



# ARAUCANAS

Text and photos:  
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**I did not start raising Araucanas in spite of their unique breeding challenges, but BECAUSE of them. I did my research carefully before settling on the Araucana as my bird of choice: arguably, the most difficult breed to perfect.**

**Above: Black breasted red, show cockerel and pullet.  
Right: A hen with perfect tufts.**

The Araucana is a challenge to even the most experienced poultry people for several reasons. First of all, the tufted gene. Araucanas are required to be tufted - that is, to have ear tufts on either side of the face. Ear tufts are actual feathers, similar to the body feathers of the bird, and are NOT the same thing as muffs, which are fluffy feathers that grow around the ears and under the chin in some breeds. Genetically, ear tufts are lethal in a double dose; that is, if an embryo inherits two copies of the gene, it will die before hatching. This means that all surviving tufted birds are heterozygous for the tufted gene -- they carry only one copy of the gene. So even if you breed two tufted birds together, a significant portion of the offspring will always be clean-faced (not tufted). Of the tufted offspring, many will have uneven tufts, or a tuft on only one side of the head, or tufts so small you can hardly see them. These birds are no good for show.





So, just the tufted trait makes the Araucana a challenge. Then you have the rumplessness, another trait required for show.

Araucanas are not just missing their tail feathers, but are completely absent of the bones and muscles that normally comprise a tail.

**Right: A black breasted red golden duckwing hen.**

**Below: Bluebuff hen; this is a not recognized colour variety.**



Because of this, they cannot move their feathers aside for mating, and as a result, many Araucanas have reduced fertility. Araucanas with nice long backs tend to have better fertility than the birds with shorter rumps.

Short-rumped birds, in addition to their tendency towards poor fertility, often have problems with "poopy butt."

**Right:  
Show hen  
with  
magnifi-  
cent tufts.**





Ideally, a breeder should not hatch eggs from birds that have overly short backs, poor natural fertility (which necessitates vent-trimming to acquire fertile eggs), or droppings chronically gathered on their vent feathers.

It can be extremely tempting, however, when birds with one or more of the aforementioned problems are otherwise good show specimens or breeders. Sadly, as nice as they may be, their problems will most likely only be compounded in their offspring.

**Right:**  
**Golden duckwing males.**



Another challenge of the Araucana breed is the lack of quality stock available. Quite simply, good quality birds that actually meet the standard are extremely rare, and the few breeders that DO possess such birds are not willing to part with them. And who can blame them? Such birds are most likely the result of decades of breeding. Solid-colored varieties, such as blacks and whites, are a little easier to get ahold of. Parti-colored birds, ESPECIALLY in the large fowl size, are rarely seen with correct plumage.

As long as I have been breeding Araucanas, I have never seen a Golden Duckwing or Silver Duckwing Large Fowl Araucana with correct plumage color. Not in my flock, nor at any shows, nor in any recent photographs.



My first Araucanas came from hatching eggs purchased on ebay. Nine of 18 eggs hatched, and I was thrilled. Unfortunately, only two were pullets and the rest cockerels. When they were about 4 months old, I decided to cull the extra cockerels and keep only one, and this is where I made my first mistakes.

Having never bred for show before, I didn't realize until it was too late that the birds I kept had the wrong leg color and wrong skin color - disqualifiers in show.





**Above: A rumpless, not tufted cockerel, black breasted red-golden duckwing.**

Before culling I should have purchased a Standard of Perfection book and very carefully read every word regarding Araucanas. Being naive and inexperienced, I hardly knew what the Standard of Perfection was. In addition, I selected for the plumage colors I wanted, instead of selecting for proper type first, which is what I should have done. The only saving grace was that, thankfully, all the birds had the correct comb type.

The birds I kept were as follows: A poorly colored rumpless/clean-faced "Golden Duckwing" cockerel with white skin and pink legs; a poorly colored tailed/tufted "Black Breasted Red" pullet with white skin and slate legs; and a poorly colored rumpless/clean-faced "Silver Duckwing" pullet with white skin and pink legs.

**Right: This cockerel has ear tufts and also a tail. Note it also has one slate leg and one yellow.**







The Black Breasted Red (BBR) pullet laid a green egg, and the Silver Duckwing (SDW) pullet a lovely sky blue.

**Left: Egg variation.**  
**Below: The desired blue color.**



Not one of the birds was rumpless AND tufted, but the rumpless/clean-faced cockerel and the tufted/tailed pullet gave me what I needed to get started on that. I hatched several batches chicks from them and was fortunate enough to procure a few rumpless/tufted offspring.

Note: The APA and ABA Araucana breed standards call for a willow legged (for duckwing and BBR), pea combed, rumpless, tufted, blue egg laying bird with.

It was around this time that I realized no matter how many chicks I hatched from this trio, I would never get showable offspring with proper leg & skin color, unless I brought in birds with the correct skin color.

Steve Waters, a very reputable breeder in my area, was kind enough to give me two white hens with yellow legs and yellow skin.



**Right: Black and White pullets from Steve Waters.**

I bred these birds with my slate-legged, white-skinned Golden Duckwing rooster, and it did the trick! Out of the first hatch from this pairing, a few of the offspring had willow legs and yellow skin - the correct combination for the color varieties I wanted to breed for - namely, Black Breasted Red, Golden Duckwing, and Silver Duckwing.

Sadly, breeding the white birds with my part-colored Golden Duckwings and Black Breasted Reds did some very strange things to plumage color in





my flock. Odd color combinations kept popping up, often some sort of mix between blue and buff. While attractive, these birds were not any standard color and could not be shown. I did, however, use them for perpetuating the willow legs and yellow skin in my flock.



**Above: A hen who disappeared a few weeks back turned up in the yard ... with 11 chicks! The really cool thing about this is that this hen is fully rumpless and has never had her vent trimmed. So it seems that natural fertility is alive and well in my flock.**



**Left: Roosters can make good dads.**

**Below: Bilateral tufted chick.**



Each year, I managed to increase the percentage of birds with proper leg and skin color, and each year I needed fewer of the birds with improper leg & skin color. At first I kept most of my wrong-leg-color birds



because they had other traits I needed -- tufts, rumplessness, good type, nice comb, good egg color, and/or the plumage colors I wanted to breed for. Since I did not have all of these traits in the same bird, I had to keep many birds with wrong leg color to make sure that these traits would be perpetuated. Gradually I managed to breed these traits into birds with the right leg/skin color, and then I could finally afford to get rid of most of the ones with wrong leg/skin color.

**Right: A broody with her 6-week-old chicks. The blue one in the front is a pullet and a total cutie.**

Finally, as of this year, my flock consists almost entirely of birds with proper willow legs and yellow skin! I realize that I still have a long way to go. Plumage color still leaves a lot to be desired, and many of my birds are non-standard colors. Body type needs improvement; many of my birds are too tall with overly-long legs. And, finally, I need to work on egg color. Many of my birds lay green eggs when they should be sky blue.



**Left: One-month-old chicks. On the left, a bilateral-tufted rumpless willow-legged duckwing pullet, and on the right a bilateral-tufted rumpless yellow-legged duckwing cockerel.**

**Below right: 2,5 months old chicks. The cockerel in front is a golden duckwing. In the next few months, his coloration will change drastically. The hackles and saddles will grow in golden or silver, the shoulders will turn red, the chest will turn black, and a dark wing bar with light tips will appear.**

Reaching these goals is a matter of many more years of selective breeding, but it can be done! By applying the same principals I used to achieve correct leg & skin color, adhering religiously to selective breeding, and pairing my birds properly so that, for example, a deficit or weak area in the rooster is made up for by pairing him with a hen that is strong in that trait, I will be able to achieve my goals. It may take many years, perhaps even decades, but eventually I will be consistently producing show quality Araucanas!

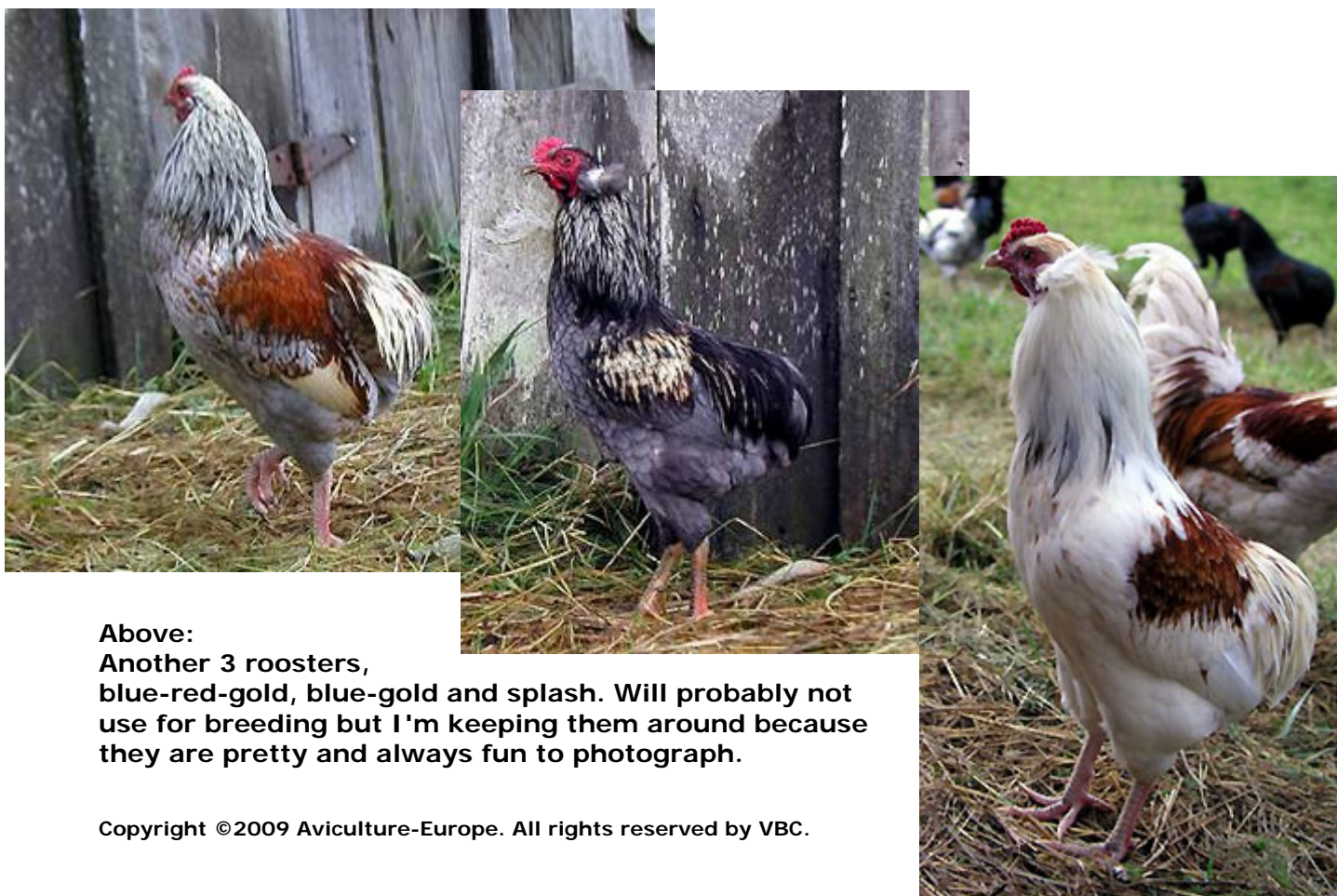




Here are some more photos of my Araucanas. Also in the article 'Araucana-Past and Present' in this issue you can see more of my birds. And if you want more, then have a look at my website <http://www.araucanasonline.com/>.



**Above: A show quality silver duckwing pullet.**



**Above:  
Another 3 roosters,  
blue-red-gold, blue-gold and splash. Will probably not  
use for breeding but I'm keeping them around because  
they are pretty and always fun to photograph.**