

BUFF LEGHORNS, a rarity in many countries.

By: Arie van Bijsterveldt

It is only seldom that we see Buff Leghorns. Still they do exist, worldwide and in different breed types. We thought it is high time to have an inventory to find out where they are and who is keeping them.

How and where did the Leghorn originate

From old poultry documents we can learn where the first Leghorns have been created. The Leghorns originally came from the city of Livorno (traditionally Leghorn in English), a Tuscan port city on the Tyrrhenian Sea. From there they were exported to North America around 1832. After being refined and perfected into a stable breed in the United States it was shipped back to Europe, firstly arriving in the UK in 1870 and from England re-exported to Italy.

Buff Leghorns in their different types and names

The Italian type Leghorn 'Livorno' is considered to be the origin of this beautiful breed. Over the years, this ancient breed has developed in different ways in different countries, to meet the taste of the fanciers. Today the Leghorn is split into three rather different breed types, all with these breed-points in common: the bright yellow legs and the white earlobes. The American type of the Leghorn is about as big as the Leghorns in mainland Europe, but looks more ornamental, thanks to their rich plumage and to the cock's splendid male feathering in neck, saddle and tail. The English type is the largest variety among all Leghorns, with a higher posture and much coarser comb and wattles while the back is rather steep, especially in cocks. In proportion to the rest, the tail is rather small and is carried folded together, especially in the hen. In the many countries on the European continent the breed type is almost the same: rather elongated in shape, but also very strong in its appearance. The general appearance is that of a slender bird, with broad shoulders that become progressively narrower towards the tail.

On the website of the Dutch Leghorn club (www.leghorn.nl – click: English) you can read about the different names that are used in the various countries and the difference in type.



Left: NL type Large Buff Leghorn, at Arie van Bijsterveldt's in 1988.

In the Netherlands, America and England they are called Leghorns.

In Germany they are called *Italiener* and in Italy *Livorno* – both breed types look a lot like the Dutch type Leghorn.

Also in Belgium they use the name Livorno, together with the name Italiener in the German speaking parts of Belgium, and "*Leghorn type moderne*" in the French speaking parts of the country. These 3 names refer to one and the same type of Leghorn, but Belgium also recognizes the English and the American type.

The French poultry federation (Fédération Française des volailles) divides the Leghorn breed into four types: the American white, the English white, the Leghorn old type (Italian type, light brown) and the Leghorn modern type, with 17 listed colour variants for the large-size birds, and 14 for the bantams. In France, the buff variety is called: *jaune*.



Italian Leghorn ~ Livorno

Although being such an ancient breed, it was only recently that the Italian standard of the Livorno's native type was officially published. Colour Varieties of the Livorno: Barrata, Bianca, Blu, Collo Argento, Collo Arancio, Collo Oro, Fulva, Nera, Pile, Bianco Columbia. In English: Barred, White, Blue, Silver Duck-wing, Orange Duckwing, Black Red, Buff, Black, Pyle.

Left and below: Buff Livorno in Italy. Photos courtesy of www.agraria.org

The Italiener (German stock) is also included in the "Italian Standard of Perfection" with a specific typology, different from the Livorno. The native Livorno is a leaner and taller breed compared to the Italiener selected in Germany. A morphology too similar to the Italiener is a fault.

In Italy, the buff colour is called: *Fulva*.

See for more breed info and Livorno standard (in Italian): www.fiav.info



German Leghorn ~ Italiener

The Leghorn - Italiener in Germany - is present in Germany a long time. In 1870 'Gelbe Italiener' were imported and came via Switzerland to Germany (As such is stated on <http://www.italienerzucht.de>). These chickens did not have the buff colour that is required today. Crossing with Buff Cochins - as they tried in Germany - had not been successful and it was the Danes who in 1888 exhibited buff Leghorns in London that were superior in colour. Over the years, the Germans bred the chickens in a different type, which is now called the Italiener. It is a very popular breed. According to the former Dutch Poultry Standard, the type of the Italiener, differed from that of the Dutch Leghorn, but in 1985 the Dutch Standard Commission decided to equalize that 'paper' difference, because in practice there was little or no difference between the exhibited birds from



Holland and Germany. The Italiener is recognized in 21 colour varieties, but not the Exchequer. The buff colour is called: *Gelb*.



Above: Large 'Gelbe' (buff) Italiener cock.

Right: Large 'Gelbe' (buff) Italiener hen.
Photos Tassilo Neubert, Germany.

In Germany, there is a Specialty Club for breeders of the 'Gelbe Italiener' with 27 known members, also a Club for breeders of Italiener bantams in all colours and a Club for breeders of the Rose Comb Italiener and Italiener bantam.



Left: Large Gelbe (Buff) Italiener pullet by Dieter Müller, at the show in Alsfeld, Germany. Here several very good Gelbe Italiener had been entered. Photo: Michael Kruppert, Schlitz, Germany)



Left: A trio of Gelbe (Buff) Italiener bantams with rosecomb, at the show in Alsfeld.

Photo: Michael Kruppert, Schlitz, Germany)



Note: When in German-speaking countries they talk about "the Leghorn", they refer to the American type of Leghorns, with the abundant plumage.

American Leghorn

From the small Italian landrace fowl the American breeders created the Leghorn fowl with a beautiful type, a great laying- capacity, yellow legs, white earlobes and lopped comb in the hens.



Above: American buff Leghorn cock at Dan Honour's, USA. Photo: Dan Honour.

They are distinguished by a richly feathered tail, especially in the cocks, having abundant, long sickles and side hangers. Also the saddle is richly feathered and flowing nicely to the tail. The comb of the American Leghorn is smaller in size and very refined in texture. They are also recognized with a rose comb.

In America, the Large Leghorn and Leghorn bantams exist in many colours, but in the Netherlands (and many European countries), the American Leghorn comes only in the white colour variety, and the bantams in white and in buff, the bantams having a long flowing tail too.

Right: Buff American Leghorn bantams, 2007.

Below: Buff American Leghorn bantam pullet, 2011.

Photos and breeder: Arie van Bijsterveldt, the Netherlands.



English Leghorn

In 1870 the refined 'American' Leghorns were introduced in Britain and then spread over the continent of Europe. In England, the American breed type was developed into the English type of Leghorn which is larger with good body development at the rear. They also distinguish themselves from the other Leghorns by their large comb and wattles. The tail is relatively smaller and is carried folded together, especially in the hen, and they are higher on the legs.

Due to the magnificent laying capacity, it was not only kept as ornamental fowl, but also as utility chicken. For many decades, the Leghorn has been the perfect utility breed until the hybrid breeding was introduced. However, the Leghorns still play an important role in the establishment of high egg-producing hybrids. In 1888 the first Buff Leghorns were showed.



Above and Right: English type Buff Leghorn bantam cock and hen.

Photos and breeder: Alexander Hales, England.

Large English type Leghorns are hardly seen at the Dutch shows, and they are only recognized in White. The English type bantams are present in the Netherlands in White and Black, while some breeders are working on the Blue variety. The English type in Buff is not recognized in Holland.



Dutch Leghorns

By breeding to the standard requirements established in the Netherlands for the Dutch Leghorn, a type of Dutch Leghorn was created that may be considered as a Dutch breed variety. For the creation they used American Leghorns and possibly also original Italian land fowl (Livorno).

Left and below: Dutch type Leghorn LF, cock and hen, 1987. Photos and breeder: Arie van Bijsterveldt.

In the Netherlands the Leghorn-Dutch type is recognized in many colour varieties, both in Large Fowl and Bantams, and with single comb as well as with rose comb.

Apart from the Dutch type, also the English type and the American type are recognized in Holland.

The Buff variety is only recognized in the LF Dutch type, with single comb and rose comb. In the bantams, the buff colour is recognized in the Dutch type and in the American type, also with single comb and rose comb.



Below: Buff Leghorn bantams, Dutch type, 1989. Photos and breeder: Arie van Bijsterveldt.



Danish Leghorns

Just like in the Netherlands, also the Danes choose their own breeding direction, which is not much different from the breed type that we pursue in the Netherlands.

These Leghorns have a somewhat smaller body size and a slightly steeper tail.

Occasionally we recognize these characteristics in the buff Leghorns, which can be explained by the contribution of the Danish Leghorns when creating the buff Leghorns.



Above and Right:

Buff Leghorn bantams in Denmark. Photos taken at the National Poultry Show in Denmark, 10 and 11 December 2011, by Andreas Vorland from Norway.

About the Buff colour

Why was the name 'buff' chosen? In the middle of last century we saw in a buff coloured Cochin, whose colour varied so much that they were divided into 3 groups namely; buff, cinnamon, and lemon buff. Exhibiting the buff Cochins in 3 colours was not ideal, because with the judges and the breeders it was unclear in which colour class they had to enter the birds. By introducing the name buff one tried to achieve one uniform colour.



However, the buff colour is not always the same in everyone's eyes and it therefore remains difficult to specify exactly what is the right buff colour. Previously we talked about the colour of a golden decade; today you could also say that a good buff colour is the colour of coffee with a dash of milk. Exactly and how much milk goes in? By this I try to indicate that nowadays there are still visible differences and it is also a matter of preference, which holds both for judges and breeders. Therefore, it is better to compare the colour with that of a natural chamois-leather (shammy). Actually it does not really matter as long as you know how to maintain the wanted colour. The most important thing for a buff coloured chicken is that the colour should be even and free of any other hue. Each feather and shaft to be buff to the extent, possible up to the skin.

Buff Leghorns, where did they originate?

The first Buff Leghorns have been created in Denmark and they looked a bit different than the buff Leghorns that we know today. The name 'Leghorn' was not known in Denmark; they were called 'Yellow Italians'. These



chickens were not of a beautiful warm golden yellow colour, but the colour looked like an artificial shammy. They were chickens that came closest in colour to the breast colour of the quail-coloured animals. This went hand in hand with the black in the tail of the cocks.

These 'Yellow Italians' went to England and from England also to America.

Right: Saddle hackle and back feather of a cockerel.

Photo: Arie van Bijsterveldt.



To achieve the same beautiful buff colour as in the buff Cochins, in the buff Leghorns; this could probably only be achieved by crossing with buff Cochins. It took a long time to breed out the large differences between the type of Leghorn and the Cochin and still retain the wanted colour. The crossing with the Cochin resulted in heavy, compact birds that were also somewhat lower on the legs. Also sometimes feather stubbles appeared on the feet. With good breeding pen selection, these faults have been bred out, and it managed to retain a nice slim Leghorn type. However, it is striking is that over the years the buff Leghorns always remained a bit smaller than the other colours.

Buff Leghorn, where did they go?

In June 2011, we started looking for breeders and keepers of Buff Leghorns, Large, Bantam, American, English, or Dutch type, both with a single comb or rose comb. It soon became clear that there is demand for a good database incorporating all breeders and owners of this beautiful Leghorn variety. On the other hand, gathering the needed information is not always easy because, despite the use of social media, yet only a limited number of breeders and keepers are reached. Also the language barrier is often an obstacle. On the other hand, there are also people who don't like to disclose their data, which is also understanding.

Right: Large Fowl buff Leghorns, Dutch type, at Arie van Bijsterveldt's in 1988.

During my search, I have found a number of breeders willing to provide information.

I myself have been keeping buff Leghorns since 25 years. At first I had Large Buff Leghorns Dutch type, then the buff Leghorn bantams Dutch type and since 1994 the American type buff Leghorn bantams.



My story can be read in a previously published article "The American Buff Leghorn Bantams" – 2008 - <http://aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/08E06A04.pdf>

In the Netherlands 3 breeders seriously devoted themselves to breed American type of buff Leghorn bantams. Several others keep them as a backyard bantam.



Left: Large Fowl Dutch type buff Leghorn cockerel, Overall Champion of the Show in Waalwijk, January 1998. Photo and breeder: Arie van Bijsterveldt.

Concerning the Dutch type Large Fowl buff Leghorns only 3 or 4 serious breeders are known to be active. These strains could use some new blood though. Recently initial contacts are made with breeders in Germany and if that works out we can expect the first results from hatching eggs in the spring of 2012. In the past we had great breeders of buff Leghorns by the name of Mr. Meurs, Mr. Schopman, Mr. Schooten, etc. Currently, Mr. Van Lankveld, Mr. Hulshof and Mr. Vermeulen and Mr. v.d. Oetelaar are the only names known to me as breeder of large buff Leghorns-Dutch type.

In the Bantam section, Mr. Gerard Tesselaar is busy making a new line of Buff Leghorn bantams Dutch type by crossing his Buff bantams with Black Leghorn bantams-Dutch type. There were hardly any good Buff Leghorn bantams Dutch type present in Holland. Only Mr. Vlaardingebroek is still in possession of a few very good Buff Leghorn bantams Dutch type.

Right: Buff Leghorn bantam American type, 2009, by Arie van Bijsterveldt.



From Britain I received information from several breeders: Edward Boothman, Keith Ashley, Alex Hales, Paul Hallum and Andrew Bergmanski.

The below message is from Paul Hallum:

"I keep buff bantams that I made from crossing buff Plymouth rocks with black Leghorn bantams. I am now hatching my 9th or 10th generation and I am pleased with the way they are turning out. I found that fixing the type was relatively easy early on, but the main problem I had was with blue or black in the tails and

some in the flights. I have been trying to be as vigilant as I can with regards only using pure buff birds in the breeding pen but I do occasionally still get some hatching with the smut. The birds themselves are very hardy and the hens are really good layers of large eggs. They do tend to be pale brown rather than white though, which I guess is the buff rock influence. I will send you some photos of my birds".

Right and below: Leghorn bantams, English type, by Paul Hallum, England.



From Andrew Bergmanski I received the following message:

"I do breed buff Leghorns in large and there are not many people in the UK doing it...There are bantams and large in UK but I would say the bantams are more advanced in terms of show quality. I know of 2 other breeders of large which can be accessed via the Leghorn club breeder's directory and I know of 2 breeders of bantam...Ian Sissons being one and Paul Hallum being the other... The large buff's in UK are not of very good quality for the show and I have been making efforts through my own breeding to get some for show quality. I have been breeding Buffs for about 2/3 years and think I need another 2 years before I hope they will show".

From Germany, I received a message from Michael Kruppert. Michael is breeder of the rose combed 'Gelbe zwerg Italiener'. He also sent me some photos of his birds.

Right: This rosecomb bantam pullet by Michael Kruppert was awarded 97 points, winning the Grand Champion trophy at the Show in Schlitz in 2007.

I also received data from other German breeders, which will be documented in the Listing of Buff Leghorn Breeders. Germany has the largest number of breeders of the Buff / Gelbe Italiener Large Fowl and probably also in Bantam.





Above: Michael Kruppert from Schlitz, Germany is breeding Buff rosecomb Italiener bantams.

In the United States of America, Dan Honour is a known breeder of the Buff Leghorns; of course they are American type Leghorns. Dan wrote an extensive article on his Buff Leghorns in the 2011 October issue, see: <http://www.aviculture-europe.nl/nummers/11N05A04.pdf>

Apart from Dan Honour, there are more breeders in the US also having beautiful Buffs; several reported themselves to be mentioned on the Breeders' Listing.



Left: Buff hen, American Leghorn, Large Fowl. Photo and breeder: Danne J. Honour, USA.

Also some American breeders of buff Leghorn bantams are on the breeder list. One of them is a breeder whose animals come from the same line (the line of Burt Gaude) as the bantams in the Netherlands that hatched from the imported eggs in 1994.

From June 2011 till now we succeeded in reaching a number of breeders and keepers of the buff Leghorns that were positive about a Breeders' Listing of the Buff Leghorns and wanted to be added to the list. Only those who have registered on the list will receive a copy of the list.

The preliminary state at the time this article was published are as follows:

- Number of registered breeders of Buff Leghorns: **25**
- Number of breeders/keepers Large Fowl, single comb: **18**
- Number of breeders/keepers Large Fowl, rose comb: **0**
- Number of breeders/keepers Bantams, single comb: **9**
- Number of breeders/keepers Bantams, rose comb: **1**

(3 breeders having both LF and bantams).

Countries from which we received data:

The Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, Britain, Sweden, Czech Republic, Austria, Italy, America, Australia, Denmark, Norway, New Zealand.

As we hardly see the Buff Leghorns anymore, there is great need to know where they are and who is breeding or keeping this variety. In order to be able to continue to help each other and prevent the extinction of such a beautiful colour variety, everyone's input is welcome and I invite anyone who has the buff Leghorns to make themselves known by an e-mail message to buffleghorns@hotmail.com. You can also contact this address for advice in breeding this beautiful colour.

Also on Face book, is a group called "Buff Leghorns" where breeders and keepers of Buff Leghorn can contact each other and worldwide can communicate and exchange ideas.

Breeders' clubs:

Nederlandse Leghorn club www.leghorn.nl

Czech Leghorn club http://klubvlasek.webzdarma.cz/barevne_razy.htm

Leghorn club UK <http://www.theleghornclub.com>

SV d. Z. des gelben Italiener-Huhnes, Vors. Fritz Rüffel, Niedergasse 14, 76877 Offenbach, Tel. 06348 8620, Fax 06348 8620 (Germany)

SV der Zwerg-Italiener-Züchter aller Farbschläge <http://www.sv-zwerg-italiener.de> (Germany)

SV der Züchter rosenkämmiger Italiener und rosenkämmiger Zwerg Italiener <http://www.rosenkaemmige-italiener.de> (Germany)

Specialklubben for Ancona, Italiener og Legbar, Denmark.

Formand: Kjeld Sørensen, Kannevej 6, 8355 Solbjerg, 86 53 12 91.

Sources:

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