

CHANTECLER



THE CHANTECLER POULTRY

By: Michel Boulianne - Canada

I like pure breed animals, breeding and most of all playing with the genetic probabilities really fascinate me. Today's commercial "breeds", specialised in laying or in meat production, are in fact cross breeds and have no genetics stability. Because of that, I am not at all attracted by them. I already had few fowls and was searching to improve my general knowledge. While spending some times in used books stores, I was looking for documentation on poultries in general when I came across "le guide Avicole" (poultry production guide) written by Brother M. Wilfrid O.C.R in 1938. When I first took this small book home at summer 1988, I was far to expect it would reveal all the story of the Chantecler. The origin of the breed as well as the incredible value of this almost forgotten Canadian Poultry breed, we still sometimes hear the name in old French Canadian folk songs...

Brother Wilfrid's father had a farm at the end of the 19th century. Around this period the poultry houses were not heated nor lightened by artificial today's light. Because of that, these buildings were frequently very humid and very cold. In the province of Quebec, winter really begins around December until middle of March. We spend almost all the white season at minus 10° to minus 15° Celsius however the temperature in the month of January and February frequently down to minus 20° and even minus 35° Celsius.

My wife (who stands 1.62m) in front of a snow bank, after a storm of January. In back the barn and the poultry house at right.



At this temperature, the fowls' combs and wattles in general but especially those of the roosters, freezes and this was making lots of damages and/or lost to the poultry flocks. This made so that when he was nominated in charge of the poultry department at the Cistercian abbey of Oka, Brother Wilfrid decided to create a new breed that would be as white as the snow and standing with the minimum of comb and wattles, in addition they should keep laying during the winter!

Until about the end of 1950, the Chantecler is used by a great number of eggs and meat producers across all Canada. Here is what they write in some newspapers of the time: "Because of a well planned selection, the Chantecler has formed flocks whose egg production average between 150 and 225 eggs per year. It was even officially registered a number of 233 and 247 eggs". "In 1919, in an official laying contest a pullet has registered a production of 240 eggs for 12 month". It was a great improvement because the average egg production of the North American poultry breeds like the Plymouth Rock, the Wyandotte, the Rode Island, and Leghorn were around 120 to 200 eggs per year.

After these years, the commercial specialised hybrids used for egg or meat production over passed the production of Chantecler. Producers started to prefer buying the "new tech" chicks from commercial producers and stopped producing their own stock. This is how the old poultry breeds and the Chantecler did fall into shadow...

In the province, some small farmers however kept producing their own "national old breeds" able to perpetuate their qualities. In 1988 when I was involved in finding some Chantecler fellows, I found few fans who were keeping the breed as well as they could since 10, 15 or even 20 years!!!



Each one of these had a complete story of how and where they got their Chantecler as well as the way they kept the only Canadian poultry breed through the years. This is why we know for sure some lines directly come from old OKA stock. In Ontario, M. James Hopkins, who took his fowls at the closing of the Alfred College Abbey's poultry houses, still breed few Chantecler after 30 years.

Left: Rooster from M. Hopkins acquired in 2006.

Since the beginning, each animal I own is individually identified by a permanent numbered wing clip and I keep pedigree records for each animal. I try to do some laying test during December and

January and if a hen does not lay during winter she will not be kept as a breed producer. The Chantecler being a dual purpose utility breed, my selection is based on conformation but also on utility performance (food/egg production). Chantecler produce a good size egg of a light brown color. It is a calm breed easy to handle. It is interesting to note that the official "Standard

of Perfection” of the American Poultry Association, who officially did recognise the breed in 1921, mention that the hen should weigh 6.5 pounds and the rooster 8.5 pounds. However in all the books written by the creator of the breed it is written that an 8 pounds female is to be considered as an exceptionally good hen and a 10 pounds male is of a great value so I tend to select my fowls according to the original standard. I personally pay attention to some typical characteristics of the breed mentioned in the Brother Wilfrid’s books as; the breast bone length and curved shape, the deepness of the body, the distance between the back end of the breast bone and the pelvic bones that indicates the laying capacity transmission. The Chantecler Coq should have a long fertile life and I have used several 5 of 6 years old Roosters for breeding with great success.

Front view of a typical head form one of my lines called “The white”!

In year 2000 the government officially recognised the Chantecler poultry, the Canadian Cow and the



Canadian horse as national native breed. We hope this statement will give more recognition to the breed and help in the effort of maintaining the population healthy. It is estimated that we have around 1000 to 1500 Chantecler in the province of Quebec.

There are also Chantecler in other Canadian provinces and in USA but the number of animal is very limited. This makes 'The American Livestock Breeds Conservancy' to consider Chantecler's situation as being "critical" for the future.

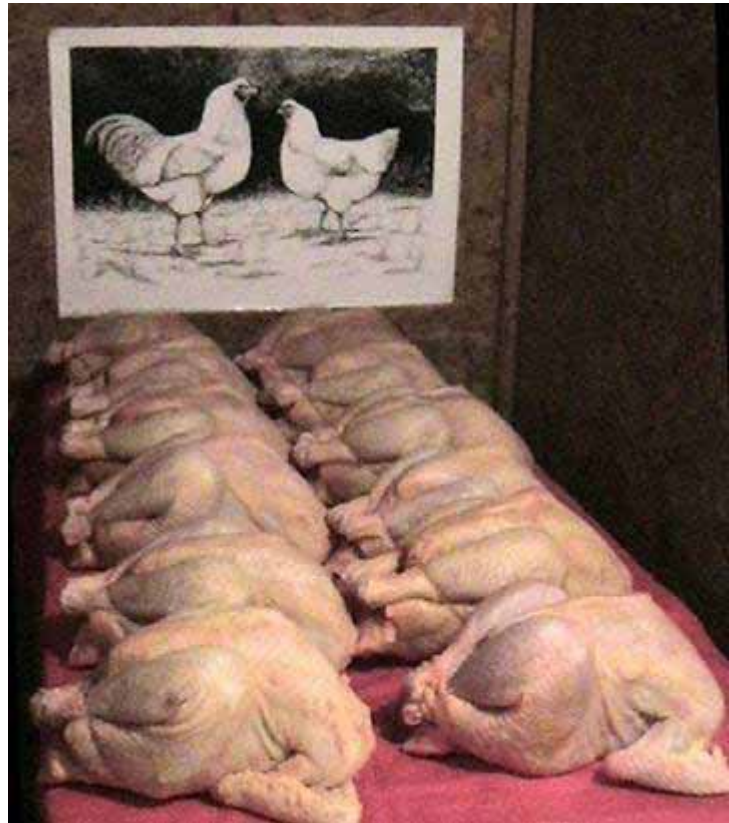
Side view of an almost perfect cushion comb of my line called “the green”.

I personally have 2 different lines that I try to keep apart, free of breeding between them. I make this to give the breed a larger gene pool. All my Chantecler are kept in a non heated poultry house where I have no artificial light added, Trying to keeping the original capability alive.

In spite of the much reduced number, the Chantecler gene pool is diversified enough to survive. This is possible because of large enough fanciers' number who creates different families. They like this breed because of his great value for the production of meat and eggs among the old breeds.

Right: Just beside is a picture of Chantecler carcass from my flock. The skin is normally of a uniform yellow color and the picture can give you a general look on the meat production!

Since recently, we have been able to sensitise the Canadian government to the Chantecler situation and a project is now being created. If this project takes form as we wish, the Chantecler could have a place in the commercial market and his future would be of a great value.



I have shown you several pictures of "White Chantecler" only. However there are 2 officially recognised colours. The white of course and the partridge colour. It is also possible to find some Buff (Fawn) coloured Chantecler but it is important to know that Brother Wilfrid took 13 years to create the white and the other colours were created totally differently and without all the severe selection the Cistercian monk did apply to "his" whites... the type, temperament and production qualities are then quite different.

As you can find the official standard and history of origin on several websites I made the choice not to write it here and rather did show you some animals that are typical, hoping it will give you a better knowledge of our National Canadian Breed!



At http://www.cfagr.com/Chantecler_chicken.htm - English/American language - you can read the history of the Chantecler (however the picture that is included in the upper page is not totally representative...)

At http://www.lescaut.com/les_oiseaux.htm you can read the history of the Chantecler in French, and also the breed's standard description and characteristics.

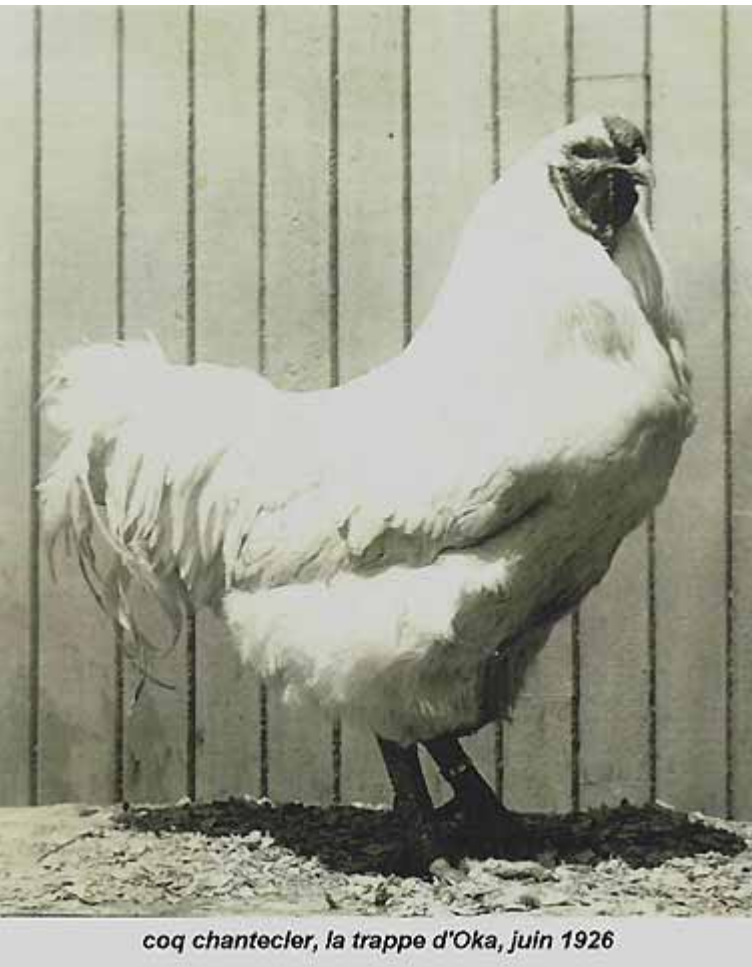
[Crowing Chantecler rooster](#)
- [CLICK HERE](#)



I also included 2 of my pictures; coq and hen Chantecler June 1926, original pictures I got from an old judge, many years ago (I have Chantecler since 1988) who was taken by the creator of the breed as a model to follow.

Michel Boulianne and all of us at Lescaut's farm

<http://www.lescaut.com/> (The Dogs) of http://www.lescaut.com/la_ferme.htm (The Farm)



Poule Chantecler, La trappe d'Oka, juin 1926

Copyright ©2009 Aviculture-Europe.
All rights reserved by VBC.