

THE LUCERNE

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The Lucerne is the 'Pixie' of the Swiss Pigeon Breeds. With its unusual shaped head, high peak crest, large dark eyes and groused legs, it almost reminds you of some drawing out of a children's fairy tale book. It even has a temperament to match! More docile and 'laid back' than the others, although still an excellent flyer. It is the only Group of Pigeons I have ever looked after that actively 'scratches' in the bedding like a tiny Bantam or Quail, inherited I imagine from its searching in the field for food; something that all the Older Swiss Breeds were specially adapted for.

Aiming for some more popularity of the Swiss Lucerne breeds in other European countries, I thought it would not come amiss for some more in-depth information from the top Swiss and German writings. I include Germany not because I live here, but simply because there is such a good network of breeder communication between the Swiss and the German breeders of all Swiss pigeons.

The Lucernes originated in the 1800's in Switzerland, from the Canton of Lucerne. The group has seven members, all with an elegance of posture, all with trousered legs, described as 'full trousered' as the short, broad feathering can flow onto the toes, as long as the nails are clear of feathering. They were formed by crossing Swiss Breeds with Owls, retaining some of the 'Owl' body form and

stance but developing a very unique and very attractive head shape, completing the picture with a shapely peak-crest and groused legs. The head is the most distinctive feature of this Group of pigeons: a high peak-crest, large, full dark eyes set in an unusually shaped head that is a full, gently curving line from the beak tip rising to the peak of the crest, without any flatness or break in the outline.

Right: Lucerne Cream Bar.



Left: Gold Collar Bar.

With its barely medium length, broad based beak, it is an excellent parent.

Temperament: When given the attention can be very confiding and tame.

This is such a lovely breed, so easy to manage, breeds easily and if you have good stock, few that you must really select against.

It is also an excellent flyer and does need a good flight/aviary where 'free-fly' is not an option, as it can tend to get a bit 'overweight' without sufficient exercise!

Below: Lucerne Gold Collar in my garden.

The 7 Breeds in the Lucerne Group each have their separate Standard.

Selection within the various Lucerne Breeds

Take it we have a bird typical of the group, compact, well balanced, good body form, a head that is elegant but with substance and a well set peak crest, the next criteria is





colour and markings (they are 'Colour' pigeons). One point to mention with Lucernes is, it is one of the very few breed groups where birds that look so called 'Cow Hocked' (angled at the joint) is actually a breed feature; this does not however mean weak hocks!

Another point worth mentioning, in common with many breeds, Lucernes as young birds often do not display what is deemed to be the correct colour/ markings. You have no other recourse than to wait until moulted out of nest feather; the changes can be quite dramatic and attempts at early selection verges on idiocy in many of the colours.

Above: Breeding.

Right: No aggression and super parents. This old pair is fostering a Rumanian Argentee youngster.

Below, left: Baby Lucernes in the nest.

Below, right: A Gold Collar, just out the nest, still needs to develop colour.



For your perfect 'Type' you only need to look at the Standard Pictures.



Lucerne Gold Collar - Barless, Bar, Chequer.

This is probably THE most popular in other European countries. Here in Switzerland and Germany it is bred to a very high standard of colour perfection. First the ground colour must be as pale and even as possible. Hens may tend to be slightly (but only slightly) darker; this can be allowed for in the breeding pen, as in most breeds complementary pairing is the rule.



Above: This shows the Maximum desired 'Collar' on a Swiss Lucerne, the 'gold' should not go further back than this (it is really a 'Crescent') and this bird should be paired to one with a shorter crescent (like the one behind). Again, pair a broader crescent with a narrower one and a darker, with a paler. Pairing like to like, even with the best birds available, is the idiots way of seeking disaster, which is why I always laugh when I see writers putting 'Pair the best to the best', which generally sends the novice off seeking 96 and 97 grade birds and paying the Earth for them! When their less desired nest brothers and sisters, cousins or other close relatives, could easily do as good or better when correctly paired.

For Barless, you can maintain for several generations the desired pale ground colour and intensity of the Collar colour by using one of a pair that is a shade too dark for ideal exhibition, to a partner that is the desired colour or even a little pale. This is preferable to the recourse of using a Barred Bird 'cross', where you will generally get a much higher percentage of birds not suitable for further breeding, or exhibition. Indiscriminate 'crossing' of Bar and Barless will in short time ruin the ground colour throughout the breed, as Bar do carry more reserve colour.

Also using a Cheq' on either Bar or Barless is definitely not on, as the Chequer carry the highest amount of 'Colour Reserve' and could be long term

detrimental to the lovely pale ground colour usually achievable in the Bar and Barless.

Bar may be crossed with Chequer to help maintain clear and well defined chequering, but offspring from this pairing should not be allowed back into the Bar and Barless bred lines, as this could have a permanent detrimental effect on the Ground colour in those markings.

**Right: Cream Chequer.
Below: Mealy Chequer.**

Concerning the 'Collar' again, complimentary pairing is advised. Pairing two with perfect collars for size-shape-colour (all else being equal) will still give a variance, for one generation at least. You can often get good results by pairing a bird that is slightly smaller-paler in Collar to one that is slightly too dark and large. Birds with the Collar going around into the back of the Neck should ideally not be used at all in Breeding, unless absolutely excellent in all other respects and should certainly not exhibited.



Flights and Tail Bars should be distinct in colour (see faults) again the actual 'shade' may vary slightly as will the Ground Colour between the Barless, Bar and the Cheq marked Birds (being the Darkest for obvious reasons) and a good reason for not comparing these 3 colour variations of the Breed in 'Mixed' Classes, the same approach needs to be kept in mind when comparing Cock and Hen Birds.

**Left: Copper Collar Chequer.
Below: Copper Collar Bar.**



Lucerne Copper Collar

All the above observations also apply equally to the Copper Collar and equally obviously, crossing of Copper Collar with Gold Collar will give offspring useless to both breeds!

In this Breed particular attention needs to be paid to the correct Collar colour and with the Coppers it would be possible to produce more often useful birds from Bar and Barless and Bar and Cheq' matings but this still needs to be approached with care.

Other Lucerne varieties are the: Lucerne Rieselköpf (Tiger head), Lucerne Elmer, Self Lucerne, Lucerne Shield Marked and Lucerne White Tail.

For more information on these, please read my former article on Swiss breeds, published in April 2009, <http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/09E02A04.pdf>



Above, left to right: Lucerne Self, Tiger head (Rieselköpf) & Shield Marked.

You may have noticed none of the Lucernes in the show pens are actually standing 'perfectly' in the pictures. If you want to see how they should stand, you have the Standard picture. I tend to take pictures simply to show examples of the breed/breeds, if I can get them standing in a show stance, that is simply a plus.

Lucernes are not one of the easiest breed groups to take pictures of, confronted with a stranger with a camera in hand, 90% will hunch up, squat or generally not display well at close quarters. I dislike pictures behind bars, so chancing a poor 'stand' is a small price to pay for a clear view of a bird.

The photos of my own Lucerne Gold Collars in my garden are more 'natural'.



Left: Head study of a Lucerne Gold Collar.

Breed standard of the Lucerne Gold collar (*Luzerner goldkragen*)

Origin: In the 1800's in Switzerland, from the Canton Lucerne, bred from Swiss Pigeons and Owls.

Overall impression: Medium size, strongly built, short and rounded Form, slightly sloping Posture, with Peak-crest and Grouse Legged.

Head: Broad, barely medium length, full behind the Beak-Cere, profile from the Beak-Tip, over the Forehead, and to the Peak-crest, a slightly curving Line.

A high-set Peak-Crest, the Feathers from the Rear base of the Neck to form a sharp, practically straight Mane (in Show

Stance).

Eye: Dark, high set, in a line with the Beak-curve, Eye-Cere smooth and narrow, with all colours the Eye Cere barely noticeable.

Beak: Barely medium length, strong at the Base, with a strong and nearly equal Under and Over Beak, Light to Horn-colour, a smooth 'V' shaped Beak-Cere that is not over developed so blending in well with the Profile.

Neck: Rising full from the Body, narrowing appreciably to a clean cut out well rounded Throat.

Breast: Broad, deep and round, carried well forward and slightly lifted.

Back: Broad at the Shoulders, narrowing to the Tail, slightly sloping.

Wings: Strong, well-closed, the Back well covered, Tips not crossing.

Tail: Short, well closed, held clear of the Floor.

Legs: Medium length, the Heal Joint (Hock) angled. Fully Groused Legged.

Nails strong and not covered by Feathers.

Feather: Smooth and tight feathering.



Right:
Head study of a Lucerne Copper Collar.

Colours:

Mehlfarbig (literally 'Meal colour' an Off-White), in Chequer, Barred or Barless.

Colour and Markings:

Ground colour an off-White, Pale colour, NOT Blue or Dilute Blue,(see Faults), (should not be called 'Silver'), very, very pale.

Primaries and Tail somewhat darker, Back with the same colour, Neck with a Silvery Sheen.

Wing Shield, Cheq', Bar or Barless.

Breast colour a bright deep Yellow/Gold, from mid-Throat to the Breast Bone and under the Wing Butts without a sharp dividing line between the Collar and the



Ground colour, but should not be suffused through-out the Ground colour or reach behind the Neck.

Tail with a dark Bar, the Side Feathers with paler outer feather webbing.

Faults:

Narrow Breast, too high/upright stance, horizontal stance, too large/course or narrow Head, incorrect Forehead (too high or too flat, with a noticeable 'break' between the Beak and forehead), Beak too long or thin, without substance. Deep-set, open or badly formed Peak-crest, thin or badly formed grousing to the Legs, feathered Nails. Blueish colour tone in the Ground colour. Gold in the rear of the Neck. Green neck sheen, 'Rust' in the Bars or chequering, trace of a third Bar, all white Back, white Primaries, flecks in the Tail and under-tail, all dark Beak.

Evaluation:

Breed Type and Balance - Body Shape and Stance - Colour - Markings - Peak-crest - Beak - Eye colour.

Ring size 9



My source information is the birds I have handled myself over the last seven years, my conversations with top breeders and the wealth of breed literature available here.

