



## Australia Post releases Australian Poultry Breeds stamps

By: Greg Davies, Australia

Since European settlement of Australia, poultry has been part of the domestic landscape of country areas. Historically, hen-keeping was also common in many towns and once again it is on the rise of urban environments. Many imported heritage and hybrid breeds can be found in backyards and on farms around the country, but there are four specifically Australian breeds of fowl that have been developed since settlement: Australian Game, Australian Pit Game, Australorp and Australian Langshan. This stamp issue celebrated these breeds.







**The Australorp is by far the best known Australian chicken.**

They were developed using primarily original William Cook type Orpingtons and Australian Langshans. Then known as the Australian Orpington, this became the Austral Orpington and finally, the Australorp. There was much dissent between the various states of Australia as to a standard and it was not until 1949 that an

Australian Standard was finally agreed to, at a meeting of state delegates, called by Edwin Hadlington (the NSW Government Poultry Expert). This Standard was adopted almost word perfectly by the British Poultry Club in its Book of British Poultry Standards.



**Above: Postcard with Australorp and stamp. Right: Australorp male. Photo: Greg Davies.**

The illustrations for this first Australian Standard were of a cockerel bred by Jim O'Malley of Queanbeyan and a hen owned by the late Claude Ubrihien of Bega.

The Australorp is one of the World's finest utility breeds and proved itself in laying trials for many years. In 1963 it was honoured at the World Poultry Congress being depicted on medals and stamps. The breed was recognised as the single most important utility breed ever developed.





**Right: Australorp female. Photo: Greg Davies.**

The Australorp could best be described as a bird of curves. There should be nothing angular about these chickens at all. The back should be long and concave, sweeping gracefully up to the tail. A most striking feature of the Australorp is its big, bold, black eye, which sits in the centre of a clear, open, bright red face. The face has no signs of coarseness and any hint of "beetle brows" should be eliminated. The plumage should be glossy black with a rich beetle-green sheen and tight, not loose and fluffy as with Orpingtons.

It is a wonderful show bird, often winning major awards. It is quiet and docile and may be had in both large and bantams. Black is the true colour, but today also blue and white Australorps are bred.

### **The Australian Game originated as a fighting fowl.**

Its ancestry includes Old English Game, Malay Game and the Aseel. They were in great demand as they possessed great courage and stamina in the pit, yet were gentle and quite tame towards their owners. Of course those fowls were much different to the ones we see today.

Because of the use of Malay Game in the breeding, many birds were bred which were too leggy for fighting. At this time, the craze in the British chicken fraternity was for long legged birds, such as the Modern Game and Modern Langshan. With the infusion of Modern Game and Malay blood the long legged "Colonial" Game soon became popular as a show bird and the development of what we now call the Australian Game began.

The greatest stalwart of the Australian Game was Mark Marshall, who wrote in his book, 'The King of Fowls' in 1941, *"His close plumage; fitting his body like wax, his hardness of feather and upright carriage, and his great size and stately bearing make him a fowl to be wondered at."* I recommend this book to anyone wishing to learn more about the Australian gamefowl breeds.

The body of the Australian Game should be cone shaped, with no hint of flatness in the wings or wedginess in the breast. Unlike the Malay Game, they should have a flat back. The feathering is exceptionally hard and close fitting, with a minimum of down. They should be a balanced fowl, with nice proportions and massive size.

Bantams have also been developed in a range of colours.



**Left: Australian Game. Photo: Greg Davies.**





Above: Postcards with stamp. Left: Australian Game and Australian Pit Game (right).

**The Australian Pit Game originated as a fighting fowl, initially developed by British Army personnel stationed in the then colony of New South Wales.**

The present day fowl is descended directly from the Australian Fighting Game, which were blended from crosses of the Old English Game and the Aseel, Malay and perhaps Sumatra Game.

The British preferred birds which fought in the air, light, quick and with deadly power. Such birds fought bouts which ended very quickly. Other Game fowl enthusiasts preferred more prolonged battles, opting for birds which were larger and fought savagely on the ground. From these two distinct types of fowls, came the Australian Fighting Game, which combined the best fighting skills of both types of fowl.

**Left: Australian Pit Game male.  
Photo: Greg Davies.**

Due to this variation in bloodlines, the Australian Pit Game comes in a wide variety of sizes and shapes. Those strains which were built upon the Old English Game lines are generally single combed with longer, more profuse feathering. The larger, leggier types developed from more Asian bloodlines are generally pea combed with harder, sparser feathering.

The important points in Pit Games are good eyes and keen sight, strong head and powerful beak, wide strong shoulders and strong legs and feet.



They must have a cone shaped body, with strong muscular breast and thighs, strong shanks with sound feet and toes. The chicks can be quite aggressive at a very early age and great care is needed to prevent mortalities due them fighting among themselves in the brooder.

The finer details such as comb shape, colouring and feather type and quality are deemed of less importance, due to the variations of bloodlines as mentioned above.

They come in large and bantam, with some varieties displaying muffing, tassels and hen feathering. Most Game colours are found, but this feature is of little importance in the show pen.

**Right: Australian Pit Game female.**

**Photo: Greg Davies.**

**The Australian (or Chinese) Langshan was developed by a small number of breeders in New South Wales.**

Primarily, Croad Langshans, Modern Langshans, Wakfer Chinese Langshans and the true William Cook type Orpingtons were used in the development of the Australian Langshan. Wakfer Langshans were brought to Australia from China in 1905.

By 1920, classes at some shows were being put on for the Australian Langshan, (which for some obscure reason had been named Chinese Langshans) and the distinct type was beginning to become standardised. The first breed standard was drawn up in 1920 by the newly formed Langshan Club of Australia.



**Left: Australian Langshan, male.**

**Below: Australian Langshan bantam, female. Photos: Greg Davies.**





The Langshan could be described as a bird of V's. This V shape should be apparent from almost any angle from which the bird is viewed. The comb is fine and angles upward and away from the neck line. The eye is dark and bold and should almost appear to protrude. The foot feather should not be too profuse and the middle toe should be clear of any feathering. Generally, the plumage should be tight and with a medium amount of down. They are available in black, white and blue, with blacks the most popular and finest in quality. The blacks carry a glossy beetle-green sheen, whites should be snowy with no hint of straw or cream colouring, while the blues are laced as in Andalusians.

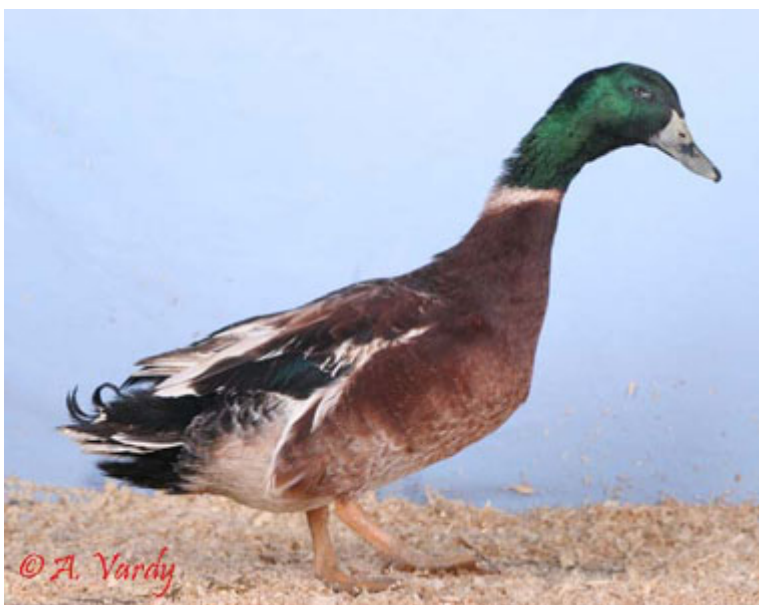


**Left: The Australian Langshan was portrayed in the pack, but not as a stamp.**

Today, Australian Langshans are a very popular show bird, more often than not, winning major awards. They are extremely good layers that

have excellent feed to egg ratio, are easily tamed and are a wonderful, all-round utility fowl. They come as both large and bantam.

**To be complete: There are also two Australian Duck breeds, being the Elizabeth Duck and the Watervale duck.**



**The Elizabeth duck:** Originated in 1972, Merrilands NSW (Australia) by Lance Ruting. Parents were "farm yard" ducks. Chosen for breeding a small, quick growing meat duck. Classification is 'ornamental duck'.



**Above: Elizabeth duck, male.  
Right: Elizabeth duck, female.**

Photos courtesy Andy Vardy,  
[www.backyardpoultry.com](http://www.backyardpoultry.com)

**The Watervale duck:** Originated in 1988 from a pair of Cayugas, South Australia by Mr Holder of Watervale. It is a mutant recessive colour bred by fanciers. Classification is 'heavy duck'.

**Right: Watervale duck, female.**  
**Below: Watervale duck, male.**

Photos courtesy Andy Vardy,  
[www.backyardpoultry.com](http://www.backyardpoultry.com)



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