

The History of the

Frillback Pigeon

In the United Kingdom

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Exactly where the Frillback originated will probably never be known, however the Orient is commonly accepted as the area of origin. One unquestionable fact is that the Frillback is one of the oldest breeds.

Left: Black, crested Frillback clean legged as illustrated in V. La Perre de Roo, l'Monographie des pigeons domestiques, Paris 1883. Photo: H. Van Grouw.



Pigeon fris  milanais.

Frillbacks were being bred in England as early as the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1735 Moore in his *Columbarium* mentions the Frillback.

In 1879 Lewis Wright wrote about Frillbacks, at that time

they were bred in plain headed and shell crested in: white, grizzle and black. It is remarkable that Frillbacks in those early days occurred in both feathered and clean legged variants. Darwin was familiar with the breed and he even kept a pair himself for a while. His birds were crested white and they had clean legs. Today of course we have crested Frillbacks with muffed feet whilst all other variants occur grouse legged.

In the U.K. the Frillback was initially catered for by the Variety Pigeon Club but were rarely seen in the exhibition pen. In the early 1950's the late W.J. Empson did much to promote Frillbacks exhibiting them in crested white, red grizzle, blue grizzle and black. Yellow grizzles were not seen in the UK until the 1960's. In the early 1980's the first shield marked Frillbacks were exhibited in the UK. To date we have only seen red and yellow shield marked exhibited although black and mealy are also to be found in the U.K.

Our specialist Frillback Club was formed in 1971 and of course this year we celebrate our 40 years anniversary.

Frillbacks are a very attractive, popular breed in the UK, but the majority are kept by people who wish to enhance their garden or bird aviary. Whilst we have some dedicated breeders and exhibitors we can never claim to have a vibrant club.

Right: A couple crested, white Frillbacks, clean legged, illustrated in W.B. Tegetmeier, Pigeons, Their Structure, Varieties, Habits and management, London 1868. Photo: H. van Grouw.



1950 WHITE FRILLBACK HEN
Owned by W. J. Empson, Crossways, Gamlingay, Beds.

Left: White crested Frillback owned by W.J. Empson, illustrated on the cover of "Pigeons and Pigeon World" November 1952. This pigeon was representative for the birds available at that time. Photo: P. Allen.

Right below: Drawing of a white clean headed Frillback with muffed feet, taken from J.C. Lyell, Fancy Pigeons, third edition, London 1887. Photo: H. van Grouw.

When we formed our specialist club we chose the standard of exhibition excellence based on the country of origin – Germany - and to this day our standard still follows the country of origin.

It was on a visit with my father to the lofts of W.J. Empson that I saw my first Frillback, a red grizzle, but it was not until Bill Empsons death in 1956 that I was able to purchase a pair from his son,



This pair consist of a crested white hen and a blue grizzle cock. Although these were good birds for their day by today's standards they would not be considered of good exhibition quality. Curl formation was poor and little regard was made to their colour and overall structure. Photos from specialist pigeon books published in the early 1960's would verify these facts.



Left:
Yellow grizzle
Frillback by
Paul Allen
in 2000.
Photo: P. Allen.

Right:
Blue Grizzle
Frillback by
Paul Allen
in 2000.
Photo: P. Allen.





Above:
Some Young
birds from 2011,
breeder
Paul Allen.
Photo: P. Allen.

Right:
Red Grizzle
Frillback by Paul
Allen in 2000.
Photo: P. Allen.





Left:
The lofts with
breeding
compartments
and aviaries
at Paul Allen's.
Photo: P. Allen.

During the interim years between the 60's and the 70's Frillbacks from Denmark and Sweden were imported into the UK. These were of a much heavier and looser type than we had seen here before but good birds were to be found particularly in red and blue grizzle. At about that time a few birds were imported from South Africa, from memory blue grizzles, but they had neither the size nor curl structure to be beneficial to our breed.

In 1971 my wife Helen and I holidayed in Switzerland and Austria and on returning home via Germany we visited the then German Frillback Club Secretary, Stefan Kellerman. Here I was able to purchase both red grizzle and blue grizzle and later on crested white Frillbacks. From seeing birds of this quality came the inspiration to form our specialist breed club in the UK and members to work together to improve the breed.

Over the years a number of breeders have imported Frillbacks from Scandinavia and Germany and today we have birds of very high quality. Fine examples can now be found in red, blue and yellow grizzle and crested white. As in the other European countries we must be careful to eradicate any birds that have narrow wing shields. For me the ongoing challenge is to breed birds with strong broad curl feather, each curl feather after the wing bar must form at least one closed curl and it is this area which requires special attention.

I hope in this short article to have inspired readers to take a closer look at our unique wonderful breed.

For more information

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