

BUTTERCUP FOWLS...

UNIQUE AND RARE

By: Luuk Hans

American, English and Dutch breeders might be familiar with the Sicilian Buttercup. A rare breed, but it can be seen occasionally at shows.

However, this is not the same breed as the Italian chicken breed 'Siciliana' from the isle of Sicily. Moreover, there are a few other buttercup varieties in the world, a fact which actually leads to confusion.



**Above: A white Siciliana cock.
Photo: Sandro Mazzeo.**

Let us get you acquainted with a few buttercup breeds and hopefully diminish your confusion at the same time.

Italy /Sicily

The Siciliana is a Mediterranean breed of ancient origins. The breed has been known for ages, as there are authentic paintings dating from the sixteenth century, illustrating the breed, and which can be seen in the Vatican Museums

i.e. the Borghese Gallery, the Florence Art Gallery and the Chiaramonti Museum. The Siciliana has red earlobes; some white is allowed. The legs are willow green. They exist in many colours like partridge (black-breasted red), black and white. Weight: cock 2,0-2,4 kg; hen 1,6-1,8 kg.

Although its characteristics are rather difficult to describe, it is a very interesting breed with undeniable qualities: precocious, with high fertility, excellent meat and very good production of white eggs. Male and female chicks can be distinguished within weeks by larger development of the male comb. They are extremely active, males starting to crow at the very early age of four weeks! Today the original Italian Siciliana is not widespread – moreover, in danger of becoming extinct.



**Left: White Siciliana in Sicily.
Photo: Luuk Hans.**



In the above photos you see various Sicilianas. Photos have been taken on the isle of Sicily, by Luuk Hans.

America

The breed commonly known as Sicilian Buttercup – or short: 'Buttercup' - is properly bred abroad. For sure, the two breeds are related, but due to the different selection this Buttercup breed developed into a different strain or type, which is also known in the UK and in the Netherlands, but more or less unknown in Italy.

The breed got a real stimulus in the USA when hatching eggs were imported around 1892. All present stock descends from it. However, today the breed is on the SPPA Critical List for poultry breeds.

Pity that the American variety got its own momentum; in spite of its name it is different from the Siciliana, and the Sicilian Buttercup is actually a real American breed. Sicilian Buttercups were accepted into the American Standard of Perfection in 1918. The name 'buttercup' refers to the flower (*Ranunculus acris*) and the comb is wanted closed at the end, thus to form a true flower or crown.



The main difference between the two strains is the colour; the Sicilian Buttercup is only standardized in golden, in the US and other countries. This is a very contrasting colour between the sexes. Males are a deep golden with a black tail; the cape should show some black spangles. The hen is golden buff, with parallel rows of black spangles, giving her an almost spotted appearance. The well-spread tail is carried at an angle of 45 degrees.

**Left: Siciliana rooster on Sicily.
Photo: Sandro Mazzeo.**

Other differences are: the Sicilian Buttercup is more robust and heavier. A cock weighs 6.0-6.5 lb., (2,5-3 kg). Also, the Sicilian Buttercup has white earlobes, that is, in the US and Dutch Poultry standard. In the English Poultry standard they are wanted with

red ear lobes. The legs are wanted willow green in all countries.

The Sicilian Buttercup is also known in a bantam variety.

In all, the Sicilian Buttercup and Siciliana are non-broody light Mediterranean breeds.

**Right: Sicilian Buttercup in the Netherlands.
Photo K. van der Hoek.**

The Buttercup in Other Countries

Since 1925 there are also Buttercups in Australia, probably coming from America. There still are a few present today, but we don't know whether they descend from the 'old' birds or have been newly imported.

In 1913 the Buttercups arrived in England, in Gold and Silver, but the Silver variety doesn't exist

anymore. The breed was popular for some time, but now is rare.

We have no data when the Buttercups came to the Netherlands and Belgium. Today there are only a few breeders, or maybe just one.

In France, the '*Sicilienne*' was imported from the US in 1935. Because of the comb form and golden colour, they were also known as '*Bouton d'or*' (= *Ranunculus acris*, *buttercup*) The breed is very rare in France.



Germany is probably the only country where the two different varieties of Sicilians are present- although on a very small scale. In September 2006, a club was founded in Germany to establish the Sicilian Buttercups that are present there: the Siciliana from Italy and the Sicilian Buttercup. In the past, Buttercups had been imported from England, and later from Italy. The Club wants to find more friends for these highly endangered breeds. In Germany, the 'Italian' Sicilian (*Sizilianer*) is not yet recognized.

OTHER BUTTERCUP BREEDS

Germany

Germany also has its own buttercup variety, the **Augsburger Buttercup**. It was created at the turn of the last century, by using the Italian breed Lamotta and the French La Flèche.

A striking handicap of this breed is that the comb of the Augsburger is not hereditary; when breeding it shows a single comb in 25%, a V-shaped comb in 25% and only half shows a proper comb, i.e. a buttercup. This has hampered the popularity of the breed.



**Augsburger Buttercup,
Large Fowl**
Photos: Mick Bassett.

The Augsburg Buttercup is recognized in black and blue; black being the most often found - although still rare - colour. This breed also exists in white. The earlobes are white and the eyes are dark brown. The cock has a long and broad back and the lustrous tail is carried at about 30°. The legs are slate blue. They are about as heavy as the Sicilian Buttercup : a cock weighs 2.3-3.0 kg. The Augsburg Buttercups are also recognised in a bantam variety.



Left: Augsburg Buttercup, bantam cockerel. Photo taken in Munster (Germany) by Luuk Hans.

France

France could not stay behind and has its own national breed; the **Caumont**.

Contrary to the other mentioned breeds this one is tufted; it has a small backward tuft. A very rare breed, which is supposed to be nearly extinct. The Caumont is named after a small town in Normandy. It was standardized in 1913.



The breed disappeared later on and now efforts are being undertaken to recreate this breed up to its standard again. The Caumont only exists in black. A cock weighs a minimum of 3 kg.

Above and left: Caumont cockerel; a rare French buttercomb breed. Photos D. de Jong.



Egypt

A much less known Buttercup breed is the **Dandarawi**, which lives in the northern part of Egypt and is able to survive in an arid habitat. The origin is unknown. It is a light, lean chicken with yellow legs. They come only in the silver wheaten colour variety and lay white eggs, although varieties with red ears usually lay brown eggs. In the oasis of Fayoum and Assiut University, this breed is maintained and bred by the state, to prevent extinction. Some twenty years ago the breed was brought to Europe by Professor Horst of the University of Berlin, who wanted to study the breed's laying capacity in order to use it in tropical areas.



The comb of the Dandarawi chickens in Europe is a buttercup-comb, and this type of buttercup is breeding true. But in Egypt there are more comb varieties, such as a double-bladed single comb and butterfly comb. They also appear with both 4 and 5 toes, and also a variety with a small, backward crest is known. From this we may conclude that the Dandarawis have probably been crossed with other breeds along the course of history. Meanwhile the breed has been standardized as a 5 toed breed, with or without crest. They are smaller and lighter than the breeds mentioned earlier: only 1.6 to 2 kg for the cocks and 1.3 to 1.6 kg for the hens.

Left: Dandarawi rooster.

Photo W. Kaiser/Archives Avicultura.

In common

Perhaps - according to Frenchman Periquet, chairman of the French poultry association - the connection between all mentioned breeds is to be found in the history of the kings of Sicily. From 1138 to 1254, the *House of Hohenstaufen* (their capital being Augsburg) was a dynasty of German kings. In 1194 the Hohenstaufen also became Kings of Sicily. In 1254 the Pope, having declared the kingdom a papal possession, offered the crown to the King of England's son, Edmund Crouchback, but the English never succeeded in taking the kingdom. In 1262 the Pope granted the kingdom to the King of France's brother, Charles of Anjou. In this way all related birds may be connected!

Another theory is that the buttercombed breeds descended from certain poultry breeds of North-Africa (or more specifically Tripoli) and were created by the Arabs, who travelled to Europe. This seems logical, since Sicily is somewhere in-between North-Africa and mainland Europe.

Anyway, the connection between the breeds mentioned in this article seems to be there. We know for sure that there is a connection between the Sicilian Buttercup and Siciliana. Also, all these breeds have their rareness in common. For that reason we know that crossings between these breeds have taken place. No matter what, these rare breeds are of a striking appearance, and also hardy and good layers. A real challenge for the one who dares.

Who dares? The breeds deserve it!

Sicilië <http://www.gallinasiciliana.altervista.org/>

Duitsland <http://www.sizilianer.info/index.html>

USA http://www.backyardpoultrymag.com/issues/4/4-3/the_american_buttercup_the_crown_of_the_fancy.html