

SIAMESE SILKIES

Text: Elly Vogelaar.
Photos: Hans Ringnalda.

No... the Silkies in the above photo are not 'Siamese Twins' and neither are they conjoined. Nor were they born in Siam (now Thailand). As you can see, they have a red comb and face, and yellow legs. They were thought to be a subvariety of the blue skinned Silkie that we know, and their given breed name is 'Siamese Silkie'.

This is the Silkie we know best

The most eye-catching feature of Silkies is their fluffy, downy plumage but they have another unusual feature: a very dark, almost black skin. Their shanks and toes are also black and even the bones and flesh are of a very dark colour. The head is small with a mulberry face, large dark eyes and turquoise ear lobes. The purple-coloured walnut comb is preferably broader than long with no horns protruding from the rear.

Silkies are said to be a very old Chinese breed. The best known and most quoted reference to Silkies comes from the book *Il Milione* by Marco Polo –notes from his stay in China between 1272 and 1295.



For many years – particularly in the United States, but also in some parts of Europe – the breed was called the Japanese Silkie rather than the Chinese Silkie. The reasons for this are unclear as we think the Silkie comes from China, and probably entered Japan via Chinese merchant ships.

In China, silky fowl is famous and thought a nutritional and healthy product. In the Chinese medical practice, the silky fowl is specially bred and supplied, and is claimed to have remarkable effects on nourishing the liver and kidneys, invigorating the vital energy and blood, nourishing the refined materials in the viscera and clearing away pathogenic heat. Thus there are many clear references to silky fowl from ancient China. The oldest record of Silky Fowl in the ancient literature of China (with our thanks to Prof. Ning Yang, Professor of Poultry Genetics and Breeding, China Agricultural University in Beijing) dates from the Jing Dynasty (265 to 420 AD),in the book: *GuangZhi* (*Encyclopaedia of the Jin Dynasty*) by Yi-Gong Guo. The professor translated the content related to the Silky Fowl for us: "The chicken is bearded, with five toes, yellow shank and fluff feathers, and the line with larger bodily form is named "Shu" — a place name, and the smaller named "Jing" — another place name. The chicken with white feathers and yellow shanks crows long and loudly."

Yellow legs. So the Silkies of that time did not necessarily have dark skin and black bones/flesh. In the Chinese book *Ben cao gang mu* (*Compendium of materia medica*) printed c. 1590 in the Wanli period, we read: "…some have white feathers and black bones, some have black feathers and black bones, some have bones and flesh both black, some have flesh white and bones black."



Silkie chicken meat sold in the market (Taiwan). Also white skinned with black legs. You can see that the internal organs on the right are also black.
Photo Takoradee - Wikipedia Commons.

A Japanese picture book on birds, *Bairei Hyakucho Gafu (Bairei's Album of One Hundred Birds), Tokyo, 1881*, shows a pair of Japanese Silkies (Ukokkei); the cock as white as snow with red comb and wattles, and the hen jet black.
In Japan, Ukokkei is listed as an authentic native poultry breed.

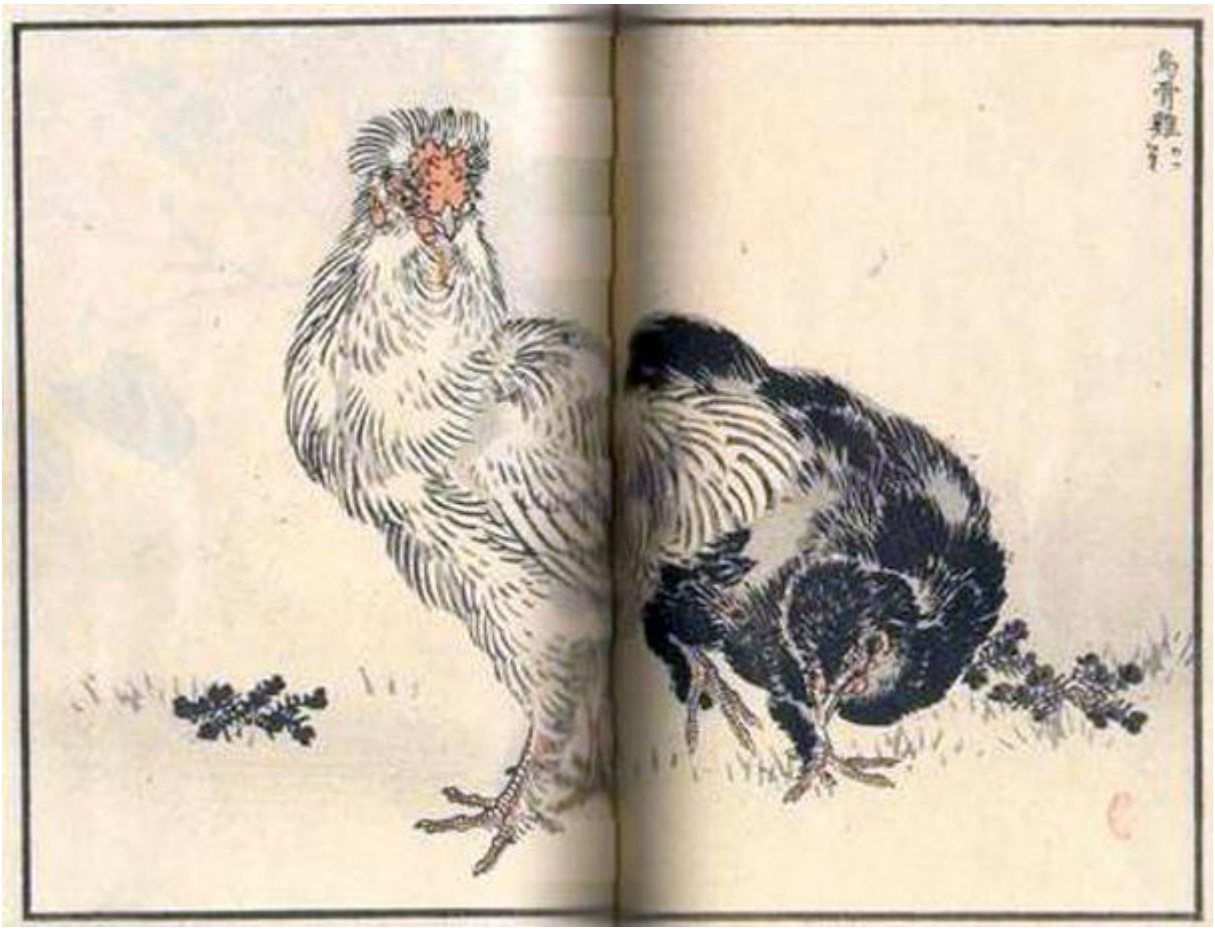


Illustration of a pair of Ukokkei, Japanese Silkies from *Bairei's Album 1881*.

In the early 1900s, several authors mentioned the Siamese Silkies. In 1906 Dürigen wrote: "This Silkie is just like the Ukokkei, a subdivision of the blue skinned Japanese Silkie". Blyth also reported on these Siamese Silkies, stating they were brought to Europe from Malacca via Singapore and the East Indies. The Siamese Silky was described as less 'full' than the Japanese Silkie and also smaller, with the skin and flesh colour of ordinairy fowl, but with black bones. The head furnishings were red, the beak and legs yellow.

Although Düringen initially stated that the Siamese Silkie was a subdivision of the Japanese Silkie Ukokkei, he later assumed that the Siamese had been developed by crossing Ukokkei with other fowl. Opinions differed somewhat, but in general everyone agreed that it was a crossover product. After that, little or nothing has been written of these bantams.



Right: Siamese Silkies, bred in Germany.

At the end of the 20th century, a German breeder, Sven Neumann, started re-creating the Siamese Silkie. He crossed Silkies with a lighter skin colour with Cochin bantams. After years of selecting and inbreeding, his 'Siamese Silkies' were exhibited in Bremen for the first time in 1990 and in 1999 they were recognised in the Germany Poultry Standard. They are the size of Silkie Bantams, with white skin, yellow beak, orange eyes and yellow legs. It is unknown to us whether or not the bones are still black.





Understand of course that these Siamese Silkies have no relationship to the Silkies that were historically described.

Photo below: In comparison, a Siamese and a 'normal' Silkie.



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