



Photo: Simon Flitney

CROAD LANGSHANS

It's always a mystery why one person is attracted to a certain breed of dog... cat... or chicken... but as Secretary of the Croad Langshan club in Britain I'm often told by new members that they just 'fell for' these gentle giants when they first saw them.

The perfect utility breed

The Croad Langshan is a heavy soft feather breed. Their attractive features include black plumage with a dark green sheen (there are white Croads too, but not so many). They have dark, intelligent eyes, a proud carriage and lay pinkish-brown eggs. They are well known for the U-shape that they show in profile where the tail feathers of both male and female birds reach the same height as the head. Other characteristics include feathering on the leg and outside toe. Soles of the feet should be pink and toe-nails should be white.

Right: British breeder Annette Adaway shows off the dark green sheen on the feathers of her 2010-hatched Croad.



Croads have a friendly, inquisitive approach to life, They are generally very calm birds, and you would be unlucky to find an aggressive cockerel. But in these rare cases, remember they are also good meaty birds for the table!

They can produce 150 large plum coloured eggs per year and are long lived—10 years is not unusual, but egg production declines dramatically after 6 years.



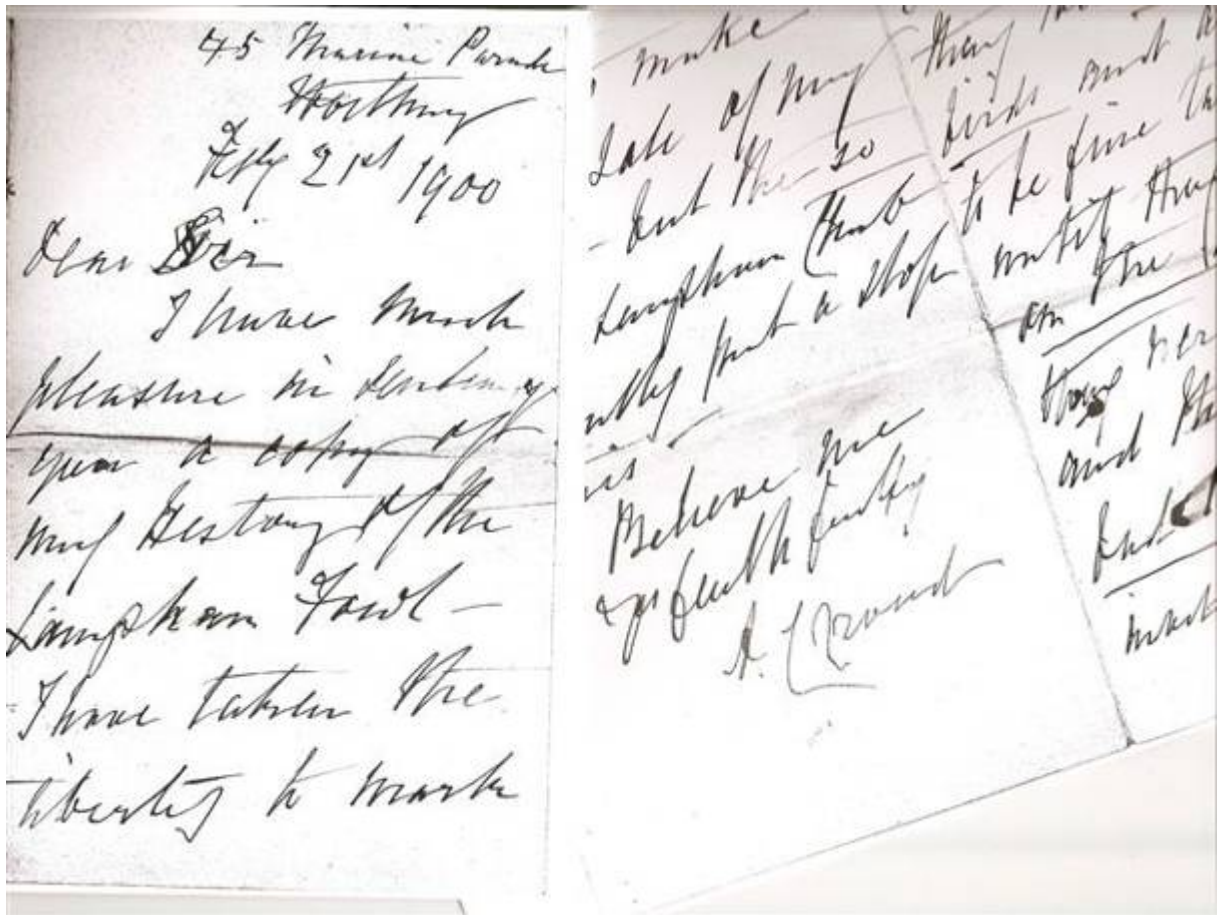
On the downside, like a lot of the less common breeds, fertility is not always high, and you may have to travel a long way to find them—although I am pleasantly surprised by the number of breeders across Europe who are popping up all the time. We now have a few members in most western European countries, and these people have often bought their birds from local breeders, and the birds look very good, as some of the photos here show.

Left: Winner of the British Croad Langshan Club Show in 2008 - bred by Tracey Chubb (currently club vice-president).

All the way from China

Most poultry breeds originated in Asia, and Langshan is a region in the north of China, close to the Mongolian border. The first Langshans in Britain were imported by Major F T Croad in 1872. Croad Langshans are the descendants of these, and are thought to be the most 'true' to the original type. Other Langshans also exist – such as German, Modern, Australian and American – but tend to be taller and 'leggier' than the Croad. In Australia, I'm told that Langshans were 50% of the nation's breeding flock before 1940, but as fertility dropped over the years, Orpington blood was introduced, and the Australian Langshan today looks more like the Modern Langshans than the Croad.

When they arrived in Britain, the poultry fraternity (which was full of rivalries and politics) was not keen to accept them as a distinct breed, and wanted to classify them as poor-quality Cochins. It was Major Croad's niece, Miss A C Croad, who fought hard to establish the breed in this country against fierce opposition. It is hard to imagine the amount of anger and bitterness in the arguments, but apart from personal pride there were also commercial interests. A new breed that offered both good meat and egg-laying abilities could bring success for its breeder, but possibly reduce the popularity of a rival breed.



Above: Letter written by Miss A C Croad, from Worthing, West Sussex, in 1900: "Dear Sir, I have much pleasure in sending you a copy of my history of the Langshan Fowl..." To the modern reader, this book is not so interesting, as much of it is taken up with Miss Croad's account of her struggle to get Croad Langshans recognised as a distinct breed - not a 'poor variety of Cochins' and the bitter feud with other poultry breeders who disagreed with her.

History comes alive

It is often written in Croad Langshan books 'there may still be some Langshans in China'. Some of our club members were even forming a loose plan to travel to the province to look. So you can imagine our surprise and delight to receive an email from Jifa Zhang at the Langshan Chicken Farm in the People's Republic of China (PRC). This is what he told us:

"I am a undergraduate working in a chicken farm, named Langshan Chicken Farm, located in Yangkou Town, Rudong Country, Nantong City, Jiangsu Province in China. Unfortunately now in China, Langshan Chicken is endangered, so we hope that we can exchange our views, to help the endangered chicken. Our website is: www.langshanji.com.

"Langshan Chicken Farm, established in 1959 in China, mainly engages in preserving, upgrading, and breeding of Langshan chicken. Because Langshan chicken has long growth cycle, and has no distinct advantage, its quantity declined sharply in the past few years. With the promotion of people's consciousness of animal resources protection in China, the RP of China offers us lots of help. At the same time, they hope that we can promote Langshan chicken world-wide to cause more people's attention.

"Now, with the help of RP of China, our farm owns capital assets more than 30,000,000 RMB, floor space about 200,000 sq.m., 20 standard henhouses, 2 warehouses, and standard isolation partition, etc. The standard henhouses are good running with 50,000 Langshan Chicken.

"Although, we have made some progress about Langshan chicken, there are more rescue actions needed. Such as, it is necessary for us to know much more about the development history and glory of Langshan chicken abroad etc. Finally, we warmly invite you and all club members to visit our farm! I look forward to hearing more from you."



Left: It is always a question "Are there any Langshans left in China?" This year we were delighted to be contacted by Jifa Zhang, a young man in the People's Republic of China. He is located at the Langshan Chicken Farm, where they have 50,000 Langshans. See the website at www.langshanji.com.

This is a massive farm – we probably only have about 2,000 Croad Langshans in Britain, and very few Moderns – but since

this contact we have been exchanging news and information. If you look at the website, you will see that the Langshans at the farm are more the taller like Modern Langshans than Croads. If this club visits China, we will try to find out if there are any of the original 'Croad Type' birds still in the Langshan region (the farm is further south, near Shanghai).

Another historical discovery...

Earlier this year this club had another exciting surprise—the discovery of three Langshan trophies that had been hidden 'for safe keeping' in a lawyer's office since the mid-1930s. Many breed clubs faded away during the war years and after. Although our Croad Langshan club was re-formed in 1979, these trophies had been long forgotten until this year when the business was closing and cupboards were emptied.

Right: Croad Langshan Club of Great Britain Vice President Tracey Chubb (left) and President Shelley Rogerson show the huge size of the silver Langshan trophy that was 're-discovered' in 2010.

One of the cups, the Langshan Fanciers Association cup, was first awarded in 1902, and the Cock challenge cup in 1927. The beautifully engraved shield (shown in the photo) was first awarded in 1913.



Keeping Croad Langshans

There is very little difference between keeping Croads and any other large breed. They are friendly, hardy and adaptable – underlined by the fact that Croads are kept in cold Scandinavia and Scotland and also in hot Australia without problems. They make good mothers and are determined broodies. There are sometimes accidents because of their large size – heavy hens can step on a little chick. Also, to prevent leg injuries, heavy birds should not have high perches – about 15 cm from the floor is fine - and some Croads prefer to snuggle down in the bedding.

Right: This photo shows the practical housing Bev Nelson has built - with shelter for birds and food under the sloping roof.



Food and drink:

Make sure a good quality layer's ration in pellet or meal form is available throughout the day, along with fresh water and poultry grit. Feed a little whole wheat in the evening as it

encourages good rest if the bird goes to roost with a full crop. Allowing poultry to graze on grass is good, but not possible for all of us because of space or predators. In the UK foxes are everywhere and are very clever and persistent. Mink are also a problem, and very difficult to keep out as they can squeeze into small spaces.



Above: Large White Croad Langshans belonging to British Club President Shelley Rogerson.

Maintaining a strong immune system is important, and it can be helpful to add apple cider vinegar, garlic and a soluble vitamin supplement in the drinking water during periods of stress such as the moult or during wet, hot or very cold weather.

Croads like a handful of sultanas as a treat and enjoy pecking at greens such as cabbage or weeds from the garden (check that weeds are not poisonous). You can put these into a hanging basket in their pen.

Right: When Croad Langshans hatch, you might think you have cross-breeds - but this mixed colour is correct. The faces of a group of chicks should look "like a bunch of pansies".



Getting to know your Croads: With the basics of food, water and shelter taken care of you can get to know your birds. Croad Langshans are a calm, docile bird and very friendly if you take the time to get to know them. Regular feeding from your hand will encourage trust.

Watch your birds to know how well they are and what is normal. A pale comb or watery droppings can indicate a sick bird. Your birds should look alert and interested. By handling your Croads regularly and checking the skin around the neck and vent you will spot any lice or mites very quickly and you can spray your birds.

Croads are heavy birds and their feet can suffer from thorns and minor cuts. Hydrogen peroxide cleans away dirt and unwanted material from minor foot injuries and promotes healing.

Left: Large Black Croad Langshan Cock bred by Dieter Giesemeyer in Germany.



Handling heavy birds: Put your hand under the bird and hold the legs firmly between your fingers with two fingers between the legs. Allow the bird's breastbone to sit on your forearm with the bird's head under your armpit to

prevent wing flapping. Then grasp the lower part of the bird's legs with your other hand and support the bird with two hands. This method is necessary as

Croods are heavy birds with an adult male weighing in at around 4.5 Kg. The best time to handle the birds without distressing them is after they have gone to roost at night. If it is dark the birds are much calmer.



Left: A great win celebrated 30 years since the British club reformed in 1979! In 2009 Clare Curtis's Large Black Croad Langshan Cock won almost everything possible at the National Show - including 'Reserve Show Champion'. We think this is the highest honour a Croad has won in its history in the UK since 1872. This is Clare with champion Bradley, and the trophies from the National Show.

The all-important egg colour

You will often hear that Croad Langshans lay 'plum coloured' eggs, but that's not quite accurate. There is some pale plum colouring but the 'plum' reference can be understood when you see the dusty bloom effect on unwashed plums. The perfect Croad egg has this pale purple bloom over the top of a pinkish brown shell, which is why the Poultry Club Standards list the egg colour as brown.

The bloom over the shell is difficult to keep for showing eggs – it fades, washes off, and disappears if the shell has any grease on it.



As with many different breeds of poultry, Croad Langshan egg colour can vary widely from a tinted egg to a dark brown egg with a varying amount of bloom that can change from day to day and in the course of a season. Developing good egg colour requires careful breeding and selection.

Langshans around the world

When a few Croad Langshan breeders bravely reformed the British Club in 1979, membership was around 50. A number of those 're-founders' are still members, and provide a valuable store of know-how for newer members to draw on. Helped by the experience of these long-standing Croad keepers, in recent years we have been fortunate in the UK and other countries to see the emergence of a

number of young, dedicated breeders—both male and female—who are producing excellent Croads and giving great confidence for the future of the breed.



Knowledge has traditionally been passed on through talking with breeders and judges at shows or by visiting expert keepers. But now the internet makes it easy to access information, or the Club, or other poultry websites. As a result, membership is now booming—to 140 at the time of writing.

Left: Friendly young Croad Langshans bred by Raf Heylen in Belgium.

These new members are largely in three categories: newcomers to poultry-keeping who are attracted to Croad

Langshans, experienced breeders wishing to branch out with Croads, and Croad breeders around the world who have no local Club. In addition to our members in the furthest shores of Scotland and Wales, we now have members in Australia, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Spain and Sweden. In spite of a steady trickle of enquiries about Croads from the USA, as yet we have no contact with any Croad Langshan keepers in America.

This communications revolution has greatly simplified the Club Secretary's tasks of putting buyers in touch with sellers, and writing and distributing newsletters—around 70% of members now receive Club information by email.

Right: Yes, they're friendly! New club member Maria Michaelsson in Sweden sent this photo of her husband Johan with one of their young Croads.



Croads around Europe

Another benefit from this expanded membership is the rich experience and information from across Britain and other countries—in terms both of Croad Langshan history and of current breeding issues. From what is fast becoming an 'international fellowship' of Croad Langshan enthusiasts, the following is a selection of communications from our members and poultry-keeping friends around the world.



Dieter Geisemeyer in **Germany** sent us copies of letters written by Major Croad's niece and her friends, her original 1900 book about Croad Langshans, and historic articles from Europe and the USA. One article includes a fine drawing from Britain's Poultry magazine in 1884 "Mr Harrison Weir's illustration of a Langshan cock of Mr Croad's strain". Dieter helps to organise shows of large and bantam Croad Langshans and German Langshans in his town in northern Germany.

Left: "A Langshan cock of Mr Croad's strain" by the eminent Victorian artist and poultry judge Harrison Weir (Poultry magazine, Britain, 1884)

Paola Caroselli in **Italy** has recently managed to replenish her few, aged Croad Langshans by hatching 17 out of 20 eggs from a northern Italian breeder who won the Croad Langshan Best of Breed at the 2009 Italian Campionato. From her

farm near Rome, Paola sent us pages from a guide to poultry-keeping printed in Milan in 1889. It mentions Major Croad, and includes an illustration of a Croad cock.

Right: Photo of an Italian book from 1889 with an article about Langshans.

Similarly, Einar Frette and Sissel Jonassen in western **Norway** sent us a photo of a Norwegian book found in an antiquarian bookshop and dated 1892. To their surprise, it contained a picture of a Croad Langshan, describing the breed as 'the pearl of Asia'—with which Einar and Sissel agree.



"Unfortunately the breed didn't exist in our own home country, so started by contacting foreign breeders. Luckily, we were told by The Danish Langshan Club that there was one breeder of the large Croad Langshan, and he was to be found in Hornsyld in Denmark. The Danish breeder was very nice and invited us to his farm. On our second attempt we managed to hatch some chicks, and the first Croads (four hens and three cocks) saw the daylight of Norway on 23rd June, 2009".

"As proud owners, we have watched as the cocks, especially, turn out to be noble animals. At 8 months, the cockerel weighs 4.2 Kg. The hens are also very precious. All together in the poultry garden the flock looks very majestic, and impresses visitors. We hope to spread this marvellous breed throughout Norway. We already have a network with other breeders outside our country, and made interesting contacts and friends across age and social backgrounds since we decided on breeding Croads. We are sure that the Croads will give us a lot of enjoyment in the years to come."

Right: Einar Frette, a member in Norway, sent us this picture of his Croads.

Last winter was very hard, with much more snow than usual, but his Croads survived.



Tony McKenna in New South Wales, **Australia**, sent us a very informative history of the Croad Langshan from an old issue of Australasian Poultry.

Tony has bred Croads for 14 years, and when exhibiting them for the first time at the National show in Canberra in 2009, he won Best of Breed against Australia's top breeders.

Another regular contributor from **Australia** is Mark Kyle-Robinson:

"I've never lost any chickens to the heat, although some weeks it can get to low 40s".

Right:

In Australia, Mark Kyle-Robinson builds his hen runs with both the strong sun and the many predators in mind. This is his 'brooder' – providing a comfortable and safe environment for the young chicks to grow.

"They eat less and I feel sorry for laying hens and the younger ones until they learn to cope. I always keep the ground in the coolest area of yards damp with a slow hose, and



when it gets to high temperatures I put a frozen block of ice in the 10-litre plastic water containers, and change all the water sometimes twice a day."

In the **Canary Islands**, John O'Shea reports: "Croad Langshans live and flourish here in arid Gran Canaria, so very far removed from conditions in Northern China. I had been keeping chickens for about seven years here. When I saw a picture of a large black Croad Langshan I became hooked and knew this was the breed I wanted to keep. I got an 80% hatching with my first eggs from the UK. Since then I have raised birds from eggs from other Croad breeders to form different breeding groups. Croad Langshans have everything I like in a chicken—large, easy to keep, not fussy, flighty or nervous. They walk up to you like a puppy and seem to enjoy your company."

In mainland **Spain**, Kevin Forster echoes the challenge of keeping birds cool and preventing heat stress—he erects tarpaulins over the top of already shaded runs to give extra protection. "In addition, on particularly hot days, we run extension wires to the runs from the house to power fans. It's quite amusing to see the birds standing under the fans suspended above the ground, with their eyes closed and their feathers blowing around, obviously appreciating the breeze! We also have to change drinking water several times a day as it becomes very warm."

We are always pleased to hear from members, and to try to pass on useful advice. With such active members and high interest in the breed, we believe that the Croad Langshan Club can look forward to an even stronger membership, the creation of new friendships, and the exchange of even more fascinating information in the years ahead.

You can contact us through the Club's website
www.croadlangshan.org.uk



Right:
In 2009 the British Croad Langshan club celebrated 30 years since the club re-formed - this fantastic cake was made and decorated by club Vice President Tracey Chubb.

