in a century. During recent years, it has been the task of American and particularly middle-western breeders to labor with these two types to the end that the American type may evolve, with all the best features of the older types retained, and their faults, as far as possible, eliminated. It is needless to say that what has and is being accomplished toward the development of the American S. C. Black Minorca is almost entirely due to the efforts of the International Single Comb Black Minorca Club, which in the thirty-two years of its existence, has kept faithfully to its purpose while enlarging its scope and growing to its present membership of six hundred and still going."



Left: Drawing from 1897.

About the same time (early 1900's) Rose Comb Black and Rose Comb White Minorcas were made. Generally thought to originate by S.C. Minorca and Hamburg cross and repeated backcrossing to S.C. Minorcas. Then refinement breeding for small, correct Rose Combs. The Rose Combs were thought by some to be less prone to frostbite in colder climates. However the wattles still would

freeze and some lines of Rose Combs lacked in fertility and they were inclined to be smaller than Single Combed Minorcas.

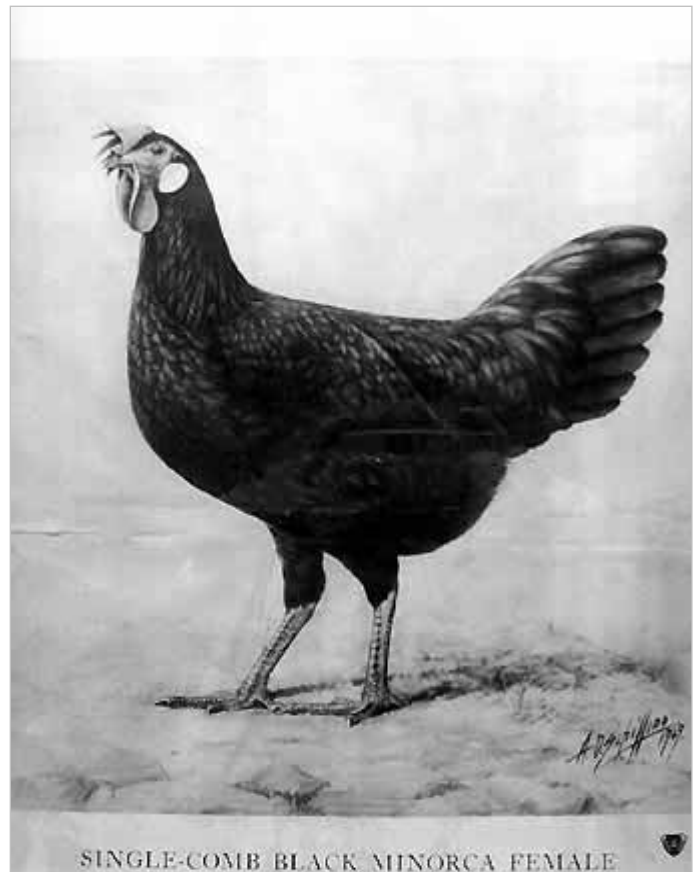
Right: A beautiful cockerel from 1925.

It was not for another dozen years after the Minorca imports that the 'American Single Comb Black Minorca' became fashionable as an exhibition fowl. The smaller old style American Minorca was still being preserved on farms for laying purposes. Later the large Minorcas exceeded trade requirements and the Leghorn became the breed of choice as a layer.

Below: These are two framed pictures from 1929 by Schilling I have that the APA sold around 1930. The last time Schilling retouched the Black Minorca was in 1952 for the 1953 Standard. He added another main tail feather in the female and male, plus in the male he added more sickle length and drew in another main sickle. Arthur Schilling died in 1956. These are not used in the current new colour Standard. With our thanks to the American Poultry Association for permission to publish.



SINGLE-COMB BLACK MINORCA MALE



SINGLE-COMB BLACK MINORCA FEMALE

The S.C.Blacks have always been the biggest and with best Minorca type. The two areas that breeders worked on was smaller comb size and, well spread tails, as there was a tendency for very large combs and whip (pinched tight) tails. White in face, thumb mark combs, flopped over combs in males, too many points, all had to be selected out or balanced in matings.

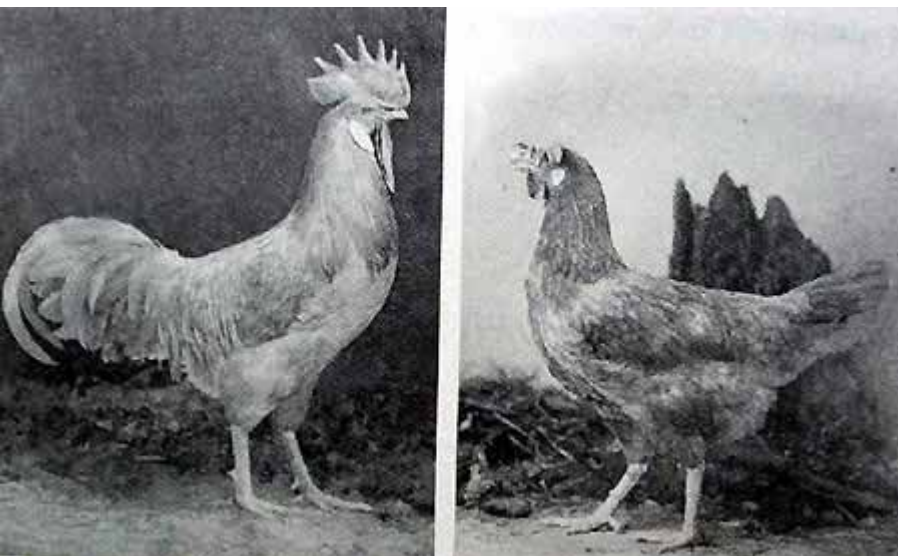
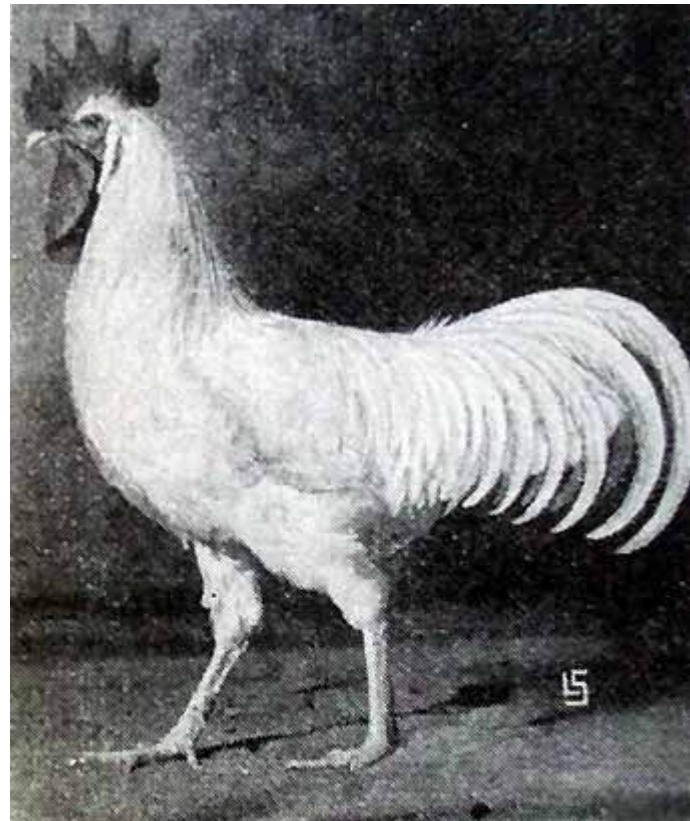
S.C.White Minorcas have had quality in the early 1900's, mainly because of being recessive whites out of good Black Minorca lines and an occasional outcross to good Black Minorcas. This usually gave some dark legs and eyes, but by backcrossing to the recessive Whites Minorcas, the legs would come back to

white. In recent years White Leghorn blood and dominant white has been a stumbling block for White Minorcas and they are rare. I think in order to have a decent White Minorca; it needs to be on recessive white. In the late 1920's and 1930's, E.C. Booth had over 20,000 White Minorcas.

Right: A fine white cockerel by L. Stahmer.

The Buff Minorca originated in the US in the late 1890's and early 1900's. Black Minorca and Buff Leghorn was often the crosses used. It leads to dark legs, reddish colour, small body size, and poor type. The early breeders struggled and many flocks did not breed true. The Lindgren brothers had more success, even though they were going about it the same way. Edward Schmidt got started in 1909 with Lindgren stock. Schmidt realized they lacked Minorca type. He crossed in a very big typy White Minorca male, and was able to reverse the trend of small size and poor type. In the March 1922 Inland Poultry Journal we

read: *"At the last Great Chicago Coliseum show Mr. Edward F. Schmidt from Hazelrigg, Ind., exhibited a big line of Buff Minorcas, which plainly demonstrated Minorca breed form at its very best. Side by side with one of the finest classes of Black Minorcas ever caged, these comparatively new Buffs possessed Minorca character of equal value, section by section, from beak to tip of tail, as well as in length, station, style and carriage. At the same time they displayed the same soft, rich Buff color that was winning in the Buff class of Orpingtons, Rocks and Wyandottes. Truly a remarkable exhibition".*



Schmidt had the goods and remained a leader in Buff Minorcas until his death in the 1950's.

Left: A pair of buff Minorcas from 1925.

Cyrus M. Lewis had Buff Minorcas from 1915 until the 1950's and wrote me many letters until his death in the 1980's. Cyrus got a Buff Orpington male in the late 1920's that had wonderful rich colour and size. He used this male on his Buff Minorca

females and created a separate line that had long backs and wonderful buff colour, even the females had deep undercolour. He trap nested and had good egg records. Cy would get birds from Schmidt's best breeding from time to time and both their stocks would cross well. I bred Buff Minorcas for a number of years and followed the Buff Minorca history close. I valued Cyrus Lewis as a reliable source. He said the March 1928 Poultry Tribune colour plate of the Buff Minorca pair, was of his birds (artist L. Stahmer) used as models.

There have been a few other varieties of Minorcas bred from time to time, but they rarely could compare on type and size. To name a few: Rose Comb Buff Minorcas, Blue Minorcas, Cuckoo/Barred Minorcas, Lavender/Self Blue Minorcas, Red and Black tailed Red Minorcas. Cyrus Lewis said he had small numbers of quality in a few R.C.Buff and Black Tailed Red Minorcas.



MINORCAS TODAY IN EUROPE

By: Hilbert Pater (NL) 2009



Left: Minorca pullets at Freddy Bettink (NL) 2008.

According to the Dutch Poultry Standard, the Minorca is the largest chicken of the Mediterranean breeds. The breed differs slightly in the European countries; in the Netherlands and Belgium a bit cobby and large, in Germany longer and slender; in the UK a bit higher on the legs and tail carried a bit higher. In the last decennia in Spain many standards of Spanish chicken breeds were drafted, also the Minorca breed standard. At the

Breeding Centre Sa Granja - *Associació de la Gallina Menorquina* they specifically occupy themselves with breeding the Minorca. According to Census Figures in 2003 there were less than 200 Minorcas in Spain.

See also <http://www.racesautoctones.com/index.php?id=27>

Right: An old cock with some German blood.

Breeder: Albert Bakker (NL) 2002. Photo: Aviculture Europe.

Internationally seen the standards are the same broadly outlined. Above all, the Minorca should be a vigorous bird; after all, it is the largest and heaviest Mediterranean breed. The stance is fairly high, although never that high to abolish the harmony and elegance of the breed.

The Minorca is a large but slender chicken with an upright carriage, a sloping backline and a fully feathered tail.

At the European Continent the tail is carried rather low, but in Spain and in the UK i.e. the tail is more elevated, such as that was in the original bird.





Above: Minorca cockerel, below: a young pullet. Photos: Freddy Bettink.



The comb is fairly large, but must be firm and preferably have 5 to 6 regular serrations. At the hen the comb falls to a side, never covering the eye though. Also at the hen a firm comb is to prefer over a large and weak comb. The face is red. The wattles are rather long. The earlobes are very large, almond shape and

pure white. The eye colour is darkbrown to black at the Blacks, darkbrown at the Blues, and brown-red at the other colour varieties.

The leg colour is dark slate blue at the Blacks and flesh coloured - without pigmentation - at the other varieties.

The breed characteristics of the Minorca are very well fixed, so they will breed fairly true. The influence of the housing and caring however is of great importance, especially because of the comb, earlobes and wattles, which need special attention.

The black variety is the most common, although blue and white Minorca's are also recognised in Europe. In the Netherlands also cuckoo and buff Minorca's are recognised, but as far as we know they are not bred in Europe. All colours are also recognised with a rosecomb.

Buff Minorca's are kept in the US and for instance in Argentina, but they are very rare. The weight of a cock is 3.5 kilos and a hen weighs 3 kilos. The minimum egg weight is 60 grams.



Above: White Minorcas. Breeder: Albert Bakker 2002. Photo: Freddy Bettink.

**Right: Black pullets, 2008.
Breeder and photographer: Freddy Bettink.**



MINORCAS TODAY IN THE US

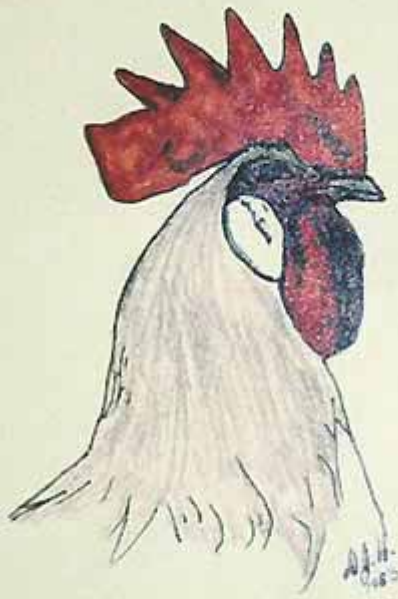
By: Danne J. Honour 2009

Left: Black pullet by Richard Schock.



The American standard was originally set up with a lot of input from prominent breeders (late 1890's to early 1900's) with lots of knowledge and breeding experience. The most practical traits were stressed and moderation prevailed.

Hence many extremes were avoided in breeds. Utility and vigour was uppermost with these early breeders, in all breeds.



Head points-Minorca male

The American standard calls for a large white almond shaped earlobe in Minorcas. The large round white earlobe was set aside for Hamburgs and Rosecomb bantams.

Left: Ideal head points in conformity with the US Standard.

Drawing: Danne Honour 1983.

Minorcas in the US are not common, but some good S.C. Blacks can still be found. Minorcas as a show bird are very impressive if they have the massive size, strength, height and length.

Right: Black rosecomb Minorca pullet by Richard Schock.

Below left: A white single comb Minorca by Richard Schock.



The current American Standard calls for the same weights in all Minorcas. For many years the Blacks had a pound more, but old Standards (1925) some had equal weights for S.C. Blacks and S.C. Buff Minorcas. In the 1930-1974, the Blacks were 1 pound more. Now they are all (White, Buff and Rose Comb) the same weight as S.C. Blacks. US Minorca Weights: cock 8 lbs. (3.6 kilos), cockerel 7 ½ lbs. (3.4 kilos), hens 7 ½ lbs. (3.4 kilos) and pullets 6 ½ lbs. (3 kilos).

MINORCAS IN AUSTRALIA

By: Greg Davies

Minorcas are pretty rare in Australia but do have some pockets where they are still available. Generally speaking, they are now too small compared to say, 30 years ago and are usually smaller than Leghorns. We mainly see the blacks, though I have seen the odd white and blue specimens but they are very rare indeed. Type-wise, they are still quite good (small size notwithstanding) with good head gear and lobes, and are usually of sound green-black colour. It is a pity really, that they have declined so much as they are a spectacular bird when seen in full size and stature. They arrived quite early in Australia as they were renowned as a terrific laying breed and it is believed that they were used judiciously as a cross in the makeup of the Australorp breed (hence their excellent laying ability).

I had a few back in the early 70s, but as a young fancier, I was not experienced enough then to know how to keep those big lobes in good condition, so I gave them away. I have to say, I think Minorcas are the loudest crowing roosters I have heard over the years.



Left: A Champion cockerel in 2006, by M. Goodwin. Foto: Andy Vardy (www.backyardpoultry.com)

In the pictures below you see a Pullet and a cockerel (head) by Marlene & Peter Oakey, Australia.

They wrote:

These two birds are not the two best birds we have had, but all our good birds are currently in moult or too young. We have bred the Minorca for many years, and breed the old style, large leggy birds (particularly the male). Because of our warm summers, and the fact that few males show as well the second year

because of their exaggerated head gear, we rely on the cockerels if we want to exhibit them.



These days it is only the fanciers that show an interest in them; the Back Yard Poultry owners seem to prefer the coloured or laced birds, regardless of the Minorca's prowess as a prolific layer of large eggs.





MINORCA'S IN NEW ZEALAND

These photos are from Mark and Fiona Goldby, New Zealand. They run the 'Precious Poultry' Farm and keep a range of chickens, Heavy and Light Breeds and also Minorcas. Mark and Fiona wrote:

"Our aim has always been to preserve the once popular but now less kept birds.

As most people are aware with biosecurity being what it is these days, the importation of poultry or eggs is almost impossible for most poultry hobbyists, due to the expense, so we must protect and preserve what we already have here.

The standard of Minorcas in New Zealand is not as good as it should be. We have done our best to maintain their standard.



We have found them to be excellent and steady layers of large white eggs, up to 260 per year.

Our Experience: They can be skittish as pullets, but as they get into laying, settle down.

Good forager if given a bit of space. Very active and alert birds. None broody".

MINORCA MERITS AND DRAWBACKS

By: Danne J. Honour 2009

I was asked one time what I liked about Minorcas? I had to say it was the impressive size and power. It is a bird of width, strength and muscle. The Minorca of quality is hard to find. The called for weights are of a very good size. So then a good one must be big, and with that a fair amount of breast. The stature, width and length, must match.



Above: Free ranging Minorcas at Freddy Bettink's (NL).

Minorcas need a lot of room and are somewhat slow to mature. They do best when one can provide a long growing season for the young stock and plenty of space for the adults on free range. So if you find a strain of Minorcas with exceptional size, egg production is good, disease resistance good, all the better. Minorcas generally lay very big eggs of nice shell texture.

If you get eggs much over the extra large size and into the jumbo size, they hatch much poorer. This is just a point I noticed over the years.

Since the S.C.Blacks are the best in size and type, the other colours will do well to copy them.



Above: A trio rosecomb Minorcas at Richards' (USA). Photo: Danne Honour.

The Minorca has a Giant comb and wattles. The smaller comb genes need to be selected for in later generations. Flopped over giant combs in single or rose are considered by many to be unsightly, unsymmetrical, and unpractical. With this all said the Minorca has a wide strong head and because of its size can support a fairly good sized comb, wattle and earlobe. With too many breeders it is an area that quickly gets overdone and extreme. Earlobes need some roundness in shape or they become loose hanging flesh. Many older males show white in face and

near eyes. I personally do not mind a nice shaped big white earlobe on Minorcas. However I am reminded each cold winter with frost-bite, that real big combs and wattles can be a drawback.



Left: Minorca hen at the nest.

Photo: Dirk de Jong.

The nervousness, high strung, activeness, and the metabolism are issues. The temperament problem demands some use of calm birds, to keep working into our lines, in order to have birds enjoyable to working with.

I am convinced that Black Langshan was used to get the frame and size. The lightly feathered shanks can be bred out quickly with a little effort. It is interesting to note that many crossings with White Faced Black Spanish and a non- white earlobed breed, results in white earlobes and red faces.



Left: Minorca chicks at Freddy Bettink's.

Unless one goes to a big show, or happens to know a good exhibition Minorca breeder, we seldom see good specimens of Minorcas. The easy to get hatchery Minorcas are such poor examples of size and type, that they do not even remotely resemble Minorca shape. Many people have never seen a good Minorca. I feel this collection of pictures can testify that good Minorcas still exist in small numbers.

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One thing I have been looking for a long time is **the 1922 Book "Minorcas of Every Comb and Color" by Geo. H. Northup and published by Inland Poultry Journal, Indianapolis, Indiana.** This is the 3rd edition and both Inland Poultry journal and Poultry Tribune sold it. The first was in 1898, second was 1907 and this is the last one. The 1922 edition has Buff Minorcas in it, the other two were before the Buffs became known. It is also our most recent Minorca book but not known, as even the Ag Colleges do not seem to have a copy. I have not been able to find a copy in the US. Maybe one of the readers has a copy, then please contact me!

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