



## BALKAN CHICKEN BREEDS AND BREED GROUPS (PART I AND II)

Text: Hristo Lukanov (BG)

*In memory of Miloslav Prochazka - a respected poultry breeder,  
writer and judge.*

<http://www.chovprochazka.estranky.cz/>

*Miloslav Prochazka site*

A similar article wished to write my friend Miloslav Prochazka two years ago for Czech magazine to promote the Balkan chicken breeds. Unfortunately he passed away too early from this world ... I hope with this material to continue his work and I could introduce to the wide mass of readers of Aviculture-Europe the exciting and not very popular Balkan chicken breeds.

Above: The Balkan Peninsula (picture: Wikipedia.org)

## INTRODUCTION

The Balkan Peninsula is located in southeastern part of Europe. The total area of the Balkans is about 505,578 km<sup>2</sup>. The population is multi-ethnic and counts around 55 million who speak different languages. Entirely on the Balkans are situated Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro. A large part of the territory of Serbia (73% of the territory), Croatia (49%) and Slovenia (27%) are also located within the Balkan Peninsula. Only 9% of the territory of Romania and 8% of the territory of Turkey (European part of Turkey), and only 0.2% of Italy are located on the Balkans [1]. Through both Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits it is located next to Asia and Africa. Balkan Peninsula is the name given in the early XIX century by the eponymous mountain range located in Bulgaria and part of Serbia: Balkan Mountain [2].

The domestic chicken was grown on these lands by the ancient Greeks. The earliest records date back to VII-VI century BC [3, 4, 5]. At IV-II century BC are differentiate various types of hens in their productivity and exterior [5]. About 2000 years ago the Roman Empire conquered the Balkan Peninsula. During this period the heavy meat type chicken was separated. It is considered that the five-toed Dorking breed was established at that time and spread in the empire [5, 6, 7]. The poultry sector on the Balkan Peninsula in the Middle Ages and Modern times, to the middle of the XX century is extensively, based primarily on satisfying the family needs for meat and eggs [8]. This has reflected on the breed diversity in this region. During this period a large part of the Balkan breeds were created.

**Right: Picture by Jacopo Ligozzi (1547–1627), representing a Turkish man with longcrowing rooster.**

At the end of the XIX century and the beginning of the XX century several highly productive breeds were imported (Minorca, Leghorn, Italiener, Rhode Island Red, La Flesh, Styrian chicken, etc.). Some of which have involved the creation or improvement of local breeds [8, 9, 10].

The second half of the XX century was characterized by industrialization of poultry and progressive narrowing of genetic diversity due to the introduction of hybrid birds [11, 12, 13]. Most breeds created as productive lost their importance, a worldwide trend that affects poultry on the Balkans. This is the period of development of the ornamental poultry; establishment and consolidation of breeds with decorative purpose.

Today, efforts are aimed at preserving the breed diversity as a valuable genetic resource for the future [13, 14, 15]. According to the author, a number of Balkan breeds might successfully be used in organic production of poultry meat and eggs in Europe, while others get popularity as ornamental birds.



Today on the territory of the Balkan countries are located in total 29 chicken breeds 1\* and over 30 breed groups 2\* . Much of breeds are dual-purpose type, but there are also many breeds created as ornamental chickens. The article will give basic information about the Balkan breeds and breed groups representing the interests of European ornamental poultry.

## TRUE BANTAM BREEDS

### Croatian bantam (Hrvatska patuljasta kokoš)

Right: Red-mottled Croatian bantam cockerel  
(photo: KUHPK)

Below: Gold Croatian bantam pullet (photo:  
KUHPK)



The Croatian bantam is bred in different parts of Croatia, the breed was created from a folk selection. In 2007 the Club of the Croatian Bantam Breeders was established (Klub uzgajatelja hrvatske patuljaste kokoši- KUHPK). In 2012 the breed standard is submitted to EE. In different parts of Croatia the breed is known as the Gretlika, Kredlika, Jurek i Katica, Đuro i Kata and others. With the development of the standard in the 2007 the name became *Croatian bantam* <sup>[16]</sup>. Croatian bantams are vital and vigorous birds, resistant to adverse weather conditions, unpretentious in nutrition and excellent brooders and last but not least with an attractive appearance. The birds are graceful and elegant, with a proud carriage. Recognized in different colours: red, red-mottled, white, gold, black-red.

Weight: 0,75/0,6 kg.

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 35 g.

Ring size: 13/11

### Bulgarian bantam (Bulgarska dzhinka; Bregovska dzhinka)

This is a breed group of true bantams breeding in north-western Bulgaria, especially in the region of Vidin and Bregovo, therefore they are called Bregovska dzhinka. "Dzhinka" is the Bulgarian folk word for true bantams.

Right: Bulgarian bantam pair  
(photo: Hristo Lukanov)



The distinctive exterior is confirmed in the second half of the XX century. Due to unintentional selection and different vision of each breeder these birds still have a great variability in some exterior performance. Their consolidation and future recognition as a breed took several years and there is more to go.

They are characterized by the presence of well-developed crest, single comb and well manifested feathered legs with vulture hocks. The colour of the plumage is varied, prevailing porcelain colour variations. The pullets start laying at about 5 ½ - 6 months of age and the egg production is low: 100 to 120 eggs [personal observations]. These birds are suitable for decoration, resistant and unpretentious, excellent brooders.

Weight: 0,75-0,95/0,6-0,8 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 30 g

Ring size: 16/15

In the Balkans are found other two breed groups true bantams: *Slavonian Naked Neck bantam* (Slavonska patuljasta golovrata kokoš), Croatia and *Lesvos Dwarf Naked Necked Chicken*, Greece.

Lesvos Dwarf Naked Necked Chicken is a rare breed group of true bantams but with a higher body weight than the others. It is characterized by the presence of naked neck and a large variation in colour <sup>[17, 18]</sup>.

Of greater interest is the Slovenian Naked Neck bantam, on the recognition of which the Croatian breeders are working now. In 2008 the breed standard was drafted. A distinctive feature is the presence of a Naked Neck mutation. Mostly found heterozygous birds in terms of *Na* gene. The colour of the plumage varies. This breed is a vital and unpretentious bird tolerating the summer heat very well and an excellent brooder.

**Right: Slavonian Naked Neck bantam rooster (photo: Dražen Biličić, HR)**

Birds with similar appearance to the Croatian bantam are found across the Balkans, but they have high variation in the colour of the plumage and the presence of different mutations (feathered or clean shanks, red or white earlobes, presence of the crest, different comb type etc.). In Serbia, these miniature chickens are called by the common name "kikerezi" and in Bulgaria are known as "Japonki" or "dzhinki". Here is the place to express my admiration of the Croatian breeders who were able to consolidate these unique true bantams.



## LIGHT BREEDS

### **Dalmatian chicken (Dalmatinska kokoš)**

The Dalmatian chicken was probably created centuries ago in Dalmatia, today a part of Croatia and thought to be extinct in the second half of the XX century. This breed was described in 1914 by the famous breeder Armin Arbeiter <sup>[19]</sup>. Today the efforts of Croatian breeders have focused on reconstruction and standardization of this ancient breed. Dalmatian chickens are vital and unpretentious birds with good meat taste, early-mature with relatively good egg production.



According to proposed breed standard <sup>[20]</sup>, the plumage colour may vary. Birds are elegant, with yellow-white earlobes, small crest and dark red-pigmented face.

Weight: 1,9-2,3 / 1,2-1,5 kg.  
Ring size: 18/16

**Left: Painting of the Dalmatian flock in Arbeiter book, 1914.**

**Below: Dalmatian roosters. (photo: Dražen Biličić, HR)**

### **Black Shumen chicken (Black shoumenska chicken)**

This interesting Bulgarian chicken breed has been featured in the April 2011 issue of Aviculture-Europe Magazine <sup>[8]</sup>. A new aspect in the development of the breed is the creation of the blue colour variety.

These are vital, unpretentious, early-mature birds with good egg production and white egg shell.



The Shumen chickens have orange-red eyes against the background of black plumage with a beautiful green shade, black beak and legs and well-developed comb and wattles. In this breed some hens have melanin pigmentation of the face and comb.

Weight: 1,8-2,5 / 1,2-1,8 kg  
Minimum weight for breeding egg: 48 g  
Ring size: 18/16

**Left: Black Shumen cockerel with blue hens (breeder and photo: Hristo Lukanov)**



**Left: Blue Shumen cockerel with black hens (breeder and photo: Hristo Lukanov)**

Other breeds of interest for ornamental poultry are the endangered *Serbian Black Svrlijig chicken* (Svrljiška kokoš) and *Vincan horned fowl* (Vincanski Jelenak; Vinča Jelenak).

Black Svrlijig chicken is an old Serbian breed, established in the early XX century in the vicinity of Svrlijig town. Average cock weighs 2,0 kg and 1,5 kg for hens. Egg-laying capacity is low: 100-120 g and 50-55 g egg weight with light brown colour with a slight greenish tinge. [21, 22]. The age of reaching sexual maturity in hens is 7 ½ months [22].

Vincan horned fowl is a new breed, first introduced in 1999 at an exhibition in Belgrade. Creator of the breed is famous breeder and international judge Prof. Aleksandar Kuga. Vinča Jelenak was created over a 11 year's period, using the Dutch crested chicken, Somborska Kaporka and La Flèche. The breed's name Vinča Jelenak comes from the place of its creation Vinca (area near the city of Belgrade, Serbia) and the specific form of the comb, like the large mandibles/antlers of the stag beetle [23, 24]. (Jelenak means: like Jelen, stag beetle)



**Right: Vinča Jelenak rooster. (photo: A. Kuga)**



## DUAL-PURPOSE BREEDS

### **Sombor crested chicken (Somborska kaporka)**

This Serbian chicken breed has been created at the beginning of the XX century in Vojvodina, Sombor region by crossing the local chicken with Houdan and Sulmtaler [25]. According to the Centar za očuvanje autohtonih rasa (COAR), it almost disappeared after World War II. Thanks to a group of enthusiasts, the breed was revived in the 60's



Weight: 3,5-4,0 / 2,5-3,0 kg. Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g.  
Ring size: 22/20

of last century. Today they work on creating the Sombor crested bantam and preservation of the standard breed.

**Left: Sombor crested red hen and rooster. (photo Hristo Lukanov)**

They are recognized in white, cuckoo, red, black, blue and buff plumage colour. A characteristic feature of this breed is the good expressed crest, from where comes her name. Sombor crested chicken is excellent dual-purpose breed, distinguished with calm temperament and very good egg production. The hens reach sexual maturity by 6 ½ months of age <sup>[22]</sup>.



### **Banat Naked Neck (Banatski gološijan)**

**Left: Banat Naked Neck hen  
(photo: Hristo Lukanov)**

**Below: Head of the Banat  
Naked Neck hen (photo: Hristo  
Lukanov)**



The Banat Naked Neck was created in the Serbian Banat area, probably by crossing the local chicken with Romanian Naked Necks. This breed belongs to the Central European Naked Necks group, which have a common

origin. It is popular in Serbia and Montenegro <sup>[26]</sup>. These are dual-purpose type of chickens, carrying allele/alleles of the *Na* gene (Naked Neck). For exhibition purposes only heterozygous birds are used.

In recent years, is worked on creating the Banat Naked Neck bantam <sup>[25]</sup>. For selection control are about 100 birds. According to the Centar za očuvanje autohtonih rasa-COAR (citing data from FAO), in 2008 the population of the breed was estimated to a number of 1000-2000 birds.

The breed is found in different colours of the plumage, the most popular are red, white and cuckoo. The birds are with middle sexual mature.

Weight: 2,5-3,0 /2,0-2,5 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g

Ring size: 20/18

### **Croatian Chicken (Hrvatica)**

Croatian chicken breed is established in 1917 by Ivan Lakuš (1891-1949) in the village Torchech, Croatia. The breed was created by crossing local chickens along the Drava River (Podravina region, Croatia), with Leghorn roosters and in the final stage is used the Welsummer breed <sup>[27]</sup>. Croatian Chicken won a great popularity in the 30-ies of XX century due to its excellent laying qualities <sup>[27, 28, 29]</sup>.



**Left: Red Croatian rooster at a Croatian poultry show (photo: Ante Obrovac, HR)**

**Below: Red Croatian hen at the Europa Show, Nitra, 2009 (photo provided by Dražen Biličić, HR)**



During the Second World War and the postwar period, the population of the breed has been significantly reduced and almost disappeared during the 80's of last century. Thanks to the efforts of the breeders, this breed was saved and now is one of the most popular chicken breeds in its country.

The Croatian chicken is recognized in black, red, black-gold and partridge coloured plumage. The age of sexual maturity for the cocks is about 6 months of age, and 6 ½ months for the hens <sup>[30]</sup>.

Weight: 3,0-4,0 /2,0-3,0 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g

Ring size: 20/18

### **Međimurje Chicken (Međimurska kokoš)**

Croatian Chicken breed that has been created in Međimurska Županija. Close to the Hrvatica exterior, but bigger, with yellow beak and shanks and pale-yellow earlobes. They lay about 180 to 210 big eggs. Birds are with medium sexual maturity, unpretentious and calm. The Međimurje Chicken are recognized in the following colour varieties: partridge, orange partridge and wheaten.

Weight: 4,0-4,5 /3,0-3,5 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 65 g

Ring size: 22/20

**Right: Međimurje cockerel and hen  
(photos provided by Dražen Biličić, HR)**



### **Posavina Crested Chicken (Posavska kukmasta kokos)**

The Posavina crested chicken was established at the beginning of the XXI century in Croatia, through the selection of the large crested chickens reared along the Sava River near the city of Zagreb. Creator is Zdravko Kozić, with the help of Josipa Bertinovca.



**Left: Barred Posavina crested rooster at Europa show, Nitra, 2009  
Below: Head study of the Posavina crested hen at Europa show, Nitra, 2009 (photos provided by Dražen Biličić, HR)**



In 1999 they started a work on the creation of the breed. The breed was recognized in Croatia in 2004. <sup>[31]</sup> Posavina Chicken are gaining more and more popularity in Croatia. These chickens are characterized by good meat features, unpretentiousness and with relatively good egg production.

Weight: 3,5-4,5 / 2,5-3,5 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g

Ring size: 22/20

### **Križevaci Crested Chicken (Križevačka Kukmasta Kokoš)**

This breed group is created in the 90's of last century by Josip Vojta and Katica Vojta in the Krizhevtsi town, Croatia. In the creation mainly takes part gold laced Orpingtons and local crested chickens. Birds have Orpington like appearance but with a medium crest. The Križevaci crested chicken is gradually gaining more and more supporters in Croatia and neighbouring countries. It is distinguished with an interesting exterior, calm temperament and good egg production. Hens are good brooders. Now the work is to create the miniature copy of the breed.

Weight: 4,0-4,5 / 3,0-3,5 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g

Ring size: 22/20

**Left: Križevaci crested pair.  
(Drawing by Hristo Lukanov)**



It may be noted also the Altsteirer (Stajerskih kokoši) and Transylvanian Naked Neck (Git golas de transilvania) breeds, which are popular among the poultry community, established in Slovenia-

Austria and Romania- Hungaria, but outside the geographical boundaries of the Balkan Peninsula: Styria and Transylvania. For more information about Naked Neck chicken see: <http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/08E04A04.pdf> (Text by Bobo Athes, RO)

## **LONG CROWING BREEDS**

**Serbian Longcrower/Singer  
(Kosovo Longcrower; East-Serbian Longcrower;  
Kosovski pevač; Turski pevač; Drenica)**

**Right: Serbian Longcrower  
(Drawing by Hristo Lukanov)**

It is an old long crowing breed in the countries of former Yugoslavia and especially Serbia and Kosovo. Its ancestors are believed to be Turkish long crowing birds, imported during Ottoman rule





over the Balkans. This breed is known by many names, but is in acceptance process at EE as a Serbian Longcrower / Singer.

**Left: Serbian longcrows chickens. (photo: Hristo Lukanov)**

The Drenica is known worldwide for his singing abilities. They are introduced in several European countries in the early XXI century. The song is long, deep, strong and melodic, usually continues about 20-40 seconds. There are some individuals which song is lasting up to 60 seconds, making the breed competitor of the Turkish Denizli for record of long crowing <sup>[22, 32, 33]</sup>.

The plumage is black with a greenish tinge, also allows red to golden coloured shoulders and single white feathers in the crest <sup>[32]</sup>. The head is with typical helmet look crest. The age of sexual maturity for the cocks is 6-7 months of age and for the hens 7 ½ - 8 months <sup>[22]</sup>.

Weight: 2,4-3,25 /1,5-2,2 kg

Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g

Ring size: 20/18



**Above: Serbian longcrows rooster (photo: Hristo Lukanov).**



### **Berat**

Berat is an old Balkan long crowing breed, created in Albania and the former Yugoslavia, perhaps centuries ago. The name comes from the Berat town, Albania. Berat is extremely rare breed. After the war in the former Yugoslav republic the population was extinct.

A small number of representatives of the breed are reared in Turkey and Germany [32, 33, 34, 35]. In German-speaking countries this breed is also known as Bosnian singer (Bosnischer Kräher). His voice was a deep, bass and the song continues to about 15 seconds. For some roosters was observed up to 38 seconds long song [35]. The birds reared in Germany have a lower weight and better egg production.

Weight: 3-3,5/2-2,5 kg. Minimum weight for breeding egg: 55 g. Ring size: 20/18

**Left: Berat fowl (Drawing by Hristo Lukanov)**

### **GREEK BREED GROUPS**

Kugler describes a significant number of Greek breeds [18]. According to modern scientific

understandings of the concept of breed, in Greece it is not right to talk about chicken breeds but about 'breed groups'. Detailed information about Greek breed groups is given in Aviculture Europe [17].

**Right: Naked Neck rooster from Thasos (photo: Nikos Vogiatzis, GR)**

### **ALBANIAN BREED GROUPS**

In Albania there are several regional distinct breed groups. According to Prof. Dr. Kristaq Kume (information provided to FAO), in Albania there are following breeds: Albanian chicken (Commune hen), Local Black Tropoja Lekbibaj, Local Tirana chicken and Local Tropoja Pac [36]. According meager descriptions given of these birds can be concluded that it is a unproductive local separate breed group, with large variations in the exterior, and is the lynchpin there is the territorial distribution.



### **TURKISH BREEDS**

In Turkey there are various breeds, the most popular are the Sultan, Hint (Hint Horoz) and Denizli. These breeds are popular due to the decorative value of the Sultan, the game qualities of the Hint and vocal abilities of the Denizli. All three are old breeds originated centuries ago in the Ottoman Empire. The Turkish Hint was created probably earlier- in the XI century. Gerze is another Turkish breed

that resembles the French La Flèche. We will not go further into the Turkish breeds because of their popularity and the fact that they are created outside the Balkan Peninsula (except the Sultan).

1\* **Breed** is a homogeneous group of animals of one species with a common origin, created under the influence of human creativity, which owns and transmitted its characteristic features and productive qualities to its offspring, quantitatively sufficient for breeding inside without admission of close inbreeding <sup>[37; 38]</sup>.

2\* **Breed group** is a temporary, intermediate unit in creating of the breed, that can grow and become a breed, or disappear <sup>[39]</sup>.



**Above: Drawing of Sultan pair by Hristo Lukanov.**

**Below left and right: Croatian bantam pullets. (photos: KUHPK).**



*In conclusion I can say that the popularity of local Balkan breeds gradually increases both on the Balkans as well as in the global poultry breeding community. I sincerely believe that a major European exhibition will present more and more Balkan breeds in the near future. Many of them have accepted or are under acceptance process in EE, and on the other are working seriously on their consolidation.*

*This is mainly due to the enthusiasm of the younger generation of Balkan breeders who put a lot of energy and knowledge in the promotion of our hobby. I want to express my gratitude to Mladen Cvetkovic (RS), Dražen Biličić (HR), Ante Obrovac (HR), Nikos Vogiatzis (GR) and Mümin Sönmez (TR) for their assistance on the preparation of this article.*

## ***ADDITIONAL INFORMATION***

### **Struma Fowl**

For two or three years, more and more people in Bulgaria bred the so called Struma Fowl. This breed group is characterized by a relative large body size with presence of a beard, crest and well feathered legs. They come in a variety of colours; the most stable is mottled.

These birds have already been presented in several major exhibitions in Bulgaria and there are many people who breed them. There is still much work to do to consolidate the exterior.

**Right and below: Struma cock and hen.  
Photos courtesy of T. Aleksiev.**



**Right: Head study of a Struma  
cock.  
Photo: T. Aleksiev.**



In the next page we present you two additional photos of the Bulgarian bantams (*aka Bregovska dzinka*), taken at the Bulgarian National Exhibition 25-28 October 2012 in Lovech, Bulgaria.



**Above: Head study of a Bulgarian bantam female.**  
**Right: A Bulgarian bantam cockerel.**  
**Photos: Hristo Lukanov.**

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**Below: Dalmatian cocks. (Photo: Dražen Biličić, HR)**



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