



CAMPINES, AN OLD BELGIAN BREED REINSTATED

By: Maarten Jacobs, Belgium.

YESTERDAY'S STORIES

There are more myths about the origins of one breed than there are breeds. Many chicken breeds are the result of an ancient selection process where usefulness prevailed over looks. This economic selection led to a 'survival of the fittest'—safeguarding only those specimens which thrived in local conditions and delivered the most produce. This selection was a daily and ongoing process and was mostly never documented. The many speculations on the origins of this or that breed are deeply rooted in this system.

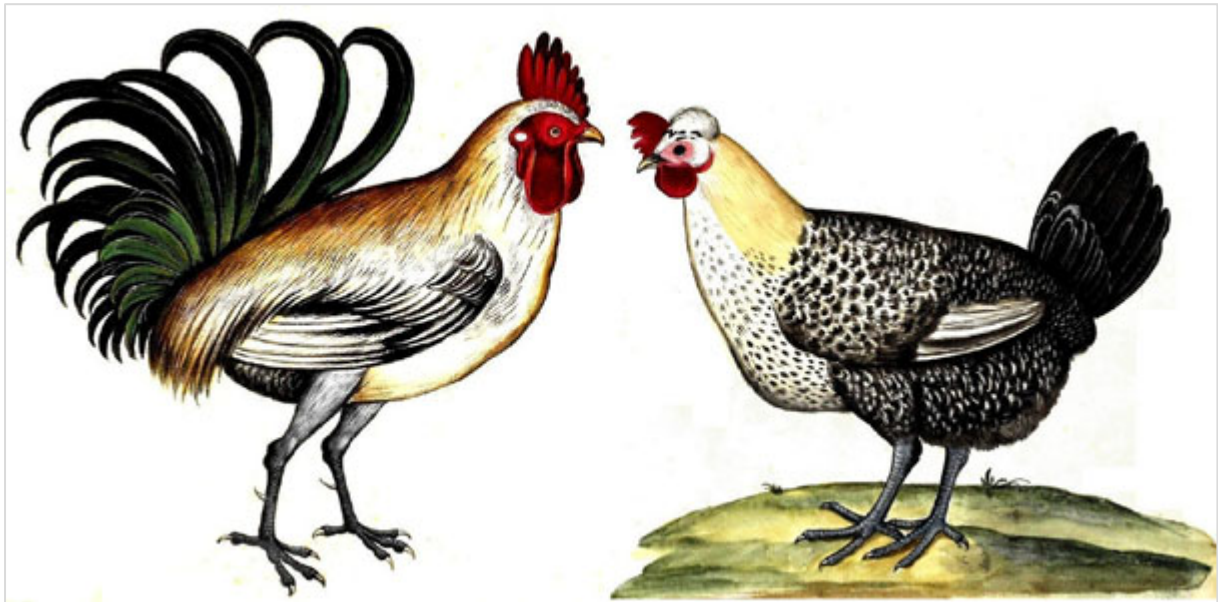
A lot of Campine-like breeds in Europe underwent the same process, which brought forward the Poule de Bresse grise, the Chaams fowl and the Westfalian Deathlayer. These and other barred poultry breeds withstood all tests successfully as they were excellent egg layers and very tasty meat breeds. A winning combination which made them renowned all over and even brought them to the tables of kings and queens.

How all these different barred breeds are linked to each other is no longer clear, although many would like to claim their breed as 'the original' and add to their allure. Most likely they all have one common ancestor—one possible candidate is the *Gallina Turcica* as it was described by the Italian naturalist, Ulisse Aldrovandi, around 1600— but even that is a guess.

The old-style Campine was known for being the darkest of all the barred breeds. From the very light Poules de Bresse in the south these breeds tended to darken the further they went north. The old-style Campine sported the narrowest white

bands and the cleanest ones, giving it a very dark appearance. This was combined with parallel banding all around the body making it appear as if white rings enclosed it from neck to tail. This smart appearance made it stand out among its barred sister breeds.

To the north of the Campine region the white bands broaden again and become much more irregular as can be found in the Friesian gull. The cocks are even white, just like the Poules de Bresse grises, and Aldrovandi's *Gallus Turcicus* and the *Gallina Turcica*. Coming full circle it might be claimed that all barred breeds in Western Europe are descended from the original Friesian gulls.

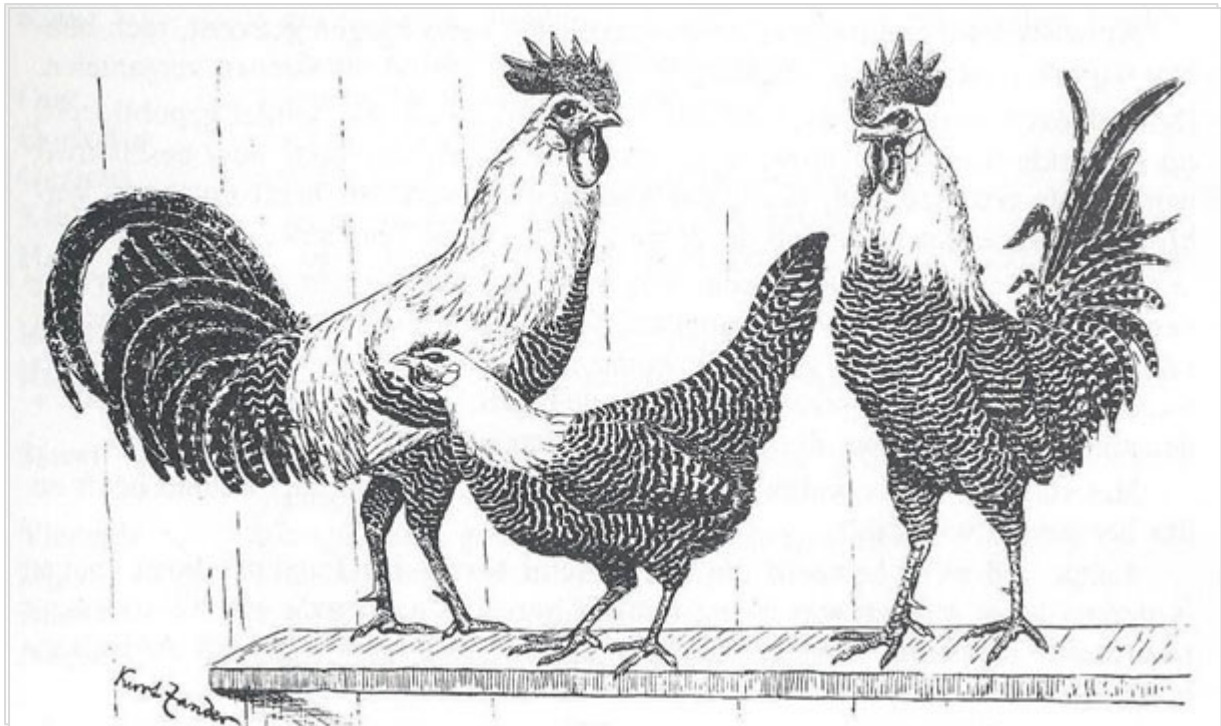


Ulisse Aldrovandi - 1600 - Gallus Turcicus and Gallina Turcica.

Luckily there are no doubts about the origin of the present day Campines. Their creation was very clearly documented around 1900, which is why the useful tips and images in this article are borrowed from the booklets early Campinists published to promote the then-new and promising breed. Sources include: *The Campine History* (B. A. Gates, 1913), *The Campines, Silver and Golden* (F. L. Platt, 1914) and *Homestead Silver Campines, The Vigorous Strain* (C. A. Phipps, 1916).

They are all American authors, but the English have the honour of being the first to recognise the usefulness and beauty of the old-style Campine outside the European mainland. They even undertook excursions to towns and villages in the Campine region as Merksplas and Meerle to find the best specimens of this 'everyday layer'. Many thousands of Campine chickens were consequently shipped across the Channel to a new future in England.

The English breeders manipulated the old-style Campines and in 1904 they introduced the hen-feathering factor. Hen-feathering means cocks and hens have the same female type plumage and markings. In Campines this meant the males did not have white tops. This characteristic was already present in old-style Campine as can be seen in this painting of German artist Kurt Zander (1838-1926).



**A common feathered Campine cock, a Campine hen and a hen-feathered cock.
Drawing by Kurt Zander.**

The first hen-feathered male, however, came from hatching eggs bought from Oscar Thomaes from Ronse in Belgium. Oscar Thomaes being the president of the Braekel club at that time, it is quite certain he sold his eggs as being 'Campine' to his English customers.

The English Campine was born. The old-style Campine received a small shot of Braekel blood, but remained its free-spirited self. Other traits in the improved Campine were also very clearly inherited from the old-style Campine, such as the fine comb, taller posture and a more closed tail. The Braekel input did make the Campine gain some weight and traded the more triangular build for a more square shape with a fuller chest. And what attracted the English from the start—namely the fine and parallel banding—was naturally maintained. So the old Campine was never really erased, it was simply given a new dress.



Left: A picture from 1915 showing what the ideal pair of Campines should look.

The success of the English Campines was their best advertising and soon thousands of Campines began a new journey, going even further to Ireland, the United States, South-Africa, Australia and New Zealand. This is the reason why to this day, the Campine outclasses its sister breeds in numbers and popularity in so many countries outside of Europe.

Right: Ideal Campine hen, according to the American Standard of Perfection, 1915.

In 1914, the breed was added to the American Standard of Perfection, and so in 2014 it enjoys a very special anniversary. One that was rewarded with a return to its origins: the Campine region in the north of Belgium and the south of the Netherlands.

Below: The very first Campine chicks to be hatched in Belgium in decades in 2013.



Now there are over 20 Campines from the US, UK and Denmark running around on Campine soil—and more to come.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Despite the Campine's early successes, today it is endangered just like many

other heritage breeds. In modern agriculture the Campine is of no use and numbers have dwindled dramatically. It is time to act. The following tips and tricks were given by the early adopters of this breed some 100 years ago. They were called Campinists and their beliefs were known as Campineology.

A first challenge is to put this breed in the spotlight again. The Campine can surely reclaim some space in backyards, city parks and in the new slow food culture.

Right:
This little flock of Campines is enjoying a walk on the grass.



The Campines in the before photo are mine; they are a Danish Campine cockerel and three English Campine hens, which will ensure there is new life in 2015.

Because there are so few Campines currently available, it is hard enough to find any and be too critical about what is found at the same time. Many current specimens are not up to the standards but are nevertheless being used by willing breeders.

Squirrel tails and comb sprigs for example, are very common as they are genetically dominant traits. Specimens with these faults should be excluded from the breeding pen.



A group of five pullets at Ronnie van der Aalst's farm in the Dutch Campine region. The Campine's future is looking good when starting with such quality. The chicks originate from a Danish breeder.

Photo: Pets Pictures Dierenfotografie © Sanne Harmsen.

The ideal weight is set at 2.7 kg for the male and 2kg for the female but is rarely attained. Following this, the weight of the eggs has dwindled as well and a 50g egg is seldom seen. Latest figures also show the Campine is no longer an everyday layer with an average of 150 eggs a year instead of 180. And finally the eggs should be clear white and more round in shape than oval. A good selection of hatching eggs can be the best start to a better breeding line.

Generally speaking, the finer Campine specimens are few and far between. Starting up a decent breeding program will require finding these specimens and having a lot of patience in doing so. Improving the present day Campines will mean putting more emphasis on shape, productivity and liveliness, followed directly by correct feathering and markings.

A process of strict elimination is necessary to reach these goals and the following guidelines help to distinguish the good from the bad and to train the eye in selecting the best males and females.

These four outlines illustrate defects and variations seen in the Campine.



No. 1 is a Campine male of over-proud carriage. The comb shows wrinkles and irregular serrations. The wattles are coarse and angular and not nicely rounded; the neck curves too much backward, the back slopes too much and the tail is too erect and carried at too sharp an angle with the back. The wings are too round at the points and the legs have too much bend at the hocks.



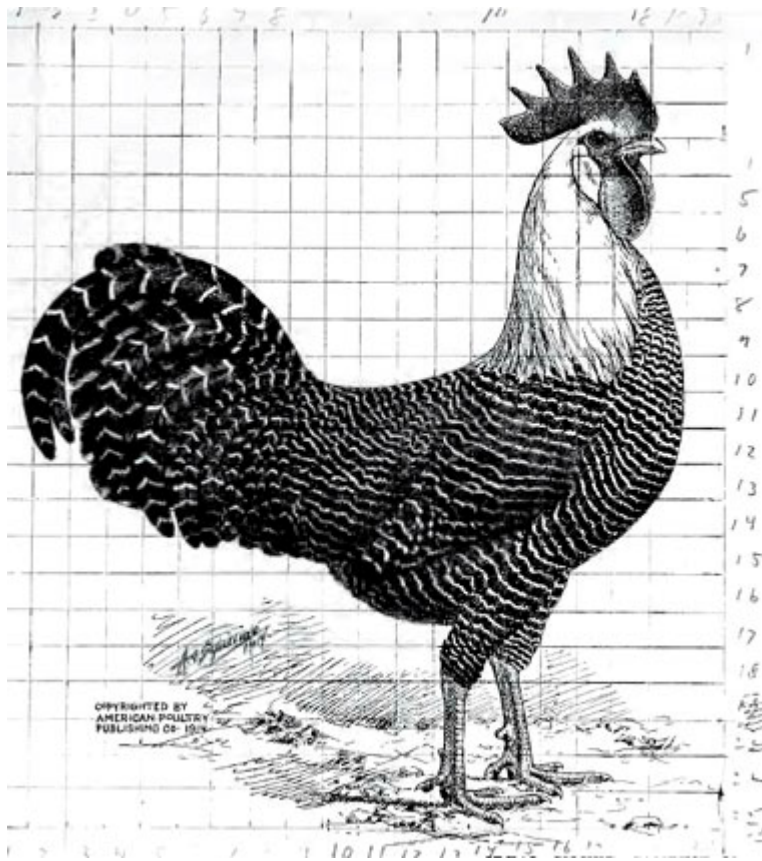
No. 2 is too slender, too narrow and shallow bodied and flat breasted for a high quality Campine.



No. 3 the comb is irregular, wrinkled in front over the nostrils and there are too many points (also a double point on the fourth serration), and there are three points instead of one on the rear blade. Combs like this and No. 1 are too large and the rear blade of both is much too coarse and large and sags down on the rear of the head. The comb on No. 2 is much better.



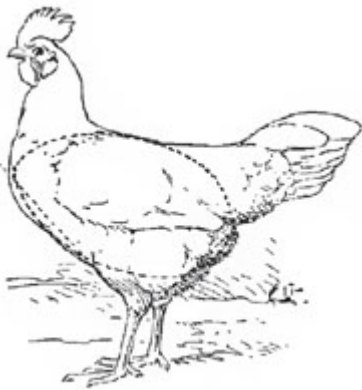
Outline of the Campine No. 4 is a male showing a body that is too coarse and clumsy, lacking the graceful carriage of the true Campine. The breast is too square and not rounded as in typical specimens, and the plumage is too abundant, fluffy and long.



No. 5 is a 1914 drawing of the perfect Campine. The back slopes gently down to the tail which is carried at a 45° angle. The comb has a fine texture and is evenly cut. The face is red without any white feathering. The chest is deep, well rounded and carried proudly.

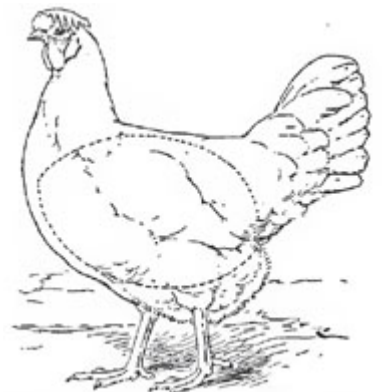
The following are similar tips in judging hens.

No. 1 shows the outline of a female that is too narrow and not deep enough to be typical. She is not smooth enough nor broad enough over the line of the shoulders and back. The tail joins the saddle in a clumsy style.

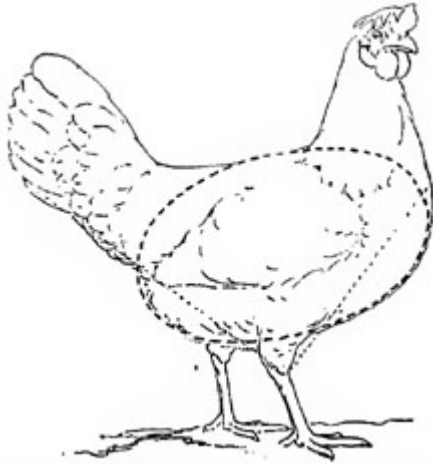


No. 2 shows a female very much wanting in breadth of hips and in depth and roundness of body and breast. The breast and body are almost V-shaped in profile underneath. She is very deficient in what goes to make a Campine beautiful or profitable. The comb should not be erect but should fall to one side.

No. 3 shows a female that is over large and coarse and too loose and fluffy in plumage. This is a type too much inclined to make flesh, feathers and fat from their food instead of turning it into eggs.



No. 4 is not deep enough in body and appears too narrow. She looks too long in proportion to be typical. However, the Campine sometimes produces individuals that may be too short. From this type the eggs are not up to the size Campines are capable of producing. For this reason the short type will be discouraged by Campinists.



No. 5 is of a prize Campine pullet, true to life, showing the oval form typical of the best specimens. The dotted V-shaped lines show the shape of a body deficient for table use or egg production, and which is to be avoided.

As stated previously, when breeding the Campine it is most important to concentrate on good type and liveliness, and then on getting ideal plumage.

A Campine's barring should approach a ratio of three times black against white.



The white should be pure white and not washed out with grey or brown, otherwise the barring will look grizzled and the straight lines will be lost. The same effect can be caused by grey tips on the feathers. The tips should be black. Another important point is the beetle green lustre that sets off the bird. A Campine with perfect parallel barring but an ashy look is not the goal.

Photo above: Pets Pictures Dierenfotografie © Sanne Harmsen.

Finding the bird with the right barring and correct black and white ratio is not always easy. One clue can be to count the bars on the back feathers. A back feather should have three to four black bars. More black bars will not result in a darker hen—in fact, the black bars will become narrower and the white bars will widen resulting in marking more like that of a pencilled Hamburg. Also, the tips of the feathers will be white instead of black.



**Right: Narrow barring.
Not correct.**

Furthermore the Campine is set apart from the hen-feathered, pencilled Hamburg by its more luxuriant dressing. The Campine has a proud carriage and does have main and lesser sickles. A rooster without these feathers will seem to stand rather tall and lean and have a brush-like tail. A rooster with sickles is to be preferred as it will sport a more elegant tail at a lower angle to the back. The barring should go right down the length of the tail, with no grey or brown and also no solid black tails.

Finally, a note must be made regarding the barring on the chest. This should run all the way from the breast up to the gills. The breast should not be pure white, dotted with some black. The barring should be present on the breast as well, but a ratio of 1 black to 1 white is permitted. The bars do have to be nice and clean, running fully across the feather. The combination of a pure white neck hackle and a beautifully barred chest is not easy, but also not impossible.

As selection is best done early, starting with the eggs, let us also pay some attention to the chicks. Like their parents they should be lively, vigorous and hardy. Before the chicks start to grow hard feathers they can show different coloration, going from very dark to very light in the same hatch. This apparently has little effect on the colours and barring of the later adults. In the United States, Campine chicks have mostly striped heads and not so much fully brown heads.

Below: Three different versions that can be found. All these chicks grew out to be reasonably barred and dark Campine cocks or hens.



Above, left: Light coloured chick.

Above, right: Common coloured chick.

Left: Dark coloured chick.

These guidelines are most important when reintroducing the Campine in its native Campine region and worldwide. To summarise, first comes character, followed by type, and finally the plumage. Only when this order is followed, will the true Campine be born again—a magnificent show bird and egg layer.

TOMORROW'S GOALS

The Campine as it exists today is recognised—and has a standard—in many English-speaking countries. Until recently however, the Campine was nowhere to be found in its native region, on the sandy soils of the Campine area—on either the Dutch or Belgian sides of the border. An important ambition is to reinstate the Campine on its home ground and to find many breeders willing to attain this goal.

These collaborators can be found among hobby breeders, but also among lovers of heritage breeds. Towns in the Campine region might be persuaded to adorn community parks and pet zoos with an antique breed of local origin.

For the time being, only the silver Campines have made their way home again, but in the future there definitely should be room for the gold Campines too. Starting up proper breeding lines will demand much time and energy so that for now, the focus will be on the silver variety. At a later stage, the same process will be applied to the gold variety.

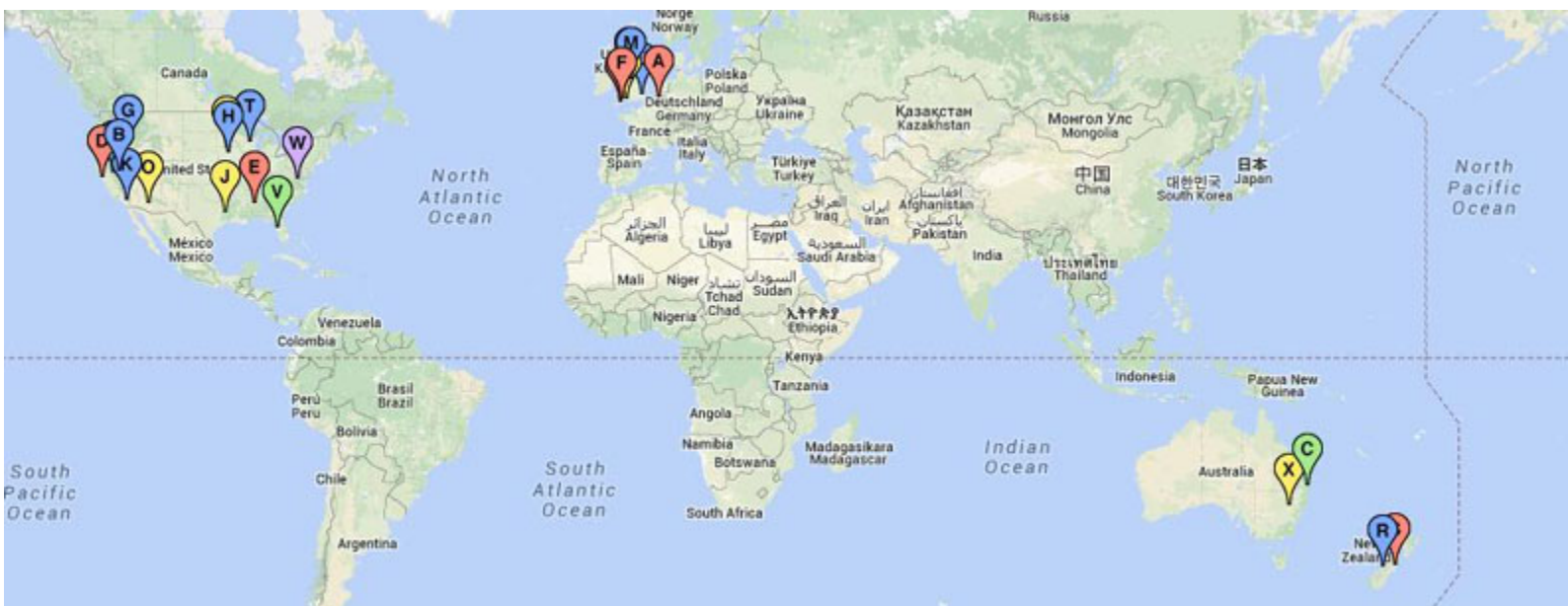


In 1896, a committee was founded in Antwerp called the 'Club for the defense of the Campine'. A similar initiative will need to be undertaken in order to provide a sound base from which to support the breed, with annual meetings of club members, a translation of the English standard and provision of shows and other exhibitions. The limited experience in breeding has to be shared between breeders, so quick progress may be made.

The current Campine is a direct descendant of the old Belgian style Campine and is not a reconstruction. This living heritage deserves to be maintained and returned to its former glory. As for the Chaams chicken and the Poule de Bresse, there should also be a future for the Campine as both living heritage and a local agricultural product. Initially it was bred and promoted for these same goals—as an everyday layer and a tasty broiler—so the Campine should not only return to the barnyards, but also to the tables and menus of innovative restaurants and clever chefs.

As a local product, the Campine will have to meet certain conditions to be recognised by the slow food fraternity and to reach a high standard of quality. Once agreed upon, such conditions will lead to the reinstatement of the old-style Campine—the original everyday layer.

Finally all credit must go to Campinists worldwide who have contributed to the safekeeping of this breed. An international network going from the United Kingdom, the United States to Australia is there to benefit from, sharing its expertise and one hundred years of experience.



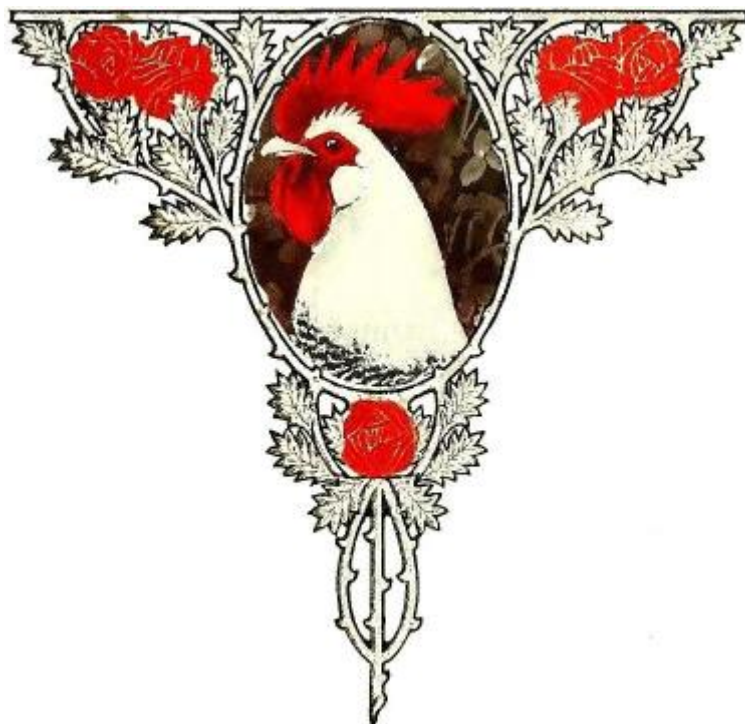
As you can see, the Campine in Australia still displays the original type of the old Kempische Hoen as it once was in Belgium. The high breast, the triangular body shape, the whipped tail in the hens, the dark barring, and the somewhat small head. Although they do not fully conform to the current Standard description in Belgium, it is nice to see the characteristics of the original 'Kempische Hoen' still so obvious in these chickens.



For all Campinists there is a website at: www.campines.be that contains lots of information and an up-to-date breeders list. Questions and comments can be sent to info@campines.be.



Above: Flock of the author. Below: Logo Campines.



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