

CONCERNING POULTRY

DIVERSITY

By: Dirk Zoehl



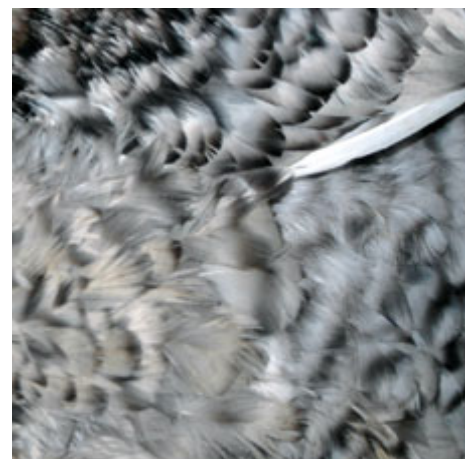
Above: Chickens in Zanzibar, Stone Town. Photo: Livia Marchioni & Leslye Haslam

In large parts of the world, the diversity of fowl does not just exist thanks to standard lists, priorities chosen by judges, show and poultry magazines, but simply because of the care and preferences of farmers and countrywomen. The reason that there is so much attention for breeds from Europe, United States and Japan has more to do with better documentation and poultry press articles than the fact that other parts of the world would lack diversity.



Barred - male hackle

Many writers have already pointed out the rich poultry diversity in the underestimated Eastern Europe. They are right to fear the disappearance of this unknown gamma of breed types and varieties, all in favour of the commercially developed hybrids from the West. The largest obstacle is mostly not understanding the Slavic language and their libraries. If something gets published regionally, it hardly ever reaches our Western channels.



barred - breast



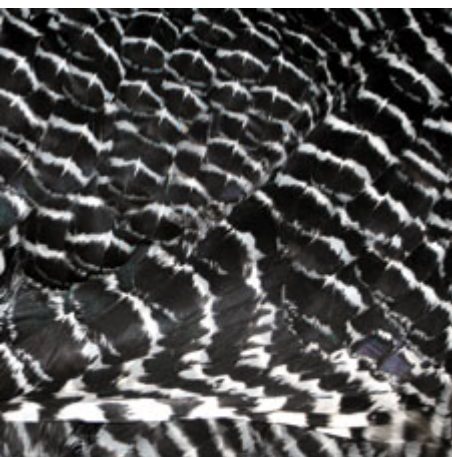
silver duckwing - breast hen



Lemon mille fleur - female



Pile - tail male



Autosomal barred, silver hen

From more and more sources it has become apparent that throughout the ages people have been breeding all sorts of fowl, but the excessive attention for eggs and meat exclusively is something of a much later date. Take the Long Crows, the Game Fowl, the Silkies, used for medicinal purposes (e.g. against kidney stones and impotence) and the Japanese Onagadori roosters, that have the sickle feathers up to a length of 10 or more meters. The Leon fowl from the Spanish Highland, after which it is named, has been kept since the 17th century

because of its neck- and saddle hackle. Three times a year their feathers are collected. They are transformed into artificial flies for trout fishing. It is only one of the many reasons why chickens were kept in the past - and sometimes they still are.

Through organizations like SAVE Foundation, (www.save-foundation.net) safeguarding endangered breeds of domestic animal varieties in their area of origin, we learn about genetic and historically important cultural varieties of (chicken) breeds that are still around in European countries. And there is the very complete book 'Handbuch der Hühner-rassen' by Rüdiger Wandelt, published in Germany in 1965, giving a summary of worldwide known chicken breeds. The book is illustrated with numerous photos by Josef Wolters.

And especially via Internet we can get acquainted with many more unknown breeds.

Because of these worldwide presentations, regional patterns will catch the attention. In our confident European area, it is remarkable to see how often a breed is named after only one village (like our Welsummer and Assendelft Fowl) or even after a cloister or castle. The French Crèvecoeur was named after a cloister in the neighbourhood of Lisieux; the related Pavilly was named after a castle not far away from the cloister. Another European characteristic is the fact that so many breeds were kept because of the passion of one individual. The beautiful Vorwerk is named after its German creator.



lemon mille fleur - cock



Columbian - abdomen



black -Cemani male



Autosomal barred, gold, male



gold laced



Autosomal barred, silver, tail male



porcelain



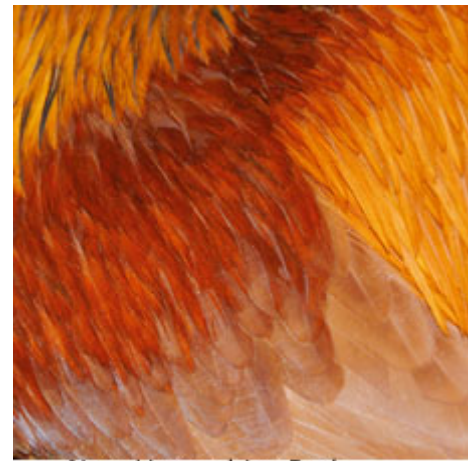
crele -female

Armin Arbeiter, an Austrian, was the one who saved the original Sulmtaler Fowl. Due to cross breeding with heavy breeds from Asia, like the Cochin and the Brahma - only because of the insatiable appetite of the Viennese and Berliners for Backhendl (Viennese Fried Chicken) - the old breeds became neglected. In the Netherlands we can point out Roel Houwink for saving the original Drentse Hoen from being extinct. Germany and Switzerland developed a so-called Reichs-Huhn. A productive and easy-to-keep chicken, suitable to being bred by small and middle-large poultry keepers.

Lamu chickens

In the eighties I was working in the mainland near Lamu, in a development program. Lamu is an island in the Indian Ocean in front of Kenia's coast, not far away from the borders of Somalia. It is one of a whole series of Islands, in size comparable to our "Wadden Islands". I still love to go there on a sort of tropical retreat and would recommend the readers of Aviculture Europe a visit to this place. Lamu is an island which belongs as much to the domestic animals as to the native Swahili inhabitants. There are no cars on the island (well, one or two ramshackle Land Rovers, belonging to the district's Chief), neither there is any other modernity, and awful bio-industry doesn't exist here. Donkeys, chickens, ducks, cats (no dogs here) they all have equal rights to the quay, the market place and the narrow streets of the town. On a lower level to the ground we meet the free-range chicken... and I mean the real free-range chickens, not the beak-trimmed Dutch chickens that spend their short

lives crammed in ammonia-intoxicated barns. No, over here in Lamu a free-range chicken is a free-range chicken, without the people (apart from the few tourists) knowing about the terrible way in which chickens are being kept in Western Countries. To get an idea of the looks of the chickens in Lamu and surroundings: imagine the painter Van Gink, after a hard day's work, painting our chicken breeds, using all his left-over paint for a fantastic hotchpotch.



New Hampshire Red, shoulder, male



duckwing neck and shoulder-male



crele- saddle+tail male



partridge hackle male



blue partridge - male

There were many silver partridge chickens like our (Dutch) Twents Fowl and double laced ones like the Barnevelder, but also pure white, black or red birds, or with Mille fleur and Columbian markings. I saw naked-necks, rosecombs, peacombs and single combs; long legged birds and also some short legged ones, and I even saw frizzled chickens!

Those many occurring Twent and Barnevelder colour varieties are not that strange, because of the fact that the Dutch used Eastern Game Fowl to improve vitality and free-range capacity in



partridge - female



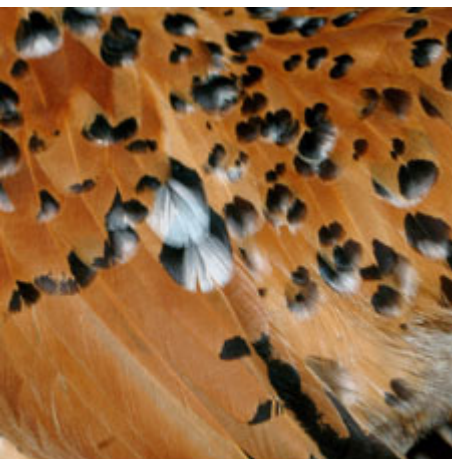
lavender - male

their chickens.

In Lamu there is a place for each individual that, guided by its mother hen, survives the street and garbage place dangers, and grows up and matures. The scarce eggs that are laid, are being sold as 'Swahili-egg' on markets and little shops. They are smaller than the eggs from commercial batteries - which are sold in neat boxes - but they are a little bit more expensive. No wonder; the battery-egg with its pale yoke, imported from the far highlands and mainland, is no comparison to the briskly authentic Swahili-egg.



lavender mottled



millefleur - female

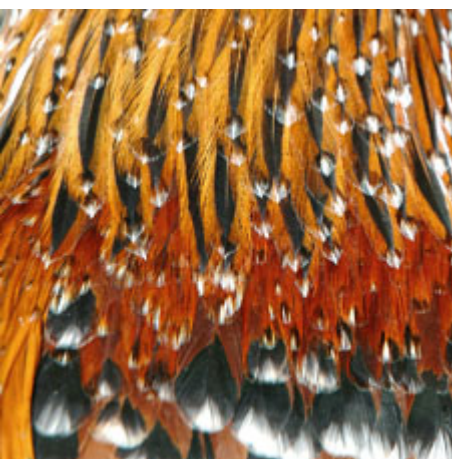
Photos

Most of the photographs in the beautiful poultry books of present times are by the well known German photographer Josef Wolters. Sharply and well lighted pictures, carefully depicting the characteristics of a breed. On the contrary, the breeds from faraway countries that we find on the internet are being photographed in nasty back gardens, along the roads, in their cage or next to the basket in which they are transported, or in the arms of the lucky owner.



millefleur

The latter is very always appealing to me, although we will not be able to see all the details of the breed that well. The difference in presentation is probably the best rendering of the meaning of my earlier statement on diversity in rich and poor lands. Uniform, clear but sterile documentation versus the dynamic reality of the farm yard.



millefleur - hackle male



porcelain - female



Wheaten mille fleur

A lot, if not most of the diversity in fowl breeds have originated and were developed on these farmer's backyards, taking generations of breeding work over thousands of years. Placed in time, the modern ways of commercial and hobby breeding only represent a small percentage of the many years that fowl have served men.

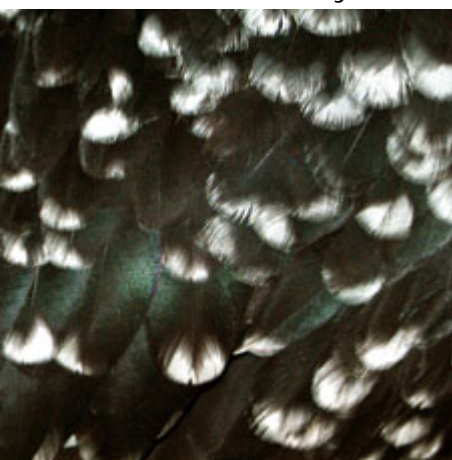


red mottled

To illustrate this article we have chosen a series of pictures of a diversity of colours and markings, developed by fanatic European fanciers; a great many more than in the times when the first poultry

shows took place. And still the diversity worldwide is many times larger.

A diversity that – to quote the legendary anthropologist Levi Strauss - would perish without the wealth of the minorities, which are the salt of the earth.



mottled

All these photographs are taken by Sigrid van Dort.

Right photo:
A rooster in the Isle of Lamu.
Photo: Dirk Zoebel.



For more smashing photos and drawings on all present, known and new colour varieties, plus their inheritance, we recommend the book: Genetics of Chicken Colours, the basics by Sigrid van Dort, www.chickencolours.com or www.tuinvee.nl , at the bottom of the homepage.