

THE HERVE FOWL

By:
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Photo: Genootschap Herve / Mergelland Hoen.

Being a breeder of some Belgian breeds, I also follow with interest the story of the development of the Herve Fowl, because of the strong interest for this breed in the media as well. Officially, this breed is called Herve Fowl (in Belgium), but in the South of the Netherlands it is known as Mergelland Hoen.

The Herve Fowl originated in the triangle Aachen – Liege – Maastricht. This region is located near the Dutch border. So it is not surprisingly that, through the contacts between the two countries, the breed crossed the border. This can also be witnessed for another Belgian breed: the Braekel – known as Chaam Fowl (in the Netherlands) or Poule de Hergnies (in France). Formerly the Braekel Fowl was also known as Belgian Campine (Kempisch Hoen); later as Campine- Braekel and finally as Braekel.

The Herve Fowl got the regional name Mergelland Fowl on the Dutch side of the border. This region is also touristically known as Mergelland. In a historic movie about this region a black chicken can be seen, which strongly resembles a Herve Fowl. Dutchman Ton Wanders had a deep interest in black poultry, which was available in former times in this Dutch region. He concluded that this must have been the Herve Fowl, the breed which today can only be found at six breeders in

Wallonia, the French-speaking southern region of Belgium. The Herve Fowl was recognized as a breed in 1896, in Liege. These birds appeared in the border region Belgium-Netherlands and were still present in 1960-1970 in Southern Netherland (= Limburg). This information was more than enough for Tom Wanders to bring some Herve Fowls to Limburg (Mergelland).

He wanted to save the Herve Fowl from extinction and to bring the breed back into its original reach. Therefore he decided to found the 'Society of the Herve Fowl/Mergelland Fowl' in close cooperation with the Walloon 'Société des Eleveurs de la Poule Herve' (Society of Breeders of the Herve Fowl), active on the Belgian side of the border. The purpose of the newly founded society would be to bring back this old breed into the scenery; to people's homes and into the people's interest. From the outset, contact with the media was sought. Under the spotlight, on May 25, 2012, the Herve Fowl was brought, in a horse-drawn cart, to Noorbeek in Limburg. At the same time the founding of the Society of the Herve Fowl/Mergelland Fowl took place. The society has three Board members and an Advisory Board consisting of eight members. One of them is a poultry judge, for technical support. In addition, a vet and some entrepreneurs are members of the advisory board.



A call was done on breeders. This call resulted in 20 registrations; future breeders first got a 'job interview' and 10 were chosen. There was an enormous demand for chickens by fanciers: in early 2014 there was a waiting list for more than 600 birds



The breeders of the Mergelland Fowl have the obligation to participate in the breeding programme, which will be accompanied by experts. Also the birds will be ringed with special rings for Mergelland Fowl, so this will be a guarantee that the birds are pure bred.

Left: Cuckoo Herve pullet with a leg band of the Poultry Union KLN and a Mergelland Fowl leg band.

These breeders will be acknowledged breeders, with chicken houses at a nice place along the touristic Mergelland road. These chicken houses are also meant for education and have been officially 'opened' by well-known Dutchmen. Since Tom Wanders has an extensive network,

the society frequently knows to persuade ministers to accept the first egg. This way, the society gets attention in the media.

There is a strong interest for roosters that are not suitable for breeding, by renowned regional restaurants. In these restaurants, the authenticity of the Mergelland Fowl meat is guaranteed on the dish since the ring will still be on the leg of the chicken.

In January 2013 the Herve Fowl (in black) was recognized and standardized in the Netherlands (at the Noordshow). A year later, the blue variety was recognized (at the Noordshow 2014).

Right: Herve cockerel, black.



On Sunday, October 15, 2013, an Expert Meeting/Young Birds' Day was held in Voerendaal (NL) together with the Belgian breeders; Eleveurs de la Poule de Herve. Some 140 large Herve Fowl /Mergelland Fowl were entered in the colours black, blue and cuckoo. Also some bantams were present.

All chickens were ringed with the special Herve/Mergelland rings for pedigree research purposes.

The evaluation was made by a Dutch judge (Frans van Oers) and two Belgian judges (Philip Streel and Pierre Sadaune).

Right: Herve cockerel, blue.

Below: Herve cockerel, cuckoo.



Right: Herve Fowl, male.

Photo: Genootschap Herve/Mergelland Hoen.

During the Jubilee Show in Voerendaal (NL) and the Provincial Show (Maasdal Show 2013, the largest entries of Herve Fowl) the Dutch Poultry Association (KLN) has given special approval to enter chickens with a Herve/Mergelland ring. That way the chickens had an opportunity to get a proper judging and a predicate. (Normally only official Poultry Union KLN leg bands are allowed).

A special budget, providing the resources necessary to sustain the operating expenses of the founding of the society, special rings, website, chicken houses and touristic trail, has been funded. The financing was possible thanks to contributions of the province, various municipalities and entrepreneurs. In the meantime the society has opened twelve Mergelland chicken houses. Here chickens can be raised on a small scale for fanciers.

Website:

<http://www.mergellandhoen.nl/home>



Thursday, April 17, 2014 Daelzicht, Herve / Mergelland Hoen Foundation, Jo Janssen Architecten Maastricht and a Mergelland Fowl signed a declaration stating the intention to build a village for the Mergelland Fowl in the area of Daelzicht in Heel. The fowl village will consist of a collection of 12 innovative and creative chicken houses, which are designed by 12 Euroregion architects. The village is expected to open in late 2015.



Above: Daelzicht in Heel. Presenting the song in honour of the Mergelland Hoen, composed and sung by Ivo Rosbeek.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PF_2ZKk34sk&feature=youtu.be

STANDARD OF THE HERVE HOEN

With our thanks to the Herve / Mergelland Fowl Society

ORIGIN

Belgium. The breed originated on the heights of the Land of Herve, an area that stretches from Liege, via Maastricht to the area around Aachen. In the southern part of Dutch Limburg the breed is known as Mergelland Hoen (Mergelland Fowl).

OVERALL IMPRESSION

A lightly built country fowl, of barely medium size with a deep, slightly carried forward chest; a very flat and only very slightly sloping top-line and erect posture.

BODY: Not too long, rather deep and horizontal, upright posture.

HEAD: Nauwelijks middelgroot, gezicht glad, levendig rood.

COMB: Single, medium in size, erect, evenly serrated (5 to 6 serrations). Rather coarse texture, bright red without black pigmentation. Front of comb rather forward. The blade slightly upwards.

BEAK: Strong and of medium length slightly curved, dark horn colour.

WATTLES: Medium in size, oblong and rounded at the bottom, bright red colour without black pigmentation.

EARLOBES: Small, smooth and elongated, bright red colour.

EYES: Large, prominent and expressive; dark brown to black.

NECK: Fairly long, fine at the junction of the head, with a gradual outward curve to the back, widening directly at the shoulders.

BACK AND SADDLE: Broad across shoulders and the saddle, medium length and flat, only slightly sloping to the tail, saddle well developed.

BREAST: Full and rounded, deep, carried forward without bulging.

WINGS: Comparatively large, compact and carried closely, the ends being covered by the saddle hacks

SHOULDERS: Broad.

TAIL: Full and well spread, angled at about 55°; tail feathers broad and long, properly closed; sickles well developed and gracefully curved.

ADOMEN: Well developed.

THIGHS: Hardly medium length, halfway revealing from the belly feathering; tight feathered.

LEGS AND TOES: Legs hardly medium in length and spaced well apart, standing parallel seen from the front, smooth with fine scales. Dark slate with blackish shine. Four toes, straight and well spread.

FEATHERING: Soft, but close, feathers wide and with a minimum of fluff.

The general characteristics of the female are similar to those of the male, allowing for the natural sexual differences.

The comb of the hen is allowed to lop. The back line is almost horizontal, tail angled at 45°. In pullets a somewhat dark pigmented face is allowed.

MAJOR FAULTS

Too high on the legs; thighs too visible, wings carried too low; tail too open or too closed; white earlobes; black pigmented face, wattles or comb, traces of yellow colour in beak, legs or skin.

FAULTS

Above major faults to a lesser extent. Also eye colour too light, too dark or too light beak colour, flyaway comb and the cock having too short hackles.

COLOUR VARIETIES – Black, Blue.

RING SIZE: male 18 mm, female 16 mm.

WEIGHT : Male 2-2,5 kg. Female 1,5-2 kg.

Photo: Genootschap Herve / Mergelland Hoen.



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