

# *A visit at: Marc van Schelstraete, in Nijlen (Belgium)*

**Text and photos: Aviculture Europe**

**In earlier days, Marc's parents had a farm in Flanders, where they flew racing pigeons. In 1948, his father took over a grocery store and a wholesale business in**

**Antwerp. They had much less space there, so the racing pigeons were exchanged for Stettin Tumblers. This breed requires foster parents which was considered a drawback.**

## **Breeder of Ghent Croppers**

Marc is retired, after an active life, in which he continued the wholesale business of his father. For a very long time he bred Ghent Croppers, but after a number of years – mainly because of the leg feathering of the Ghent Cropper - he changed to breeding the Steiger Cropper. For many years he bred them with great success. He was an active member of the Dutch Specialty club for the Steiger Cropper. Fourteen (14) years ago he switched back to the Ghent Cropper, this breed being his old love in spite of the Ghent Croppers require more attention, which there is always some grooming to do.

**Right: A couple of red Dominican Ghent Croppers, in Marc's aviary.**

In contrast to earlier days, his first Ghent Croppers many years ago had the so-called



Dominican marking - which was the most popular variety. They always had the proper marking and never needed any grooming; the pattern was much more fixed than today. He still remembers that the first Ghent Croppers came from a breeder in Wommelgem (B), where he saw aviaries full of Dominicans, all with perfect markings. The three pairs of Ghent Croppers that he started with bred youngsters that were all of show quality.

**Left: The first eggs have been laid and brooding has started.**



He started again with Ghent Croppers after a period of breeding the Steiger Cropper. Several pairs were purchased in Black Dominican from the well-known Belgian Ghent Cropper breeder Etienne de Vos. This breeder had many pigeons of excellent type, but only a few had perfect markings. With the young from three pairs he produced nice birds, although every 8 to 10 young raised, there were only two or three suitable for the show. Even today that is still the case.



**Above: A superb designed garden, in the summer it is a pleasant place to visit. Left side in the back of the garden is a barn (the pigeon loft) with aviaries for the birds. At the back side of the barn there is a room for some chickens.**

It is always a matter of too much or too less – either the birds have too much colour or they have too much white, which mostly shows in the tail. The tail colour is the most difficult component of the Dominican, because the problem is the white under tail coverts (so-called fish tail) under the solid coloured tail. This is an unstable balance. Because an extension of this white colour in the tail provides immediately a number of white tail feathers, as a result of which the pigeon is no longer useful for the show. Frequently the white fish tail is lacking, that is; the white under tail coverts are coloured. However the experience is that this is not considered a fault by most of the pigeon judges.

**Right: The three different colours of Dominicans; black, red and blue, are kept separately. In the picture you see Marc standing in front of his box perches, which he thinks could have been a bit larger for the Ghent Cropper.**

He keeps the black, red and blue variety, of which he has approximately 10 pairs in each colour. He has about 30 breeding pairs, from which he has about 40 youngsters. In former days he used to keep over 70, but more







youngsters is not a guarantee for better pigeons. The 40 youngsters are only a small part of the total offspring, which he must select by the markings which are clearly visible in the nest bowl at an early stage of life.

**Left: Black Dominican Ghent Croppers in the aviary.**

Since mid - February he paired the birds and (by the end of February) the first eggs have been laid. During pairing he keeps an open eye, because sometimes

the female is not accepted and in such a case the male is placed in a separate cage beside the female to avoid injury of the female. A few days later mating will be successful. With regard to character, the black and red Ghent Croppers seem equal to each other, but the Blue's are another story, almost seeming to be of a different breed! The colours are kept strictly separated, as the recessive red does not correspond with the Black and the Blue. Such a mixture give Red birds with a not wanted bluish sheen in the tail. Marc does not see any usefulness in colour mixes with his Ghent Croppers.

**Right: Couple blue Dominicans Ghent Croppers.**

After the breeding period the males and females are separated and the young Ghent Cropper offspring are selected. The birds not selected are culled and frozen for later consumption. The Van Schelstraete family consider pigeons a delicacy. The young pigeons are especially appreciated because of their tender meat, and the older pigeons are used for soup. The surplus young birds, when show worthy, are sold or given away. Marc's favorite dish is young cock with plums and apple sauce.



**Left: A couple of black Dominican Ghent Croppers in their breeding compartment.**



**TIP 1: Mediterranean recipe with young pigeons (Pigeonneaux)**

Season the pigeon (or pigeon breasts) with salt and freshly ground pepper and cook for a few minutes on each side until cooked to your liking. Add some washed raisins and (dried) plums and chicken broth. Season with garlic, cumin and saffron or turmeric (as used in South Asian and Middle Eastern cuisine). Cook until tender. Serve with rice.

**TIP 2: Spring Pigeon and summer variation.**

Pigeon breasts served with asparagus, baby leeks and sugar peas. Use as seasoning: thyme, laurel and fresh parsley. Instead of baby leeks and sugar peas it is also possible to serve with red onions and black olives (summer variation); in this case season with garlic, ketjap (sweet Soya sauce) and chilli. Cook the pigeon breasts until golden brown, add the greens and some white wine (or red wine, in the summer variation) and cook until tender.



### Exhibitions and associations or clubs

Annually he participates in eight to ten shows, entering some 15 Ghent Croppers at each show. The preparation, i.e. washing and drying the pigeons and grooming - by means of clipping some 'wrong coloured' feathers, is a whole lot of work. Marc does everything possible to present his pigeons in an optimum way for the judging. But he experiences many differences in the judge's appraisal of the birds.

**Right: All Ghent Croppers have free flight at Marc.**



It is especially the volume of the birds that causes the difference in judging. And it is striking that judges are often attempted to prefer a (too) small pigeon, although it shows a perfect type. Problem of this moment is that there is much crossing done in the breed. One is not afraid to cross a King pigeon in the breed, to get a stronger and heavier Ghent Cropper, but as a result the marking becomes less fixed and the typical character of the Ghent Cropper gets lost. Eventually Marc believes that the differences in type within the Ghent Cropper breed and the many cases of mismarking, do not stimulate and are certainly not challenging for the young breeders to start with this breed.



**Left and below:**  
Specifically the Ghent Cropper is always exhibited in a so-called 'bell cage'. The intention is that the Ghent Cropper can show itself optimum in such a cage. Here is an overview of the Provincial Championship of East Flanders in October 2005 at Merelbeke Belgium. Photos: Dirk de Jong.

Marc's wife always accompanies him to every exhibition and that is indeed remarkable, because nowadays in Belgium - but also in the Netherlands and Germany - you see only men on the Show.

The only board membership that Marc ever chose to fulfil was President of the Animal Breeders Association 'Oostmalle', which he was for 7 years, but by lack of time he had to stop. He was lucky to find a very good successor who has made the association really large and important afterwards.



### **The most beautiful prize ever gained by him**

A peculiar situation developed when we asked Marc what is the most beautiful prize that he has ever won with his pigeons. He took a deep breath and told a story from at least a 50 years ago, which he reminds if as happened only yesterday. He participated in a large pigeon exhibition in The Hague (Netherlands) and gained with his Steiger Croppers and German Magpie Cropper the highest prize, 'excellent', what is nowadays 97 points. According to the catalogue he had won a very special prize, being a beautiful handmade chess board. The administration confirmed that, one even showed him the chess set, a splendid marble inlay hardwood chess board, and according to the nameplate, this was manufactured by a renowned furniture maker. This prize would be provided to him at a later time on his house address. Meanwhile, after all these years and a lot of letters written, Marc has given up hope. The chess board never came, but he also didn't receive any response or excuse from the concerning administration. Still Marc is not vindictive, although from time to time he thinks of that beautiful chess set, but afterwards he participated again at the same exhibition without hard feelings. Marc's won awards, trophies or plaques are 'permitted' a place in the living room only for the duration of the current show season; afterwards they are placed in the basement.

**Right: Ghent Croppers. On the left a blue pied with crescent and on the right a red dominican. Painted by Joh. Lentink.**

**Photo: D.J. Hamer.**



### **Food and care**

Each day Marc spends two hours with his pigeons, and during the breeding season as many as four hours. An advantage is his wife knows where he is. When Marc and his wife are away during the holidays, his daughter takes care of the pigeons. She does that perfectly, including banding the young pigeons. He cleans the loft three times a week thoroughly with a scraper. He uses no sand or any other litter or absorber product on the floor. In spring the pigeons get a special 'breeding mixture'. After the breeding season they get a 'moulting mixture' with 1/3 barley. Vita-mineral and grit are also supplied. The Vita-mineral is much consumed, but it leaves a nasty red spot on the white feathers of the breast. This mixture is not given during the show season. The pigeons are also provided with a lick stone – the kind used for cows, which contains some necessary minerals, and he also makes a mixture from garlic, apple vinegar and salts. Of this mixture he gives regularly a dash in the drinking water for a better digestion of food. It seems to help against Trichomoniasis and other bacterial contagions. They do not drink it readily, and for this reason you must keep them inside the loft for a while when this additive is provided. Marc's pigeons are free flying and keeping the birds in the loft prevents them from drinking else where during the treatment. As an additional control he can use this mixture to prevent his pigeons from drinking too much on warm days. Croppers may drink too much which can result in crop problems, like sour crop. He also gives his pigeons Electrolyte, which is - especially in Belgium - enormously popular with the racing pigeon flyers. It provides better health and more vitality for his pigeons. Of course all pigeons are annually vaccinated against Paramyxovirus; that is required in Belgium to participate at all exhibitions. At the same time they are vaccinated against Paratyphus-Samonellosis. Marc has good experiences with all these treatments and his pigeons are always in good health. Against external and internal parasites - such as worms and lice - he uses Frontline. Healthy pigeons will keep themselves cleaner. A pigeon that looks dirty is not in a good shape nor healthy, according to Marc.





## *A visit at: Joop van Loon, in Emmeloord (NL)*

Text and photos: Aviculture Europe

Although Joop and his wife Jopie are now living in Emmeloord, they grew up in The Hague region and spent the greater part of their lives there. Joop is from origin a Thief Pouter fancier, and had a good reputation as a breeder of Ghent Croppers. He was a pigeon judge for many years and assisted in several administrative jobs in the hobby. His wife Jopie is breeder of Lahore pigeons and was a poultry judge in earlier years. She descends from a well-known family of animal fanciers. During the years she has held several administrative functions and at this time she is the secretary of the Lahore Specialty Club. Unfortunately there is a decreasing interest from the Lahore breeders, thus the club is not very active. Her father, Joop Remmerswaal kept Holle Croppers and was a poultry judge. Jopie and her mother kept Plymouth Rock chickens in earlier years. Joop Remmerswaal for many years was occupied with the poultry entries at the Avicultura Show. Jopie assisted him as twelve-year-old girl with making the catalogue of the Avicultura Show, which then was held at the Hague Zoo.

Right: A painting of two dominican Ghent Croppers in red and yellow, hanging on the wall in the living room of their home in Emmeloord.

Painted by: A. Maes.

To everyone's surprise the family van Loon departed the Hague region at the end of the 1990's to live in Emmeloord. Joop retired and they hoped to find rest and more living space. That space was found, but according to Joop you'll never get used to so much rest when you grow up in a city like The Hague. Joop noted the distance from The Hague to Emmeloord seems to be further than the other way around.



One of the reasons for this visit was to take photographs of his Ghent Croppers. The quality of his pigeons was still clearly in my mind. Thus the Ghent Croppers from Joop van Loon deserve to be presented in this Ghent Cropper special. As far as I knew Joop was the secretary of the Ghent Cropper Club in the Netherlands. The Club had only 16 members (Dutch and Belgian breeders), which not all were active breeders. To my great surprise I heard that the Ghent Cropper Specialty Club had been deactivated since January 2009 due



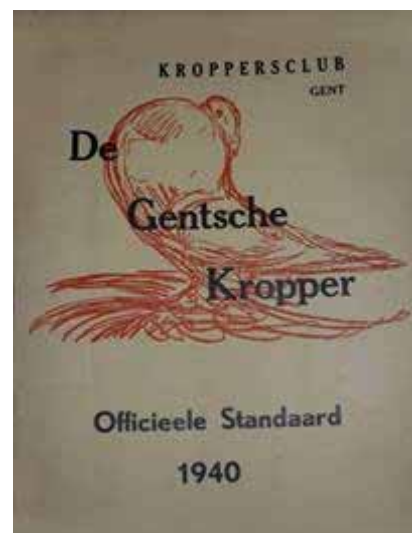
to the lack of board members. The remaining members had been advised by means of a newsletter from the Club Secretary, to join the Rare Cropper Association.

**Left: Joop van Loon in his garden, with on the left at the back the loft with Lahores from his wife and at the right (just visible) the lofts with Ghent Croppers.**

He has only Ghent Croppers in yellow and red dominican, which are kept in a dry loft with much light. Much attention has been given for the prevention of damaging the foot

feathering of the Ghent Croppers. There are wide breeding compartments, special pedestal perches to prevent damaging the foot feathers and on the floor is a thick layer of sand, which is regularly sieved and renewed. The character of his Ghent Croppers is quiet, even when there is a 'stranger' in the loft. Still they can behave rather aggressive amongst each other, especially in the time of pairing the pigeons. Another problem with Ghent Croppers is that they sit so 'tight' on the nest that the eggs are often cracked. That is solved by putting in an extra stone egg, which is somewhat larger. Three eggs is not a problem for the Ghent Cropper. This breed perfectly raises its own youngsters.

**Right: An official Belgian standard of the Ghent Cropper. During the years some small adaptations are noted. In general these changes concerned only the language used.**



After closing down the Specialty Club for the Ghent Cropper, he continues to breed Ghent Croppers and he has splendid birds. Thus some beautiful photographs were taken, but moreover I got much information and insight in old documentation on this splendid breed. According to the standard the Ghent Croppers exist in five different (pattern) varieties. In order of popularity: Dominican, self, cropper pied (bibbed), blue tail marked & head spotted, and tigered.

Of course we conform here to the Belgian standard, as the country of origin.

**Dominican, or (in Belgium) called *Preekheer***

This pattern variety is the most popular and is magpie-marked with a white head, the upper part of the crop, back, wings (apart from the shoulder feathers, which forms a coloured 'heart') belly, thighs, foot feathering and under-tail coverts (called the fish tail) should be all white.



**Left: A view in the loft of Joop van Loon, with red and yellow dominican Ghent Croppers. .**



**Right and left below:  
A red dominican Ghent Cropper cock in a  
breeding compartment.**



**Right: Front view of a yellow dominican  
Ghent Cropper hen.**



**Above: Ghent Cropper, yellow dominican.  
Rear head marking is excessive, but for  
stock breeding this is a valuable pigeon.  
The head pattern including the coloured  
spot is considered as dominant in  
breeding the Ghent Cropper.**

**Right: Ghent Cropper, red dominican.**







**Left:**  
 The mating is done (early March) and the first eggs will be laid soon.

About 10 years ago there was a lot of discussion concerning the dominican variety in The Netherlands. From the viewpoint of uniformity, the Standard Committee of the Union (Dutch NPA) wanted to alter the

denomination of this pattern in: magpie. This was prevented by means of an official appeal and voting during the annual Dutch NPA meeting. The colours of the Ghent Croppers are: black, red, dun, yellow, blue (barred), dilute blue (barred), ash silver (barred), red- and yellow chequered.

**Left: The under tail coverts at the dominicans, the so-called fish-tail must be white in colour.**

**Below: Ghent Cropper, yellow dominican.**



**Sels, called also 'roek' in Dutch and Flemish**

Of the sels, we see the white variety the most on the shows at this moment, but they exist also in black, red, yellow, dun and ash silver, blue with black bars, diluted blue with dark bars, red silver and yellow silver barred and chequered.



**Left: A red dominican Ghent Cropper, with some 'over colouring' on the left wing. But still a useful stock bird for good marked offspring.**

**With bib (bibbed) in Dutch also called 'cropper pied'.**

This cropper pied exists of a white half-moon heart on the front of the crop that should not reach to the eyes. The belly, thighs, muffs, back and 7 (min) to 13 (max) flights should be white. At the blacks, blues\*, dilute blues\* and mealy the tail is solid (\*except for a tail bar). The other colours have a pale/light coloured tail.

### **Blue tail-marked (Flemish: *Verhemelstaart*, in Dutch: *gesnipt*)**

This variety has a white ground colour with the upper head sprinkled with light blue flecks. The tail has a dark bar and the upper and lower tail coverts are an uneven blue colour.

### **Tigered**

The tigereds come in three different gradations. All gradations have a coloured ground colour, evenly marked with white flecks; in 'normal' tiger also tail, wings and foot feathers have white flecks. Light tiger is the same as normal tiger but birds in this variety have a white tail, 7 to 10 white primaries and white foot feathers. Dark tiger is the same as normal tiger but with coloured tail, primaries and foot feathers. The three tiger variations come in black, dun, blue, red and yellow.

### **History**

Ghent Cropper is a very old breed that was already mentioned in 1699 by the Italian ornithologist Aldrovandi. He describes large foot feathered Croppers, where we could think of the group of large Croppers, to which we might think of the narrow related English, French, Pommerian, Dutch and Ghent Cropper or Pouter. In the WW1 from 1914 – 1918, Belgium had been occupied and the Ghent Cropper had much suffered. According to C.A.M. Spruijt, the Dutch Cropper had contributed a lot to the fast re-entry of the Ghent Cropper after the WW1. Ghent was always the city for these Cropper, one called that breed there 'the beater', hence the name; 'Ghent beater club' which was formed in 1911, but later in 1922, re-baptism in the 'Kropperclub Gent'. The word 'beater' became of beating, or clapping with the wings, what Ghent Croppers did especially in the mating-season, rather noisily. But in the language of the people this breed was also called *Zwalper* in Flemish; this is dialect and comes of the drifting or wandering way of flying. The tigered variation is supposed to be an Antwerp creation. Furthermore it is mentioned, that shortly after 1918 a crossing with French Mondains is done to make the breed heavier.

**This concludes the reports of the visits to Marc van Schelstraete and Joop van Loon and concise standard description. Hereafter we give you the standard as it was in the old days and more photos from Dick Hamer of this fancy breed.**





Fédération Nationale d'Aviculture de Belgique  
Sous la Haute Protection de S. M. le Roi et le Patronage du Gouvernement.  
Nationaal Verbond voor Neerhofdierenteelt van België

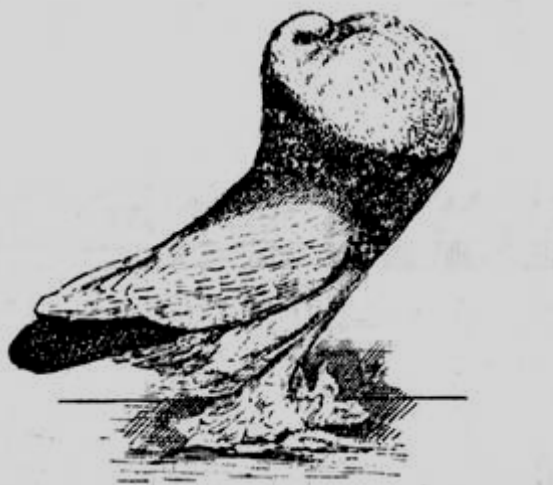
## Standard du Boulant Gantois

Standard du 9 juillet 1909, modifié par la Commission des Standards, 18 juin 1924  
Approuvé par le Conseil d'Administration, 2 juillet 1924.

The Ghent Cropper, according to the standard of June 18<sup>e</sup> 1924 is recognised in the following varieties:

- Dominicans
- Bibbed
- Selves
- Blue tail-marked. Verhemelstaart
- Tigered.

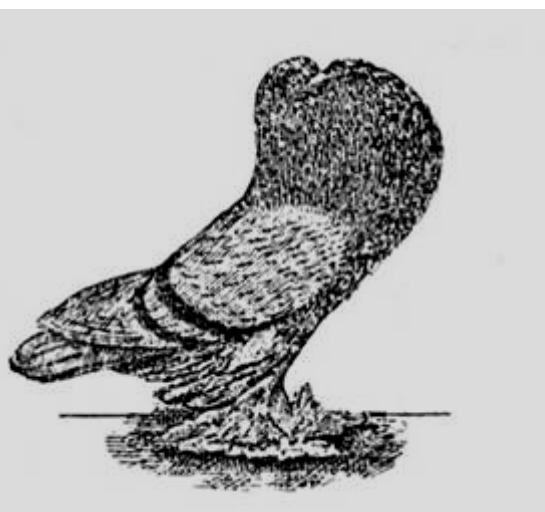
*Ghent Cropper is broad and powerful, well rounded with the forepart of the body carried forward. The hind-parts nearly horizontal in carriage. A large full crop but not blowing in the neck.*



*Left: Ghent Cropper in Dominican with distinct and clear marking, the colour is pure and intensive.*



*Right: Ghent Cropper with bib marking. Also the belly, back, primary feathers and foot feathers are white.*



*Left: Ghent Cropper, Self.*



*Right: Ghent Cropper, Blue tail-marked (verhemelstaart). Called in the early days: spot-marking and had a coloured upper mandil.*



*Left: Ghent Cropper tigered. In this standard the tiger-marking was wanted in a ratio of 1 : 4, that is 1 coloured feather and 4 white feathers, except for the tail and the primaries, which are wanted coloured.*

*Photos from the archives of  
the well-known  
pigeon promoter Dick Hamer*

These images are on average 10 years old and had to be converted from slides, which may not always give good quality. Please excuse for this, but we found these images nevertheless important enough to show them to you.

Above: Ghent Croppers in red and black, at A. Graafmans in Hilvarenbeek (NL). With sand on the floor and special perches for the pigeons to as much as possible prevent damage to the foot feathers.

Right: Ghent Cropper yellow dominican. Painted by René Delin. From the Art collection of: J. Lauwers, Mechelen (B). Photo: Dick Hamer.



Above: Dominican with and without the wanted fish-tail (under tail covers) and next we see more mismarks. Breeder: J. Sanders.







Left: A group of black dominican Ghen Croppers at the Belgium breeder: C. Vanderstraeten in Zonhoven (B).



Right: A black dominican Ghen Cropper at Jan Brederoo in Monster (NL). This pigeon shows an upright stand. Striking are the worn-off primaries due to clapping or beating the wings.



Left: Ghen Cropper, mealy pied.

Below: Ghen Cropper, old hen, diluted blue dark barred pied. Breeder: D. Lombart.

Below: Ghen Cropper, white old male. Breeder: D. Manshoven.



Right: Ghent Cropper, yellow pied.



Left: Ghent Cropper m/o, black dominican.  
Breeder: G. Schmidt.

Right: Ghent Cropper, m/y brown barred  
pied. Breeder: A. Verheijden (B).



Left: Ghent Cropper f/o, black dominican.  
Breeder: A. Graafmans.

Right: Ghent Cropper m/o, blue dominican.  
Breeder: H. Tushaus.

Below: Ghent Cropper f/o, yellow  
dominicaan. Breeder: Joop van Loon.







Left: Ghent Cropper m/o, ashsilver.  
Breeder: H. Brouwer.



Right: Ghent Cropper, Diluted blue chequered dominican. Dortmund-show (D) 2007.



Left: Ghent Cropper, black dominican.  
Neurenberg-show (D) 1995. Foto: AE.



Above:  
Ghent Cropper, f/o blue dominicaan.  
The Kempenshow '08 in Olen (B).  
Owner: Dirk Lombaert, Zeveneken (B)  
96 points. Photo: Piet Steeman.



Left: Ghent Cropper, m/o white.  
The Kempenshow '08 in Olen (B).  
Owner: Gerrit Crommen, Koersel (B).  
96 points. Photo: Piet Steeman.



**Ghent Croppers, left above: f/o black, owner: Maarten Mees, Gistel (B).  
Right above: m/o white, owner: Gerrit Crommen, Koersel (B).  
Both 96 points at the Kempenshow '08 in Olen (B). Photos: Piet Steeman.**

**For more Information about the Ghent Cropper,  
contact the following associations and/or individuals.**

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**Ghent Cropper adopted at the Specialty Club for the Rare Cropper Breeds.**

Lacking governing board members The Ghent Cropper Specialty Club in the Netherlands - of which Mr. Joop van Loon was the secretary - was closed in January 2009. Members were informed by Mr. Van Loon in his last newsletter. The main aim of the club, founded in 1998, was to maintain the name 'Dominican' in the Ghent Cropper and to everybody's pleasant surprise they succeeded, although it took much effort.

The Specialty Club for Rare Cropper breeds willingly takes the Ghent Cropper Club under their wings so that the Ghent Cropper breed will be maintained for the the Dutch Breeders in Holland. Mr. Van Loon also advised his members to apply for membership in the Specialty Club for Rare Cropper breeds, as it is not automatically completed.

In the Rare Breed Club, there are several breeders of the Ghent Cropper. I hereby invite all Ghent Cropper breeders to join our club. You are more than welcome and will gladly be added to our membership list and in the breed listings.  
Hope to see you all in our Rare Breed Club.

Martin Timmerman, secretary.